

AS Sociology For AQA
[2nd Edition]



Chris. Livesey and Tony Lawson

The background of the page is a photograph of a hallway. The walls are covered in a grid of colorful, abstract art panels. The panels feature various patterns, including geometric shapes, organic forms, and stylized figures. The colors are vibrant, including reds, blues, yellows, and greens. The hallway is lit from above, and the ceiling is visible. The overall atmosphere is artistic and modern.

Unit 1: Families and Households

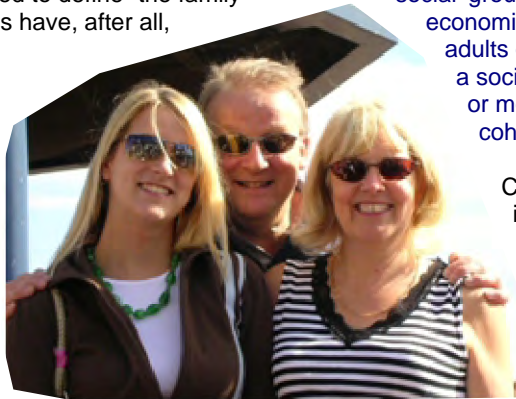
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1. The relationship of the family to the social structure and social change, with particular reference to the economy and to state policies.

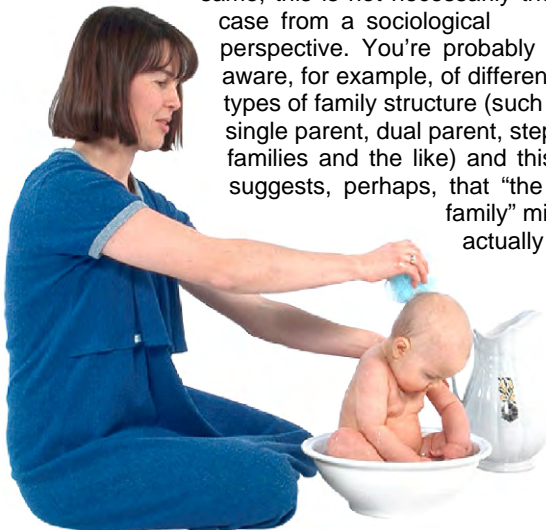
Defining the Family: Observations

It may strike you as a little strange to begin this Module by suggesting we need to define "the family" – the vast majority of us have, after all, years of personal experience of living within a family group (some more than others perhaps...) and we should, in consequence, "know something about it". Personal knowledge, however, is not necessarily the same as sociological knowledge and it's important not to confuse them, for two main reasons:



Firstly, although it's possible to refer to "the family" in a general, *commonsense*, way, it's more useful to develop a clearer definition of this particular social group as the basis for understanding things like how it relates to other social groups, the nature of the relationships that exist within the group and so forth. A coherent "definition of the family", therefore, provides a solid basis for further exploration.

Secondly, although we tend, in everyday conversation, to refer to "the family" as if all families were much the same, this is not necessarily the case from a sociological perspective. You're probably aware, for example, of different types of family structure (such as single parent, dual parent, step families and the like) and this suggests, perhaps, that "the family" might actually be



characterised more by its *diversity* (*difference*) than its *uniformity*.

We can begin, therefore, with a "classic" definition - **Murdock's** (1949) observation that: "The family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially-approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults."

Contemporary variations on this theme include **Popenoe's** (1988) argument that a "*minimal family composition*" involves one adult and one dependent person where parents *neither* have to be of the same sex *nor* married. Further definitions edge towards seeing "the family" in terms of both what it *is* and what it *does*, with the focus on the concept of:

Kinship – which involves relationships based on:

- **Biology** - involving, for example, a genetic relationship, such as that between a mother and her child.
- **Affinity** – which involves relationships created through custom, such as two adults living together (*cohabitation*) or
- **Law** – a legal (contractual) relationship with something like *marriage* being an obvious example.

Weiss (1988), for example, defines the family group as: "A small kinship structured group with the key function of...socialisation of the newborn." and **Giddens** (2006) suggests family groups can be defined as: "A group of people directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility of caring for the children".

Ambert (2003) develops the idea families can be defined in terms of a combination of what they "*are*" (kinship networks) and what they "*do*" (their *functions*) when she argues a family is "...any combination of two or more persons bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and / or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for combinations of some of the following:

- Physical maintenance and care of group members;
- Addition of new members through procreation or adoption;
- Socialization of children;
- Social control of members;
- Production, consumption and distribution of goods and service and:
 - Affective nurturance - love".

Defining the Family: Explanations

Although it can be initially frustrating to discover that sociologists can't offer a simple straightforward definition of "the family", this apparent failure points us towards the idea that one reason for this is that the institution we call "the family" in our everyday conversation involves a more-complex set of characteristics and relationships than we may at first imagine – an idea that leads to three related observations:

1. The family group is qualitatively different from both non-family social groups (such as a school class) and family-type groups such as a:

Household: This, for example, involves a single person or a group of people (such as students) living in the same location. Technically, therefore, a family counts as a household (because it involves a group of people sharing accommodation); however, not all households are families because the latter must involve *kinship* relations.

2. It is difficult to identify the *essential characteristics* of "the family" because, as we've seen, defining "a family" is not unproblematic (there are arguments over how best to define it). These arguments stretch to two different general *types of definition*:

Exclusive definitions (such as **Murdock's**) focus on the specific characteristics of "a family" that make it different to other social groups. This type has the advantage of being clear about what is - and is not - a family group – but it has a significant drawback in the sense that it's actually very difficult (if not impossible) to produce a definition that applies to all possible types of family.



Defining "the family group" is not always as straightforward as it might at first appear...

Inclusive definitions (such as those of **Weiss** or **Giddens**) focus on defining a family group in terms of the general *relationships* (such as biology or affinity) that make it different from other social groups. One advantage here is that this type of definition covers a variety of different family forms, but if the definition is drawn too broadly it may include groups (such as households or two adults living together without children) that are significantly different to families in terms of their relationships.

3. What we term *the* family is, in reality, a complex social institution involving a wide diversity of relationships and experiences and **Goldthorpe** (1987), for example, argues we should think about family structures as "networks of related kin"; that is, 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) and
- **Functions** - such as primary socialisation.

Tried and Tested

(a) Identify two different definitions of "the family" (2 marks)

(b) Suggest **two** reasons why defining the family might be difficult (4 marks) .

Social Change: Observations

In terms of what we've done thus far, we can note that arguments about how to define, study and understand "the family" reflect two significant ideas:

Firstly, the family group is an evolving institution and the various ways it changes over time reflect its relationship to economic, political and cultural structures in society.

Secondly, as our society experiences greater levels of economic and cultural diversity, these changes are reflected in the observation that the family group has become a more-diverse institution.

What this means, therefore, is that "the family group" (how adults and children live and work together as a unit) is one that is sensitive to all kinds of social change – and to understand the nature of "the family" both historical and contemporary in UK society, it's necessary to consider its relationship to the wider society (with its attendant economic, political and cultural structures and processes) in which it is located.

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The basic argument here, therefore, is that we can't really understand the family group in glorious isolation from the rest of society since what is happening in that society – its economic, political, legal and cultural changes – impact in various ways on the content and structure of the family group. As societies change, in short, so do families and for this reason we need to think about some of the ways social changes can be related to the nature of family life in contemporary UK society.

Neale (2000), for example, captures the idea that the family is an evolving institution, in terms of both its general structure and the relationships within it, when he argues families are: "...fluid webs of relationships and practices through which we define our personal, familial and kinship ties" - something that operates "not only historically, in terms of wider processes of social change, but biographically within the life course of individuals". This is a useful starting point for two main reasons:

Firstly, it points us in the direction of thinking about the nature of the family group in terms of its historical development

Secondly, it picks-up on two sociological themes we identified in the Introductory chapter, namely the relationship between social structures (the general economic, political and cultural organisation of the society within a family group is located) and social actions – how particular individuals and groups shape their family relationships within the context of social structures.

With this in mind, therefore, we can, by way of example, note some of the ways economic changes in wider UK society have impacted on family structures.

Families: One feature of contemporary UK society is the *diversity* and *fragmentation* of family life, notwithstanding **Chester's** (1985) observation that the majority of people in the UK still live at least part of their life within some form of *nuclear family structure* (a family type that involves *two generations* - parents and child/ren - living in the same household). In this respect we see a range of structures (from **dual-parent heterosexual**, through **step-parent** and **single-parent to dual-parent homosexual** families) and relationships – focused, for example, on areas like the relationship



Families and Households

between adults and children. Family relationships within different structures are likely to be quite different (think about, for example, the different type of relationship that might exist between a step-father or mother and their natural / step-children or between single and dual parent families).

In terms of examples of specific social (economic) changes, new ways of organising work (in the context, for example, of computer technology and networking) open up opportunities for home-working which, in turn, means single-parents with young children are, potentially, no longer "excluded" from the workforce. The relatively smaller size of nuclear families (*average* family size in the UK in 2005, according to **Diamond** (2007), was around 1.5 children) and improved communications (such as the ability to stay in close contact with extended family members using the telephone, email, text messaging and the like) makes this family group increasingly mobile - both in terms of national and international movement.

Households: One of the most striking features of our society is the growth of **single person households**. **The Future Foundation** (2001), for example, notes this household structure became, for the first time in the UK, the most common family or household structure. In addition, on current projections the "**Couple with no children**" household will be more common in our society than the "**Couple with dependent children**" family. The increase in the number of single-



Young, free and single?
One out of three ain't bad...

person households is also indicative of how economic changes have impacted on people's behaviour. The single-person household is potentially the most *geographically mobile* of all family / household structures and reflects the changing (increasingly global) nature of work – people are both increasingly willing and able to move within and across national borders in pursuit of work.

Social Change: Explanations

We can think about the relationship between social change and changing family / household structures in terms of two main perspectives:

1. **Historical**, in terms of, for example, general changes in UK society over the past 200 – 300 years.
2. **Contemporary**, in terms of thinking about both the *legacy* of these changes (in terms of, for example, the development and general social acceptance of a range of family structures) and *current* forms of change considered in terms of the increasingly *global* nature of political, economic and cultural behaviour.

Historical

In order to establish a framework for our analysis of social change we can think in terms of the characteristics of three “historical types” of society in the UK:

1. Pre-industrial (or *pre-modern*) society loosely dates as prior to the 17th century and was characterised by agricultural forms of economic production (the main way people earned their living was through farming).

2. Industrial (or *modern*) society began to develop in the late 17th century and continued through the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries to reach its height in the late 20th century. This type of society is characterised by industrial forms of economic production involving the development of factories, mechanisation and mass production on a huge scale.

3. Post-industrial (or *postmodern*) society: This type developed throughout the 20th century and is characterised by the growth of service industries (banking, insurance, information technology and the like) and the widespread automation of economic production. As a society it is also characterised by its global nature – goods and services, for example, are produced, distributed and traded on a worldwide scale.



15th century peasants working the land...

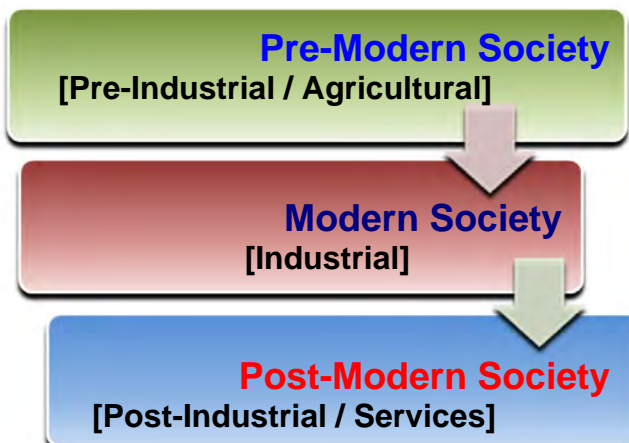
towns and cities.

This is sometimes called *social migration* from the countryside (rural areas) to towns (urban areas which developed as industrialisation and factory-type production developed).

These changes can be related to changes in family structures (and relationships) in a number of ways:

Carlin (2002), for example, argues that in pre-industrial society “...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).



In this respect, two significant forms of social change (for our current purpose) we can identify are:

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



Post-industrial society - the rise to dominance of Service industries

Choice: Carlin (2002) notes 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: Laslett and Wall

(1972) note 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** (1965) however, estimates only 10% of pre-industrial households contained more than two generations of kin.

Modified extended structures: 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".

Anderson (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've 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.

The historical evidence suggests, however, that 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 of 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, on the other hand, tended to be nuclear for two main reasons:

- **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.



19th century English middle class family

Upper class family structures, according to **Gomm** (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.

Contemporary

If we think in more recent terms about the relationship between the family and social change we can initially note the idea that in **post-Industrial society** family and household structures in the late 20th / early 21st 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: Contemporary UK 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 - an idea that leads to a consideration of how:

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 we've suggested, on how you define such things).



A nuclear family structure - two generations (parents and children) living in the same house (or...err...tent)

The above notwithstanding, if family and household structures in the early 21st century are, arguably, more complex, fragmented and diverse than at any time in our history, there are a number of explanations for this situation we can identify:

The **Beanpole** (or "verticalised") family structure - a "longer and thinner" family structure with fewer family members but increased generational links.

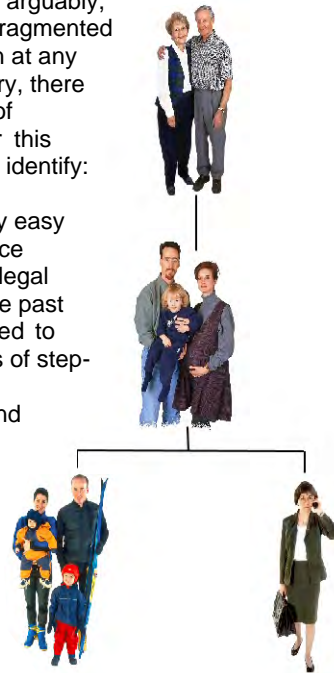
Legal: Relatively easy access to divorce (resulting from legal changes over the past 50 years) has led to greater numbers of step-parent (*reconstituted*) and single-parent families and single-person households.

Social attitudes: Whatever the origins of such changes, *lifestyle* factors such as greater social acceptance of single-parent and homosexual family structures have played some part in creating family diversity.

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 **Brannen** (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** (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**, (2000) on the other hand, suggests people are becoming increasingly *uncertain* ("ambivalent") about family structures and relationships in the light of social changes.



Increases in the number of people divorcing, for example, have led to the widespread creation of single-parent and reconstituted families; this in turn may have resulted in a weakening of personal relationships as family members seek – or are forced – to create new social spaces for themselves away from the relationships that previously existed in their lives. One result of these changes, **Luscher** suggests, is families seeking “geographical distance between different family generations”.

Module Link Families and Households

In the context of changing child – parent relationships **Hendrick** (1992) suggests substantial historical changes were “associated with social policy legislation” – an idea developed in the final part of this section when we examine some of the ways changes in social policy have produced associated changes in family life and living.

Past and Present...

Bringing these two positions – the historical and the contemporary – together we can capture something of the flavour of the relationship between the family and social change by noting that there is a tendency, in everyday life, the media and so forth to contrast the “family in the past” with the “family in the present”; the former is generally associated with stability, long-term, marriage-based, relationships and the like while the latter is characterised as an institution that has been buffeted and battered, bruised and broken by changes in both society (the availability of divorce, abortion and so forth) and attitudes (a decline in religious weddings and vows, increased cohabitation and the like). Writers such as **Cheal** (1999) have argued that this picture of family relationships and structures in the past is “a myth” in the sense that there has never been a single, natural and essential family form in our society – there has, historically, been a mix of both structures and relationships.

As **Morgan** (1996) argues: “The imagery of the ‘nuclear’ family (a heterosexual, married couple and their legitimate children, sharing a household and operating as an economic unit) has dominated the popular imagination throughout the twentieth century. But in Western societies there is a growing recognition of the incongruity between this ideological construct and the rich variety of ways in which people live (and, perhaps, always have lived) their family lives”.

What does exist, however, according to **Neale** (2000) “...are fluid webs of relationships and practices through which we define our personal, familial and kinship ties. This fluidity operates not only historically, in terms of wider processes of social change, but biographically within the life course of individuals”.

Module Link Families and Households

The relationship between the family and social change has given rise to arguments about how family groups and relationships have changed and are changing. These are developed in the section dealing with “**Family Diversity**”.

Debates over how to both define “a family” and the precise ways the family group is affected by wider social changes are reflected in the various ways different sociological perspectives look at and understand the nature and role of the family group in society. In the next part, therefore, we can examine how a selection of sociological perspectives explain the relationship between the family group, the social structure and social change.

Tried and Tested

- Explain what is meant by “family diversity” (2 marks)
- Suggest **two** ways economic changes have impacted on family structures (4 marks)
- Suggest **three** reasons for changes in family structures over the past century (6 marks)
- Examine the ways in which industrialisation and urbanisation have impacted on family structure and diversity (24 marks)
- Assess the view that it no longer makes sense to talk about “the family” (24 marks)

Family Perspectives: Observations

Module Link Introduction

This Section introduces a range of sociological perspectives and it would be useful to familiarise yourself with this material (presupposing you haven’t done so already...) because it will make the following applications more understandable.

Although family groups are generally considered important institutions in any society there are, as we’ve suggested, disagreements over how we interpret their role and relationship to social structure – a general debate we can outline in the following terms:

Functionalism

This general perspective starts from the observation that the family group is a *cultural universal*; that is, it is an institution that has existed, in one form or another, in all known societies. This suggests the family group performs certain essential functions for both individuals and wider society, which makes families, from this perspective, crucial to the functioning of any social system.

Although these “functions of the family” can be many and varied – and not all Functionalists are in complete agreement about what these functions may be – there is general agreement that the family group has two core or essential functions related to:

- 1. Primary 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 roles, norms and values.
- 2. 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 stability through family co-operation and so forth.

Module Link

Introduction

The family is considered by Functionalists to be one of the four major *functional sub-systems* in any society that together contribute to the maintenance of social order.

New Right

This general perspective, although closely-related to Functionalism, involves more-directly political (rather than sociological) ideas about the significance of families for both the individual and society. For New Right theorists, whether we define them in terms of *personalities* (politicians such as **Thatcher** and **Bush**), *theorists* (such as **Murray**) or *practices* (issues such as **anti-abortion**, **anti-immigration**, **anti-Europe** and **pro-liberal economic policies**), the family group is seen as the cornerstone of any society. In this respect the New Right generally promote the idea of “traditional family relationships”; families *should* consist of two, heterosexual, adults, preferably married (to each other) and with clearly-defined gender roles and relationships - which normally involves the general idea of men as “providers” (or breadwinners) and women as “carers” (or domestic workers).

Marxism

This perspective reflects a *conflict* view of society by relating what the family group does (socialisation, for example) to how it benefits powerful groups – how a ruling class, for example, benefits from “free family services” (such as bearing the costs associated with raising children to be future employees) or how men benefit from their domination and exploitation of women in their family relationships. For Marxists, it’s not what the family *does* that’s of overriding importance, but *why* it does it - and one argument here is that the family helps to maintain and reproduce **social inequalities** by presenting them as “normal” and “natural” within the socialisation process.

Feminism

Feminist sociology has traditionally focused on the role of the family group in the exploitation of women, with

attention mainly being given to identifying and explaining how “traditional gender roles” within the family are enforced and reinforced for the benefit of men. The family group, therefore, is seen as oppressive of women, imprisoning them in a narrow range of *service* roles and responsibilities, such as domestic labour and child care. In contemporary families, the notion of women’s:

Dual role or **double shift** (women as both paid workers *and* unpaid housewives) has been emphasised, the basic idea here being that women are doubly-exploited (in the **public sphere** - or workplace - as paid employees whose labour contributes to ruling-class profits) and in the **private sphere** (or home) as unpaid workers whose labour primarily benefits men. More-recently, the idea of women performing, according to **Duncombe and Marsden** (1993), a:

Triple shift - the third element being **emotional labour** (investing time and effort in the *psychological* well-being of family members) – has been noted as a further way that women are exploited within the family group. The basic idea here is that women, rather than men, are expected to make this investment in their children and partner’s “emotional well-being” (with the obvious, if unstated, question here being who – if anyone - makes a similar emotional investment in the psychological well-being of the female parent?).

Postmodernism

This perspective rejects the kinds of views we’ve just noted (since they’re all, in their different ways, seen as promoting 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 individual behaviours and lifestyles. From this position, sociological perspectives such as **Functionalism**, **Marxism** or **Feminism** are considered to be hopelessly outdated in their portrayal of both societies and individuals, mainly because they claim to understand individual behaviour in terms of the wider social purposes such behaviour supposedly exists to serve.

Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism - as outdated as an antique map (and probably as much use for finding your way around society)?

In the case of **Functionalism**, for example, individual behavioural choices are *generally* (although not absolutely *necessarily*) seen to reflect the needs of “society as a whole” (in the sense of, for example, the behaviour of the



family group being conditioned by social *imperatives* (or commands) such as the need to socialise children); both **Marxism** and **Feminism** are criticised for the way they explain behaviour in terms of the interests of powerful social groups (a ruling class in the case of the former and men in the case of the latter).

New Right perspectives are similarly criticised for their prescriptive arguments about how families *should* be (males and females, for example, forced to perform certain exclusive roles that somehow come together for the mutual benefit of all). This perspective is further criticised for its narrow insistence (in a way that mirrors, to some extent, Functionalist arguments) that males and females are naturally best-equipped to perform the roles assigned to them by New Right theorists.

For postmodernists, therefore, “a family” 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 position, therefore, the possible 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 largely pointless exercise (albeit one Structuralist perspectives, because of their fundamental beliefs about the significance of structures in conditioning individual behaviours and choices are forced to carry out).

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.

Family Perspectives: Explanations

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 while, 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 personal position in relation

The “postmodern family” - whatever people want it to be?



to this particular debate, we need to dig a little deeper into different perspectives as we attempt to both explain these positions in greater detail and evaluate their validity as explanations for the possible relationship between families and the social structure.

Functionalism

This type of sociological perspective has tended to view the family as the initial, essential, bedrock of *social integration* in any given society – a theoretical position that involves the idea ways have to be found to make people feel they belong to the society into which they were born (to act, in short, in ways that reflect the belief they have something in common with the people around them).

Core Functions

Fletcher (1973), for example (in a classic illustration of this general idea) linked the problem of social integration to the family by identifying its *core functions* – the things it exists to perform, in ways that cannot be performed by either individuals working alone or by any other institution in society. In this respect **Fletcher** identified three core functions:

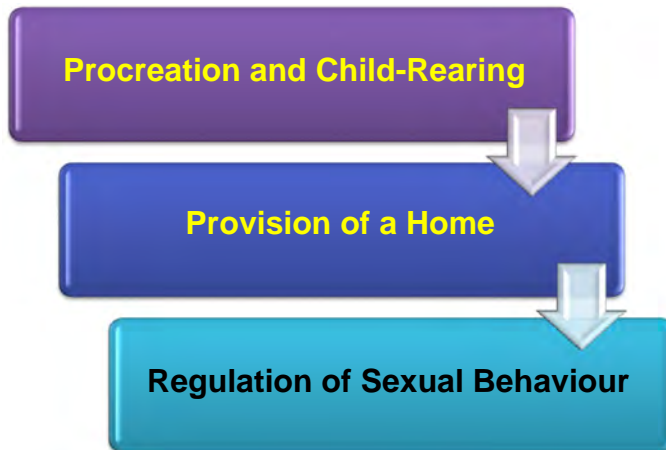
1. Procreation and Child-Rearing: Family groups provide a vital and necessary context for both childbearing (procreation) and, most importantly, child-rearing; the human infant, for example, is largely helpless in its initial years and requires (adult) care and attention if it is to develop. Child-rearing, therefore, involves ensuring the *physical* and *psychological survival* of the human infant and its development as a member of the society into which it was born (the **primary socialisation** function of the family).

Although there's no strict functional necessity for children to be reared by their natural parents (child-rearing functions can be carried-out by other agents (such as adoptive parents) or agencies) Functionalist theorists generally hold that a child's natural parents are best-positioned to carry-out this process because they have a “personal investment” in ensuring their child survives.

Child-rearing (we were going to show procreation but since this is a family-orientated textbook we thought better of it).



The Core Functions of the family



2. Provision of a Home: This idea relates to the previous core function in the sense of the family group providing both a “physical home” (in the sense of providing nurture and shelter for the child) and an “emotional home” in terms of the psychological well-being of the child.

3. Regulation of Sexual Behaviour: All cultures develop rules governing permissible sexual behaviour and sexuality (in England, for example, consenting homosexual behaviour is legal at 16 whereas in other societies (such as Iran) or cultures (such as some of the Southern States of America) this behaviour is either illegal or informally proscribed). Although the precise form of the regulation of sexual behaviour varies between different cultures (the age of sexual consent for male – female relationships in Great Britain, for example, is 16 whereas in Chile it’s 12) the vast majority of human societies proscribe *incestuous relationships*. **Levi-Strauss** (1958), for example, goes so far as to claim that the incest taboo – in one form or another (there are cultural variations in how incest is precisely defined) – represents a “**cultural universal**”.

Peripheral Functions

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

- **Consumption** of goods and services.
- **Basic education**.
- **Health care** (both physical and psychological).
- **Recreation** (“the family that plays together stays together”. Or something).

For **Parsons** (1959), 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.

Neo-Functionalism

More-recent writers in the Functionalist tradition have, as you might expect, modified, developed and applied some of the ideas at which we’ve just looked in their analysis of the role played by the family in contemporary societies. **Horwitz** (2005), for example, has argued that Neo-Functionalist perspectives contribute to our understanding of the functions of the family in terms of it representing a:

Micro-Macro Bridge: The family is an institution that connects the “micro world” of the individual with the “macro world” of wider society (the “anonymous social institutions” such as work, government, the education system and so forth that develop in complex, large-scale, contemporary societies). The linkage between, on the one hand, *social structures* (the *macro world*) and on the other *social actions* (the *micro world*) is significant because it represents a way for Neo-Functionalists to explain the relationship between the individual and social structure (in terms of, for example, the family’s role in the primary socialisation process).

As **Horwitz** argues “Families help us to learn the explicit and tacit social rules necessary for functioning in the wider world, and families are uniquely positioned to do so because it is those closest to us who have the knowledge and incentives necessary to provide that learning”.



Families are crucial for Neo-Functionalists because parents have the incentive to make the sacrifices (time, money...) required to ensure the social development of their children...

He further suggests that it is precisely because the family group plays a crucial part in linking the individual to wider society that accounts for its historical persistence - "The family has survived because it provided social benefits" to both the individual and society.

More specifically, the role of the family in relation to the social structure can be explained in terms of:

Rule learning: The family is an institution where children learn social rules in an environment that is generally supportive; rewards and punishments for conforming and deviant behaviours can also be "individualized to the greatest degree possible" because of the intimate, face-to-face, relationship between parents and children.

Rule-following: Horwitz argues "It is within the secure base of the family that children can learn both explicitly, through instruction, and implicitly, through experimentation, the rules that do and should govern behaviour in the broader social world".



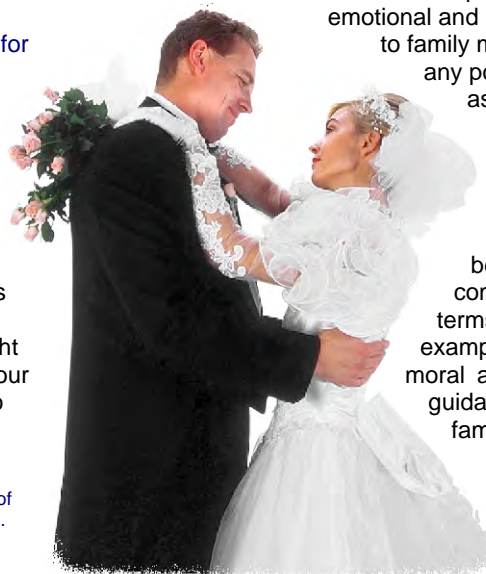
The family group, in other words, represents both a sounding-board for behaviour (whereby children come to understand what is and is not permissible) and a buffer-zone whereby children can make (and learn from) their mistakes.

Children need to be taught rules of behaviour...

Social relationships: The family is "a school for learning tacit social norms" whereby children first experiment with social interaction and relationships; by initially learning the rules of social interaction with family members children create a template "for other intimate relationships and the more anonymous relationships" found in wider society.

Social order: The family serves as the means whereby general social rules (such as "instructing children in general concepts of right and wrong and explaining appropriate behaviour in various social situations") are transmitted to each new generation.

The New Right really love the sound of (strictly heterosexual) wedding bells...



Although these lessons and behaviours can be – and are – taught by other social institutions Horwitz argues "The family is a superior site for learning these rules of behaviour" for three reasons:

1. Intimacy: Where rules of behaviour are transmitted and enforced by people who share a deep, emotional, commitment to each other, such rules are more-likely to be effectively taught and learnt.

2. Incentives: The closeness of a family group provides incentives for both adults and children to behave in ways that make their interaction "smoother" (one of the greatest incentives perhaps being the fact that a family lives together in an environment where cooperation is desirable if people are to avoid too much personal stress and strain). A further incentive for "good behaviour" is the idea that "other family members may suffer negative external reputation effects due to the misbehaviour of children".

3. Subconscious learning: In many situations it is difficult, Horwitz argues, for people to articulate and express their reasons for doing something. For example, it may be difficult to explain the rules that underpin why we love or trust someone. However, within a family group such rule-learning can be articulated "subconsciously" by children observing and imitating the behaviour that goes on around them. "A parent", for example "might be unable to explain the rules that guide her behaviour when interacting with a stranger, but the child can observe and later imitate the behaviour and in so doing, adopt the implicit rules that are at work".

New Right

In some ways we can characterise New Right approaches to family life as a form of **Neo-Functionalist** perspective; that is, a general position that both reflects and in some ways updates traditional Functionalist perspectives. Neale (2000, for example), characterises this general perspective 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, in terms of children, for example, being given clear moral and behavioural guidance within traditional family structures.

Commitment to others 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: 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 mistaken since it questions the concept of moral commitment to others that sits at the heart of social responsibility. The emphasis here is on social policies that encourage "beneficial" forms of family structure and "discourages" forms - such as single-parenthood - that are damaging to both individuals and communities.

A further illustrative example here is the work of **Morgan** (2000) who argues that *marriage*, rather than *cohabitation*, is something that should be encouraged by governments. For **Morgan**, cohabitation is not simply, to paraphrase **Leach** (1994), "*Marriage without a piece of paper*". On the contrary, she argues cohabiting relationships are:

Unstable: She notes, for example, the fragility of cohabiting relationships in terms of the idea 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.



About as much sexual promiscuity as we're allowed to show (i.e. None at all...)

Fragmentary, in the sense their instability means cohabiting 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*".

Module Link Families and Households

The relationship between marriage and cohabitation is examined in more detail in the section "**Changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce, child-bearing and the life-course**".

Marxism

This perspective has been generally more critical of the role of the family group than either Functionalist or New Right positions; as you might expect, this Conflict model focuses on issues of exploitation and oppression (particularly as they relate to economic activity) whereby the family group in Capitalist society is portrayed as 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 valve 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 (domestic violence accounts for 15% of all reported violent incidents): The **Home Office** (2007), for example, 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*" (just over two-thirds of victims are female and just under one third male). The scale of domestic violence is indicated by the fact that "*One incident of domestic violence is reported to the police every minute*" (a substantial total given that domestic forms of violence are among those least likely to be reported to the police). In addition "*One in four women and one in six men will suffer from domestic violence at some point in their lives*". Of repeat victimisation (where one partner is subjected to more than one assault over a given time period) women are victims around 90% of the time.

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, for Marxists, the exploitative work relationships experienced by many men). This situation is, to some extent, considered "right and proper" (or legitimate) by many men and women because it's 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.
- **Emotional costs** are also involved because 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.

Module Link Families and Households

The Section on **childhood** outlines some of the consumption costs associated with the raising of children

Complimenting 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 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, DVD’s, 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. Leading on from this idea we can note the role of the family group as:

Consumers: 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.



Feminism

These perspectives on family life (taken as a whole) 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 can’t, 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 female:

Exploitation: In this respect, feminists point to the idea women in our society increasingly suffer from dual forms of exploitation:

1. **Patriarchal** exploitation as domestic labourers within the home.
2. **Capitalist** exploitation as employees in the workplace - an idea that’s related to the concept of women as a:

Reserve army of labour: **Bruegal** (1979) notes how 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. One aspect of this “reserve status” is that women are generally seen to be a marginalised workforce – “forced” into low pay, low status, employment on the basis of sexual discrimination.



Are women a reserve army of labour?

Oppression: Feminists also point to the idea 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 quite happily 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, women as we’ve suggested tend to be the main victims.

Postmodernism

In opposition to the structural approaches of perspectives such as Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism, postmodern approaches generally 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:

1. 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 / household 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:



Do we live in an era of almost unlimited choice about our family relationships?

2. 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 judgments about family forms (in the way we've seen other sociological

perspectives make such judgments 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 **Stacey** (2002) puts it when discussing same-sex relationships "Under the postmodern family condition, every family is an alternative family". Because of this uniqueness, families are:

Difficult to define: As we've seen in the opening section, one of the problems we encounter when discussing families is the difficulties 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 (to put it kindly) for students of AS Sociology (and their teachers, come to that). In this respect, **Elkind** (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

Tried and Tested

- (a) Explain what is meant by women's "triple shift" (2 marks)
- (b) Suggest **two** functions, apart from primary socialisation, of the family(4 marks)
- (c) Suggest **three** reasons for seeing the family as an oppressive and exploitative social group(6 marks)
- (d) Examine postmodern arguments about the changing nature of family life in comparison with *either* Functionalist *or* Feminist arguments (24 marks)
- (e) Assess the argument that the benefits of family life outweigh its drawbacks (24 marks)

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 **Suematsu** (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".

Family and Social Policy: Observations

We can begin by noting that, according to **Calvert and Calvert** (1992), **social policy** refers to: "...the main principles under which the government of the day directs economic resources to meet specific social needs" and we can add some flesh to the bare bones of this definition using **Morris'** (2004) observation that social policy involves the government identifying and regulating three main areas of society:

- 1. Problems** – an example of which might be something like an increase in the level of crime.
- 2. Needs** - such as those of the long-term unemployed, single parents or the disabled.
- 3. Conditions** - such as the provision of health care through something like a National Health Service.



Module Link Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

Both the concept of social policy and various sociological perspectives on policy are discussed further in the section “**Solutions to Poverty**”.

This deceptively-simple characterisation, if you stop to think about it for a moment, tends to obscure the fact that social policy is a potentially vast area to cover, even if we restrict ourselves to considering only those policies *directly* affecting families. It involves, for example, thinking in terms of three broad perspectives:

- **The Past** - in the sense of identifying and evaluating policies from both the distant past (such as the various *Factory and Child Labour Acts* of the 19th 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”) that have impacted on family life, relationships and structures.
- **The Present** - in the sense of identifying policies currently being *implemented* by the UK government (such as the creation of Civil Partnerships in 2005 that gave homosexual couples similar legal rights married heterosexual couples) and assessing their impact, thus far, on family life.

child support agency

Since its creation in 1993 by the then Conservative government the CSA has had a “troubled history”. The **National Audit Office** (2006) found the agency spent “70p to collect every £1 of child support” (an improvement on the previous year when it cost more to collect monies owed than it received). It is currently (2007) due to be replaced after a costly series of reforms...

- **The Future** - something that involves thinking about policies currently (2007) being *proposed* - such as placing strict limits on the smacking of children – whose possible impact on family life cannot, as yet, be adequately judged.

Rather than trawl through this vast ocean of social policy, this section looks initially at some illustrative examples of government policies in the post-2nd World War period – material we can use to provide a flavour of the range and scope of social policy in the UK as it relates specifically to families. In this respect social policy has historically involved attempts to “manage social problems, needs and conditions” – with arguably the most significant policy development in the UK of the 20th century being the development of:

The Welfare State: The 1942 **Beveridge Report** proposed a range of policies that had a profound impact on family life in a wide variety of ways – from improved health care (a *National Health Service*), through the “extension of childhood” as children were compelled by law to remain in education (*compulsory State Education*) to economic provision for old age / retirement through State pensions (a *National Insurance system*).

Compulsory education was recommended by the **Beveridge Report** as part of the Welfare State (so now you know who to blame...)

Module Link Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

The ideological background to - and examples of - social policies introduced under the general heading of the Welfare State are discussed further in the section “**Welfare Provision**”.

Within the general context of the Welfare State (the umbrella term for social policy that’s generally been adopted in the UK) we can note a range of policies aimed specifically at the family group:

Family planning: Things like the availability of **contraception**, **abortion** (available for a period of 24 weeks under the 1967 Abortion Act, 1967) and **fertility treatments** (IVF) under the National Health Service have variously impacted on birth rates and family size.

Pregnancy: Working women are entitled to **maternity leave**, *Statutory or Contractual Maternity Pay* and the right to resume their former job. *Statutory maternity leave*, **before April 2007**, ran for 26 weeks with the option of a further 26 weeks if certain conditions were met. Since this date leave is now consolidated into 52 weeks. For women in employment there is an entitlement to *Statutory Maternity Pay* “for up to 39 weeks of the leave”. *Statutory or contractual maternity pay* after April 2007 is paid by the employer at 90% of the individual’s weekly earnings with no upper limit for the first 6 weeks of leave. For the remaining 33 weeks maternity pay is either £112.75 or 90 per cent of the individual’s average earnings. This payment is, however, subject to income tax and national insurance. Where an employer is not party to the *Statutory maternity leave* scheme the alternative is **Maternity Allowance** paid by the government (the payments are the same as we’ve just noted, although the payment isn’t liable for income tax or national insurance, with the maximum payment fixed at £112.75 per week). After April 2007 this allowance is paid for 39 weeks.

In 2003, fathers gained the right of up to two weeks of **paternity leave**, during which they could claim *Statutory Paternity Pay* from their employer (from 2005, £106 a week or 90% of their average weekly earnings). Also in 2005 the right to “adoption leave and pay” was introduced and a range of social policies govern adoption rules for prospective parents.

From **April 2007** *Statutory Paternity Pay* was set at “£112.75 or 90 per cent of the individual’s average weekly earnings if this is lower”. Tax and National Insurance is deducted from this amount in the normal way. However, a range of



exclusionary conditions apply for Statutory Paternity Pay (including things like employment status – whether or not you are employed or self-employed - the length of an individual's current employment, their current level of weekly earnings and so forth).

Childhood: Government both pays a range of benefits to parents with children (including *Child Benefit* paid to parents raising children under 16) and also regulates parental behaviour through the **Child Support Agency** (CSA) created in 1993 (although currently (2007) in the process of being replaced by a "new Agency"); the CSA was given the power to ensure non-resident parents made a financial contribution (*Child Maintenance*) to the care and upbringing of their child/ren.

The **Childcare Act** (2006) was designed to improve the general level of childcare services available from local authorities in areas like health, social services to parents and prospective parents and so forth.

Education: Although educational policies (since 1944) are not directly designed to impact on family life they do have a number of *indirect* effects – from allowing individual parents to work, through the provision of **free school meals** to those in poverty, to things like **Educational Maintenance Allowances** (introduced in 2004 and paid to those aged 16 – 19 staying in full-time education whose parents have a combined income of less than £30,810) and **Child Benefit**. In relation to pre-school education, *free nursery provision* was introduced for all 3 year olds in 2004.

Module Link

Education

The nature and impact of post-war government educational policies is discussed in the section "**State Policies**".

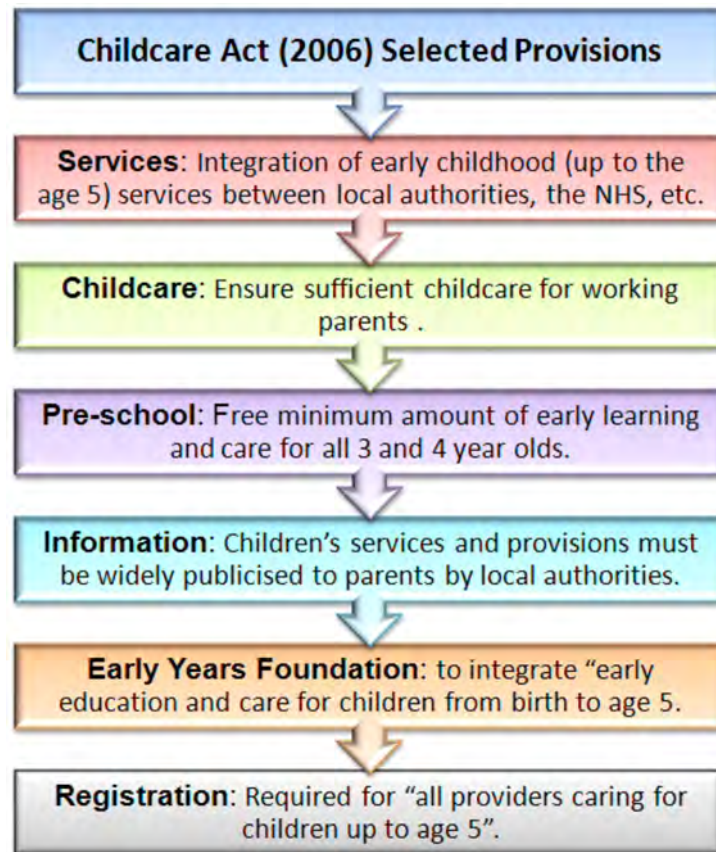
On a more general level we find a wide range of social policies designed to regulate family behaviour in a very broad sense. Examples here include:

Marriage rules governing things like who can marry whom (both *bigamy* – being married to more than one person at the same time – and *incest* are illegal), at what age people can legally marry (16 if both parents agree, otherwise 18), the legal rights and responsibilities involved in a marriage contract and so forth. Although gay couples cannot legally marry, since 2005 they have been allowed to form a **Civil Partnership** that gives each partner legal rights similar to married heterosexual couples.

Divorce: This is legal in the UK, but not in all countries throughout the world.

Economic Policies: Although things like taxation, insurance and pay / inflation policies (amongst many

other things) impact indirectly on family life, we can note further examples of economic policies that had - or continue to have – a more-direct impact:



Council housing: As part of the post-war housing reforms the government built and rented out good quality, affordable, housing ("council housing") to those on low incomes. Over the past 20 years, however, successive governments have progressively sold this housing to private owners (at large discounts from the market price) and housing associations.

Housing: A combination of policies (ranging from the abolition of *Mortgage tax relief* in 2002 to control over interest rates) contribute to the contemporary phenomenon of adult children living in their parents' home – as demonstrated by **Self and Zealey** (2007):

Tax Credits and Benefits: A wide range of economic benefits are available to family members (too many to explore in any great detail here). These include things like:

Job Seeker's Allowance (between the ages of 18 -24). If this is claimed continuously for 6 months the recipient must enter the New Deal scheme which involves a choice from subsidised employment; work experience with a voluntary organisation / environmental task force or full-time education. Refusal to take any of these options results in the Allowance being stopped.

Child Tax Credit paid to parents caring for children in full-time education or training.

Working Tax Credit is paid to individuals and couples on low incomes (the exact levels and benefits are assessed according to a **means-tested** formula)

AS Sociology For AQA

Old Age / retirement: State pensions currently (2007) start at 65 for men and 60 for women and payments depend on National Insurance contributions paid throughout the individual's working life. 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).

Pensioners receive some free services (such as a Buss Pass, television licence and help with heating). Home help, district nurse / health visitor, day centre care, social workers and meals-on-wheels are also provided for those aged 65 and over. Where the elderly are unable to care for themselves there is the choice of entering a private nursing home or being forced to rely on their children for care and accommodation ("Care in the Community").



Module Link

Crime and Deviance

Family life is covered by *general social policies* relating to the criminal law. Although, for example, we tend to talk about things like domestic violence as if it represents a special legal category, it's actually a form of criminal assault. Areas such as child abuse, rape and bigamy are also covered by crime policies. We should also remember that areas such as marriage and civil partnerships involve legally-binding contracts...

Family and Social Policy: Explanations

"The family", as we've suggested throughout this section, is a complex institution – not just in terms of its different structures (nuclear, extended, single-parent...) but also its relationships (marriage, cohabitation, the roles played by adults and children and the like). The picture is further complicated, as far as social policy and social change is concerned, by the fact that although the family, in its broadest sense, has generally been seen by successive UK governments (both Labour and Conservative) as a:

Private institution - one in which family members should, as far as possible, be left alone to work-out their relationships and differences, the family is also a social group influenced by both:

Legal norms – marriage, for example, is a form of legal contract between two adults of the opposite sex and:

Moral norms – in the sense that our ideas (both as family members and in the wider sense of sociological theorising) about what a family *is* and *should be*, *what*

Families and Households

it does and should do, influence the way we look at, understand and, in some instances, try to influence its shape and development.

In this respect, just as most of us (probably) have some sort of opinion about "families" and "family life", governments (and sociologists) also have opinions about this institution. In this final section, therefore, we can look briefly at a range of social policies that have – or continue to – affect family life in the UK as a way of illustrating a general "ideology of the family" in our society.

To this end, therefore, although it's something of an oversimplification, we can for the sake of argument characterise post-war government policies in the UK as conforming to what **Dean** (2006) characterises as a:

Managerial State: That is, the role of government, in terms of social and economic policies, has broadly been one of trying to *manage* the various ways family groups and relationships have developed in our society. Policy, in this respect, has been formulated and enacted within the general ideology of "*privacy*" we've just noted. In other words, governments have attempted to set general *boundaries* for people's behaviour by trying to encourage some forms of behaviour (such as marriage) and discourage others (such as single-parenthood) without necessarily becoming directly and coercively involved in how people live out their family relationships.

An example of a *coercive state policy* is something like China's "one child" system, introduced in 1979, that **Rosenberg** (2007) notes "...limits couples [in cities] to one child. Fines, pressures to abort a pregnancy, and even forced sterilization accompany second or subsequent pregnancies".

Module Link

Power and Politics

The concept of "The State" and theories about its role in contemporary societies is discussed in more detail in the section "**The Role of the Modern State**".



The notion of "family management" (in basic terms the idea that the role of social policy in UK society, as it relates to the family, is one of attempting to specify certain conditions under which stable family groups can flourish) is a significant one for a couple of reasons:

Successive UK governments have generally adopted a "hands-off" approach to family life.

Firstly, it maintains the idea that “families” are, by-and-large, *private institutions* that are able to function in ways that benefit both individual members and society in general.

Secondly, however, it recognises there is a *public role* for government that, in general, consists of attempting to create the general social conditions under which this private institution can flourish.

These two ideas are, up to a point, complimentary in that, as we’ve suggested, social policy within a managerial context is just that – an attempt to manage people’s behaviour by indirectly encouraging some forms of behaviour and discouraging others.

Finch (2003), however, highlights a central assumption of this idea when she notes: “Governments are always in danger of presuming a standard model of family life for which they can legislate, by making the assumption that most families do in fact operate in particular ways. In reality it is very difficult to detect a standard model, in either a descriptive sense (what people do) or a normative sense (what they ought to do)”.

This “standard model” assumption characteristic of post-war governments in the UK, has led, **Finch** argues, to the further assumption that: “The aim of policies should be to facilitate flexibility in family life, rather than shape it into a particular form...to ensure that people have maximum opportunity to work out their own relationships as they wish to suit the circumstances of their own lives. It is not the proper role of governments to presume that certain outcomes would be more desirable than others”.

Finch’s arguments strongly suggest that social policies are created and enacted within the context of certain *ideological beliefs* about the family group, the relationship between its members and its general relationship to wider society and groups.

Barlow and Duncan (2000), for example, argue that New Labour family policy was initially underpinned by the desire “to encourage what are seen as desirable family practices, and to discourage other, less-favoured, forms”. This desire was, in turn, based around what they identify as a combination of two intellectual frameworks (**Libertarian** and **Communitarian**), the basic beliefs of which have shaped family policy over the past 10 years.

Following Neale (2000) we can identify the basic beliefs contained in each framework in the following terms:

We can note a couple of things about the ideas we’ve just identified:

Firstly, although the ideological fit is by no means exact, New Labour family policies have reflected a general mix of **Functionalist**, **Neo-Functionalist** and **New Right** principles.

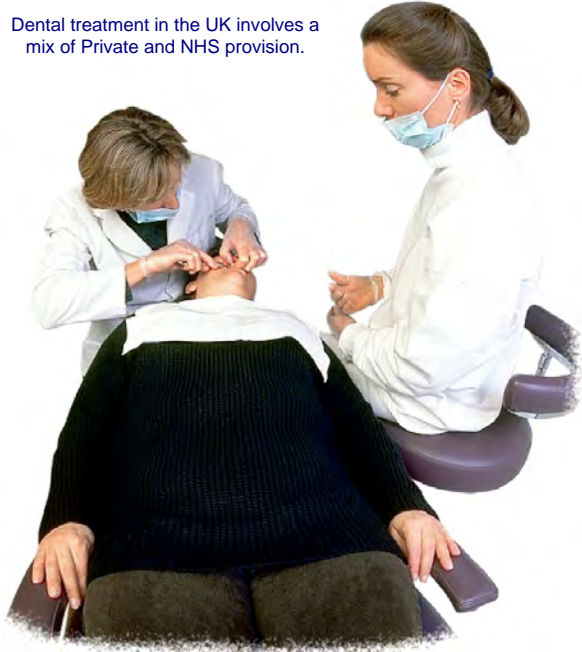
Secondly they represent ideals that, in practice, may not be fully enforced or subscribed to by governments. In addition, where government policy on the family is a mixture of different intellectual ideals (a Communitarian belief, for example, in a Welfare State system

Libertarianism	Communitarianism
Focus	
The relationship between individual and the state (national orientation).	The relationship between the individual and their community (local orientation).
Individuals	
People behave rationally and are driven by self-interest (for both themselves and their families).	People (should be) driven by moral consensus, shared values and sense of belonging to part of a wider community.
Politics	
Emphasis placed on individual choice, independence from “State interference”, self-reliance and provision.	Emphasis on ideas of commitment to welfare of others (not just immediate family) and duty (based on notions of common good – individuals benefit from community involvement).
Diversity	
Encouraged – people develop family forms and relationships that are “right for them”. A non-judgmental approach (no type of family is inherently better than any other).	Discouraged – some types of family are dysfunctional and damaging (to both individuals and communities). A judgmental approach (some forms of family are encouraged, others discouraged).
Control	
Family relationships and structures controlled by legal contracts (marriage for example), rights, incentives, sanctions.	Family relationships and structures shaped by “collective moral prescriptions” (ideas about how people should behave). These originate at government level.
Welfare	
State welfare systems should be restricted to enforcing legal / social obligations (for example, using the law to ensure maintenance payments by an absent parent). Families encouraged to “provide for themselves” through insurance etc.	State welfare system is a tool through which social policies and changes can be effected. Welfare systems have both a practical dimension (providing help and support for families) and moral dimension (channelling most support to particular types of family arrangement).

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combined with a more-Libertarian belief in individuals taking responsibility for their own welfare – through personal insurance schemes for example) we frequently see policies developing that attempt to straddle the two frameworks. For example, in terms of health individuals have free access to hospital consultants – but they can also pay for private consultations if they have the money and inclination.

Dental treatment in the UK involves a mix of Private and NHS provision.



Neale (2000) goes slightly further by arguing “In developing policies for families, new labour appears to have combined the most negative aspects of these two frameworks...there is a libertarian assumption that people are inherently individualist in their behaviour but a communitarian requirement that they behave in uniform fashion. The welfare response is to combine 'carrots and sticks' forms of persuasion with top down, moral prescriptions on how to live the 'good' life”.

In general terms, therefore, the relationship between the family and social policy in contemporary UK society can be broadly expressed in terms of two processes:

Direction: Firstly as a relatively simple one-way process whereby governments create policies and people – within family groups in this instance – react to, adapt to and cope with the implications and effects of such policies.

Outcomes: Secondly as a rather more complex process in terms of policy outcomes (the consequences of various social policies relating to the family) in that because the family, as we've noted, tends to be seen as a private institution into which governments do not directly involve themselves, the intended policy outcomes are not entirely predictable. We should also note here that not all sections of the UK population are treated equally in this respect. Some sections – largely the poor and the powerless – are subject to greater levels of government intervention in family life than others (not just the obvious rich and powerful candidates, but also the vast majority of middle class families).

Families and Households

The idea that social policy outcomes can be unpredictable leads us to our final observation here – that unpredictability partly results from the fact that social policy is not necessarily a one-way “top-down” (from government to individuals) process.

As **Neale** (2000) notes: “Families are also sources of change in themselves that can impact on wider society and on state policy. They are bound up with changes in the way individuals...perceive and negotiate their personal relationships and seek to mould their identities as partners, parents, friends, employees and so on”.

Tried and Tested

- Explain what is meant by “social policy” (2 marks)
- Identify and explain **two** needs (other than those noted in the text) addressed by social policy (4 marks)
- Suggest and explain **three** beliefs that have shaped family policy over the past decade (6 marks)
- Examine the ways in which social policies and laws may influence families and households (24 marks)
- Assess the view that the family should be a private institution (24 marks)



The various ways that individual and family relationships develop can have an impact on how governments develop social policy - the recent introduction of Civil Partnerships in the UK, for example, is a good illustration of this process.

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2. Changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce, child-bearing and the life-course, and the diversity of contemporary family and household structures.

Family Diversity: Observations

In the opening Section of this Module we noted, at various points, the argument that “the family” is not (and, more-controversially perhaps, has never been) a simple, homogeneous (“all the same”), social grouping. We can develop these ideas a little more in this section by looking more closely and explicitly at the concept of **family diversity** as it operates across a range of areas – from *organisational diversity* focused on family structures, through the concept of *life course* focused around changing family roles and relationships, to the evidence and implications of changing patterns of marriage, divorce, cohabitation, separation and child-bearing on both family structures and relationships.

Organisational

For **Rapoport and Rapoport** (1982), organisational diversity refers to a broad category of differences relating to both the *internal* and *external* organisation of family life. In terms of external (structural) differences, for example, we can develop our ideas about a range of different **family** and **household structures** based around identifying differences in the way people relate to each other. We can, for example, identify a number of different basic family / household types:

Nuclear families involve *two generations* of family members (parents and child/ren) 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. This type is sometimes called an *isolated nuclear* family (reflecting its physical separation from wider kin and its “economic isolation” from the rest of society) or *conjugal* family - a self-contained economic unit where family members are expected to support each other socially, economically and psychologically.

Extended families, involving additional family members, involve a range of basic types, three of which we can briefly outline:

1. Vertically-extended family structures consist of three or more generations (grandparent/s, parent/s and child/ren) living in the same household (or very close to each

here in that they involve (or are *focused on*) women (a female grandparent, female parent and child/ren, for example). Conversely, *patrifocal* families (quite rare in our society) are focused around men.



Horizontally extended families - involving aunts, uncles and the like - are relatively common in our society.

2. Horizontally-extended

structures involve relations such as aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. - *extensions* to the family that branch out *within* generations - a wife's sister and her partner, for example, living with the family group (or in close proximity). *Polygamous* families (where one man lives with many women or vice versa) sometimes take this form.

3. Modified extended structures refer, according to **Gordon** (1972), to the idea wider family members keep in regular touch with each other. This may be both *physically* (visiting or exchanging help and services) and *emotionally* (contacts by telephone, email and the like). Related to this idea is a distinction drawn by **Willmott** (1988) when he talks about:

- **Locally 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.
- **Attenuated extended** families involving, for example, “young couples before they have children”, gradually separating from their original families.

Modified Extended Types

Locally

Dispersed

Attenuated



Single-Parent family structures consist of a single adult plus their dependent child/ren. This type is sometimes called a "*broken nuclear*" family, because it often - but not always - arises from the break-up of a two-parent family. **Self and Zealey** (2007) note that around 24% of all children currently live in single parent family units (90% of which are headed by lone mothers), compared with 7% in 1972.

Reconstituted (or "*step*") family structures result from the break-up of one family (through things like the *death* of a marital partner 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 those from the new family.

Homosexual families: Usually nuclear in form, this type involves adults of the same sex plus children (own or adopted). Gay couples cannot currently legally marry in the UK but since 2005 they may form a **Civil Partnership** that gives each partner legal rights similar to married heterosexual couples

Households

Although *family* diversity is important, we also need to note the increasing significance of *household diversity* in our society and, as with family groups, **household structures** involve a number of organisational types:

Single person households involve an adult living alone. Historically, death and relationship breakdown have been the main reasons for this type of household, although there's increasing evidence people in our society are *choosing* to live this way. **Self and Zealey** (2007) note there were around 7 million single households in Great Britain in 2005 "compared with 3 million in 1971". They further note some interesting features of this type::



Half of all UK single person households involve those over 65 - with lone women far outnumbering lone men...

- **Proportion:** One-person households now comprise around a quarter (28%) of all British households.
- **Age:** Half of all single person households currently involve an adult in receipt of a state pension (in other words, they consist of elderly males or, more-likely in our society, females). Of the remaining 50% their proportion of all households has more than doubled over the past 25 years (up from 6% in 1961).

• **Region:** This type of household is more-likely to be found in urban areas, especially large cities.

Couple households consist of two people living without children and **Self and Zealey** note that in 2006, one quarter (25%) of all households in our society were of this type, making it the second most common *household* type after couples with dependent children (37% of all households). Within both single and couple households we could note differences in:

• **Income:** Important distinctions can be made between employed and unemployed single people, for example, as well as between dual and single-income couples.

• **Age and lifestyle** - a young single person is likely to have a very different lifestyle to 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 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* (as with the *kibbutzim* of Israel for example).



Students...

In relation to both family and household structures a further level of organisational structure we need to note here is the idea of their internal organisation – in basic terms, differences within family and household structures based around:

- **Roles:** For example, the division of labour (who does what) within families and households.
- **Status differences** such as married or cohabiting, natural or step-parents and the like.
- **Relationships** involving things like contact with extended kin, the extent to which the group is *patriarchal* (male dominated) or *matriarchal* (female dominated) and so forth.

Life Course

As the above suggests, one of the things that comes through clearly when thinking about family diversity is its general complexity; diversity covers a wide range of ideas (from the structural to the relational and all points in between) and operates on both the long-term, large-scale, societal, level (such as changing family

structures) and the relatively short-term, small-scale, individual level (such as the different personal experiences of family members at different stages in their life cycle). One way of trying to make sense of family diversity patterns, therefore, is to think in terms of both individual and family *life course* - something that, according to **Foster** (2005). "provides a framework for analysing individual's experiences, at particular stages of their lives".

For our purposes we can think about family life courses in terms of the different ways the behaviour of family members is affected by both their:

Interpersonal relationships - such as how the relationship between adult partners is changed by the introduction of children into the relationship and:

Intrapersonal relationships – such as how family life changes through interaction with wider social structures (such as the workplace).



Bunting (2004): The UK has the longest working week in Europe (44 hours compared to 40 hours per week) - and the second longest in the world...

A simple way to illustrate the significance of life course as a mode of analysis is to think about how people experience "family life" from a variety of different perspectives. Thus, as people go through the process of biological ageing, a couple of things should be apparent. Firstly, on an individual level, as people grow older their personal experiences of family life change – from a situation of total dependence on others (babies) to one, perhaps, where they assume the independent roles of mother or father. Secondly, looked at "from the outside", each family group contains a range of diverse roles and responsibilities that shift, shuffle and change over both long and short time periods. Although no two individuals will ever have exactly the same experience of family life, this isn't to say we can't identify an illustrative range of general types of family diversity based around the concept of different life courses, since these will be affected by things like *class*, *age*, *gender* and *ethnicity*.

Class

Class diversity is manifested in areas like:

Relationships between the sexes: Middle class families, for example, are more likely to be *symmetrical* rather than *patriarchal*.

Socialisation of children (upper and middle class families, for example, tend to stress the significance of education in a way that's not necessarily shared by working class families). **Reay et al** (2004) also highlight the importance of the *emotional labour* middle class women (in particular) invested in their children's education; they note, for example, the active involvement of many middle class women in 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. Working class families, for example, are generally better-positioned to offer *practical* forms of help (exchanging various services between family members for example) whereas upper and middle class families tend to be better-positioned to offer both *financial* and *networking* help to their children and other family members. An example of the former might be something like Tony **Blair**, in common with many middle class parents, buying a flat for his student son to live in during the latter's time at University; an example of the latter might be the ability to introduce family members to influential people in the business world.

Age

This involves differences occurring at *different stages* of both an individual's and a family's life span; *generational differences* can be evidenced in terms of how people of *similar generations* have broadly shared experiences whereas the family experiences of different generations may be quite dissimilar.

For example, family members raised during the 1940's have the experience of war, rationing and the like; family members raised during the 1990's, on the other hand, may have developed very different attitudes and lifestyles forged through a period of economic expansion.

The extent to which the generations are linked (such as the relationship between parents and children, grandparents and



Victims of the 1970's Style Wars...

grandchildren) is also relevant here. We could also note that the family experience of a young couple with infant children is different to that of an elderly couple without children.

Education: Changes and differences in education also have an impact on family life through things like employment opportunities, career development, earnings over the course of a lifetime and the like. These impact on areas like family:

- **Formation** (when to start a family);
- **Size** (the number of children born and raised within the family) and
- **Structure** (the likelihood, for example, of a family group experiencing geographic mobility as a result of career-based work changes and, as a result, drifting apart from their extended family).

Johnson and Zaidi (2004), for example, point to wide differences in educational experience when they note “The 30 year old worker in 1970 was very different from the 30 year old worker in 1990” on the basis of different educational and work careers (only 4% of those born in 1940 “gained a university qualification before entering the labour force...Among the 1960 birth cohort, by contrast, roughly 13 per cent progressed...to... university, and they subsequently entered the graduate labour market with relatively high salaries”).



The number of people graduating from University in the UK has increased rapidly over the past decade...

Attachment: Families with children of school-age may become, in **Rapoport and Rapoport's** (1969) characterisation, *dual-income families* – “One in which both heads of household pursue careers and at the same time maintain a family life together”. This family's experience will be very different to that of a single-parent family or even a dual-parent family where one partner is in paid employment while the other performs domestic labour.

Children: Age and family structure come together when we think, for example, about children living in different family structures. According to the **Office for National Statistics** (2005) around three-quarters (76%) of dependent children in the UK live in a dual parent nuclear family (of which 90% were married couples, the remainder cohabiting couples – something

that is itself indicative of a further level of diversity) while one-quarter (24%) lived with a lone mother (22%) or lone father (2%). In 1972 around 7% of dependent children lived with a sole parent, a change that perhaps indicates both the relative growth of single-parent families in our society and their establishment as a significant family structure.

It's also important to note that we can include a couple of further diverse elements into the equation here by noting that a statistically small (but in terms of raw numbers quite large) number of children in our society do not live in families at all. In 2001, for example, around 140,000 children were living with adults who were not their parents, while a further 50,000 children lived in “communal establishments such as a children's home”.

Life expectancy:

People in our society are, in general, both living longer and enjoying a more physically active old age. Longer life expectancies produce a range of impacts on family life – and it's diversity - from the greater likelihood of divorce (where the length of marriage increases, so too does the likelihood of it ending in divorce) through changes to child-bearing and raising patterns (family formation is, on average, starting later and women are producing children at a consequently later stage in the life cycle) to the potential for changing patterns of grandparenting (where the latter, for example, are more-likely to survive into old age and be in a position to make an active contribution to family life through things like child-minding services).



Gender

Paid employment: **Johnson and Zaidi** (2004) note what they term “both huge change and remarkable continuity in the experience of paid work over the life course for men and women in twentieth-century Britain”. Over the past 150 years, for example, the average working life for men has dropped from 50 years to 41 years while for women the reverse has occurred; “the 1860s cohort worked on average for only 16 years between the ages of 15 and 69, whereas the 1970s cohort can expect to work for at least 32 years”.

These changes have impacted on family life and relationships in a number of ways – from changing patterns of marriage (the trend in the early 21st century, for example, is for marriage to occur at a much later stage in the life-cycle than even 50 years ago), through differences in male – female family roles (the family group is distinctly less patriarchal and domestic labour – while not by any means shared equally (women still

do the majority of work around the home - is "less-unequal" than in even the recent past).

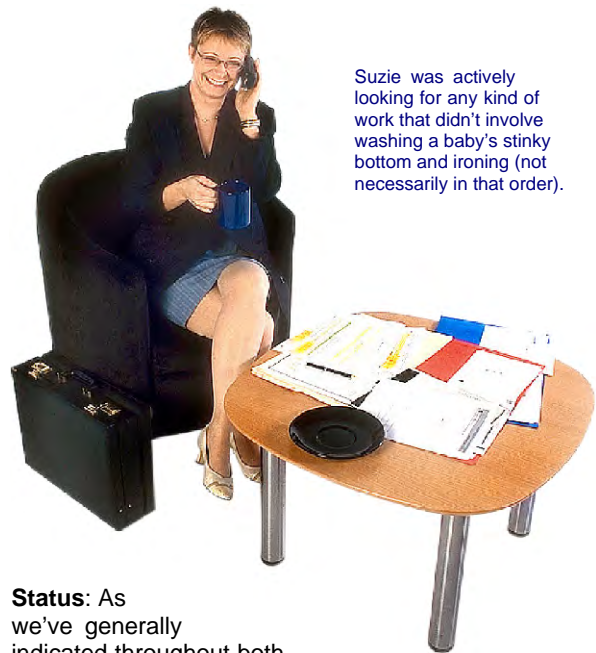
Changing patterns of female work, in particular, have resulted in internal changes in contemporary families as compared with families in the past. Over the past 35 years, for example, the proportion of women of working age in either paid employment or activity looking for such employment has risen from 60% in 1971 to 75% in 2006 and one outcome of this is that women are much *less likely* to leave paid employment, never to return, once they marry or start a family with their partner (although, of course, the fact that some women do leave paid employment to become "full-time mothers / domestic labourers" adds further to the family diversity mix). A further interesting aspect of female involvement in paid employment "as a career" (that is, as a long-term commitment to the workplace) is that the concept of **retirement** from paid work – something that has, historically, been largely associated with men – is now increasingly associated with women.

Roles: Increases in both the number of women working and the likelihood of their spending a substantial proportion of their working life in full-time work has opened-up changes and differences within families. The **Office for National Statistics** (2001) argues, for example, that the "traditional division of family labour allocated fathers the role of primary breadwinner and mothers the care of home and family. This has changed as the representation of women in the UK labour force has increased steadily and the proportion of couples with dependent children in Great Britain where only the man is working has decreased".

Children: There are significant family differences in the relationship between child care and work; the **Labour Force Survey** (2005), for example, indicates that women with dependent children are slightly less likely (32%) to be in paid employment than those without dependent children (27%). In addition, the age of dependent children is a factor in the paid employment of mothers – those with children under 5 are less likely than those with older children to combine childcare with paid work. This reflects, perhaps, the fact that women are still by-and-large responsible for child care within the family, although once again the fact of differences points to significant levels of diversity amongst family groups in our society.



I've got a window in my diary to do the washing next Wednesday...



Suzie was actively looking for any kind of work that didn't involve washing a baby's stinky bottom and ironing (not necessarily in that order).

Status: As

we've generally indicated throughout both this section and module, a variety of status differences exist within and between families in the contemporary UK. These differences are focused, for example, around distinctions between different types of family (single and dual-parent, for example), the status of individuals between families (married, divorced, separated or cohabiting, for example) and, of course, within families (differences, for example, between the roles performed by family members – such as paid employment, domestic employment and combinations of both).

Attitudes: **Weinshenker** (2006) has pointed to an area in which class and gender overlap (or *intersect* if you prefer) when he explored the balance between work and motherhood in middle-class, dual-earner, families. Of his 194 respondents (male and female) "Nearly all expected new mothers to quit their jobs or reduce their hours temporarily".

Ethnicity

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

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

Marked ethnic group differences are also found in the relationship between female paid employment and family roles and responsibilities. **Dale et al** (2004) found clear differences between ethnic groups - Black women, for example, are generally more-likely to

“remain in full-time employment throughout family formation” than either their White or Asian peers. Within different broad ethnicities differences were also apparent; whereas Indian women generally opted for part-time paid employment once they had a partner both Pakistani and Bangladeshi women were more-likely to cease paid work once they married and produced children. These differences reflect a range of processes that affect and shape family relationships, structures, behaviours and, of course, diversity – from patriarchal attitudes and beliefs about the respective roles and responsibilities of men and women, to the preponderance of single-parent family structures headed by single Black women in our society

Berthoud (2004) identifies some key differences within and between selected ethnic groups.	
Additional statistics: Self and Zealey 2007	
Black Caribbean Families	South Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) families
Marriage	
Low marriage rates.	High marriage rates. Greater likelihood (especially amongst Muslims and Sikhs) of arranged marriage.
Separation, Divorce and Single-Parenthood	
High rates of separation, divorce and single parenthood. In 2006, 18% of Black Caribbean families with dependent children were headed by a lone parent.	Low rates of separation, divorce and single-parented. In 2006, 9% of Pakistani / Bangladeshi and 5% of Indian families were headed by a lone parent.
Mixed Partnerships	
Relatively high levels of mixed partnerships.	Lower rates of mixed partnerships.
Family Size	
Smaller family size (average of 2.3 people)	Larger family size (Bangladeshi households average of 4.5 people). Grandparents more-likely to live with son's family.
Structure	
Matriarchal: Absent fathers (not living within the family home but possibly maintaining family contacts).	Patriarchal: power and authority more-likely to reside with men. Majority of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women look after home and family full-time.

Tried and Tested

- (a) Explain what is meant by family diversity (2 marks)
- (b) Suggest **two** ways in which class diversity is expressed in our society (4 marks)
- (c) Suggest **three** reasons for contemporary UK family and household diversity (6 marks)

Family Diversity: Explanations

From the evidence we've examined so far it's clear that wide differences exist in areas like family and household structures and relationships and, this being the case, it would be useful to identify some reasons for contemporary forms of family diversity.

Economic

Explanations in this area include ideas like:

Female Independence: In terms of relationships *within* the family group one of the most noticeable changes in our society in recent times has been the increase in female partners taking-on paid employment outside the home. Thus, according to **Abercrombie and Warde** (2000), "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".

Reynolds et al (2003) note that "Concerns that mothers' increasing labour-market participation means that they are becoming more rooted in their work life and more 'work-centred' at the expense of their family responsibilities were not borne out" and they generally found, from both partners, a positive attitude to female working and its impact on family relationships. As one (male) respondent suggested: "I couldn't imagine myself with a partner who chose to stay at home and who didn't have a life outside our family. For starters, what would we talk about? ... [It's] good for the family because we can sit down together and plan financially for the future because we have two incomes to work with".



"My husband doesn't understand me".
"Quarter past nine".

Among women they found a general belief that “The mother’s employment provided skills and resources that meant they could meet their children’s emotional, developmental and material needs better. Their relationship with their partner was enhanced because they shared the financial burden of providing for their family and had more common interests”.

Affluence: The relationship between poverty and family size is well-documented (poorer families tend to have more children), so it’s 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 - a situation in which two different cultural family forms combine to produce a new and slightly different form. In addition, global cultural influences have an impact on how people view their individual and family relationships (in terms of ideas like divorce or homosexual families).

Attitudes and Lifestyles

Cultural changes in people’s attitudes and lifestyles also contribute to family and household diversity in a selection of ways:

Sexuality: Increasing tolerance of “alternative sexualities” (such as homosexuality, bisexuality or transsexuality) and lifestyles (such as transvesticism) serves to increase household diversity.

Religion: The decline in the power of organised religion (*secularisation*) amongst some ethnic groups may account for:

- Increases in cohabitation.
- A decline in the significance of marriage.
- Increases in divorce.
- The availability of remarriage after divorce and so forth.

Conversely, amongst 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 21st 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 and Technological

These forms of change make important contributions to diversity in some illustrative ways:

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.

Medicine: The availability of *contraception* (enabling planned families) and *abortion* change how people relate to each other in terms of creating families.

Work: Workplace changes over the past 25 years have also impacted on family life; **Bynner** (2001), suggests that “The transformation of the labour market through the rise of information technology-based industry and the decline of unskilled work has led to an extension of the transition from school to work and this itself has impacted on the timing of such personal goals as marriage and parenthood”.

Module Link Families and Households

Technological changes and their impact on both the labour market and the family can be applied to an understanding of the relationship between family structures and social change.



Has the ability of organised religions (such as Christianity) to influence our behaviour declined in recent times?

Demographic Changes

“Demography” is the study of human populations and covers changes relating to areas like birth and death rates, life expectancy and family size (amongst other things).

Changes in these areas can be linked to family and household diversity, family structures and the like and are identified and explained in more detail in the final Section (“**Demographic trends in the UK since 1900**”) of this Module.

Optimism or Pessimism?

Thus far we've 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 doesn't 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, **Neale** (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.

Cause for Concern?: The New Right

New Right perspectives can generally be characterised as seeing family diversity – in terms of both structures and relationships – as a source of social problems and, in consequence, advance a view of "family uniformity" that can be summarised as follows:

Family structures: The traditional (heterosexual) nuclear family with family relationships based around marriage is seen as more desirable than other family structures - such as single-parent families - 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, as **Horwitz** (2005) argues, 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.

The argument here is not that "non-traditional" family structures and arrangements are incapable of performing such roles; rather, it is that a traditional

family structure provides a much stronger moral foundation for their performance. In this respect, New Right perspectives (as evidenced through the work of writers such as **Murray and Phillips** (2001) and **Morgan**, 2000) equate both structure and relationship diversity with *family breakdown* which, in the case of the former, is considered symptomatic of a social *underclass* characterised by an "excessive individualism"; where family structures and relationships breakdown the individual is forced back on their own resources for survival and, in consequence, develops a disregard for the needs and rights of others.

Module Link

Families and Households

These general ideas can be linked into the New Right family perspectives discussed in the opening Section.

Or Celebration?: Postmodernism

One of the key attributes of postmodern world views is the celebration of "difference" and postmodernist perspectives on family life reflect this particular attribute in a range of ways - family diversity should be embraced, either because it points the way towards an optimistic realignment of family roles and relationships or, to be brutally blunt about it, because it's going to happen whether we want it to or not...



Postmodern perspectives see family diversity in widely different ways to other approaches...

Postmodern approaches are neatly summarised by **Zeitlin et al** (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".

A range of ideas about family diversity follow from this type of viewpoint, examples of 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”. In the past, for example, 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 difficult 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 (amongst other developments) no longer makes marriage an economic necessity for women; such changes have, therefore, given women much greater freedom of choice in their social relationships – and where choice is freely available, diversity naturally follows. Given that this process of economic and social change is unlikely to be reversed, structural and relational diversity is, from this general perspective, inevitable.

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’s 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 and “failing to condemn” (as it were) new types of family structures and relationships. People become, in this respect, generally more accepting of “single-parents, surrogate-mothers and gay and lesbian families”. In this globalised context, **Jagger and Wright** (1999) argue that 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).

For postmodernists, therefore, changing family structures and relationships reflect the wider economic, political and cultural changes in our society that have 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 our ability to make choices.

Uncertainty: **Smart and Neale** (1997) draw our attention to the idea that, although the downside of increased choice is *uncertainty* (“Have I made the right choice?”) we shouldn’t simply assume *marriage*, as opposed to, for example, *cohabitation*, involves greater personal certainty because it is legally sanctioned (it is, for example, legally more difficult to break away from a

marriage than from a cohabiting relationship). On the contrary, perhaps, it’s 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”.

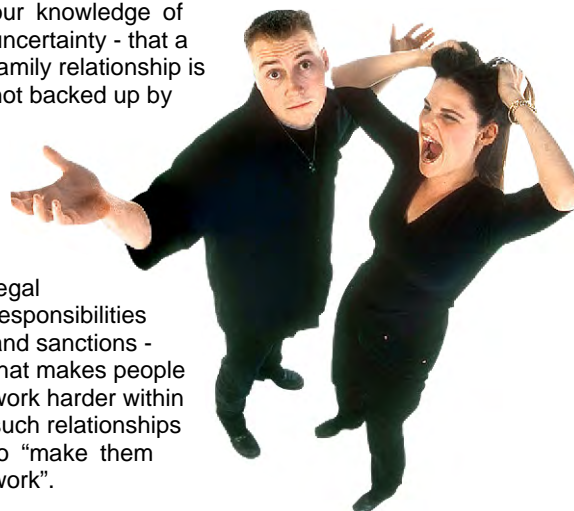
Morality: In situations where a wide diversity of family roles, relationships and structures exist, morality-based judgements (that one way of living is better than any other) become much weaker and harder to justify. In this respect, society in general becomes “less judgemental” about how others choose to form family relationships (the idea of gay family structures, for example, being a case in point).

Tried and Tested

(d) Examine possible causes and reasons for family and household diversity in 21st century Britain (24 marks)

(e) Assess the view that the contemporary diversity of family structures and relationships is indicative of family decline (24 marks).

Thus far we’ve considered “family and household diversity” in fairly broad terms and we can now refine the focus a little by examining “**Changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce and child bearing**”.



Have economic changes made women less-dependent on men than in the past?

Marriage: Observations

When examining changing patterns of marriage 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.

In the following table ("UK Marriage Patterns") we can identify a number of broad changes:

1st marriage: A steady and absolute decline in the number of people marrying over the past 50 years.

2nd marriage: Remarriage (which includes 2nd and subsequent marriages - some people either never learn or they have a touching faith in marriage) peaked in the 1980's and has 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 1970's (the two events are not unconnected and relate to the **post-war baby boom** – see below), since when it has generally declined. According to the **Office for National Statistics** (2007) for example "The proportion of married couple families has decreased over the last ten years, (accounting for 71 per cent of families in 2006, compared with 76 per cent in 1996)".

Marriage: Explanations

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

Alternatives: The main "alternatives to marriage" in 21st century Britain are:

Cohabitation (see below), something that has increased in popularity in recent years; although many cohabiting couples eventually marry, many do not. The **Office for National Statistics** (2007), however, argues that any *decline* in marriage is not necessarily accounted for by an *increase* in cohabitation; rather, any comparative decline can be largely accounted for by the increase in the numbers of young women and men choosing to delay partnership formation (marriage or cohabitation) until later in life.

Single-parenthood: In 2007 (**Office for National Statistics**) around 2.5 million families in the UK were headed by a single parent (around 90% a lone female).

Staying single: There has, in recent times, been a significant increase in the numbers of those choosing to remain single (and childless) as an alternative to marriage.

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 relatively free from the risk of conception) mean social pressures to marry have declined. There is also, as we've suggested, less economic pressure on women, in particular, to marry in order to secure their financial security.

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. **Self and Zealey** (2007), for example, note that "In England and Wales in 2005, 160,000 civil marriage ceremonies (marriages performed by a government official rather than by a clergyman) took place and accounted for more than two-thirds (65 per cent) of all marriages...over half of all civil marriages, took place in approved premises (as opposed to places of worship or registry offices)".

UK Marriage Patterns: Source - adapted from **Self and Zealey** (2007)

Year	All Marriages ('000s)	1 st Marriage ('000s)	Remarriage ('000s)	Remarriage as % of all marriages	UK Population (Millions)
1901	380	-	-	-	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	308	180	126	41	57
2001	286	180	106	37	58
2004	311	190	115	37	59
2005	284	180	110	39	60

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.

Lifestyle: The decision not to marry may have become something of a “lifestyle choice”. Amongst 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 **Oswald** (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: **Beck** (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 (by cohabiting, for example, - although this type of relationship does, of course, carry its own level of risk - or remaining single).

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.

Demographic Changes

Although the explanations for the decline in the popularity of marriage just noted are significant - either alone or in combination - we also need to consider that an understanding of demographic factors and changes are equally - if not more so - important in any evaluation of the relative popularity of marriage. In this respect we can note that the numbers of people marrying in any given year or decade are sensitive to population changes - something we can illustrate in two ways:

1. Baby Booms: During the 2nd 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 produced a



population bulge - a rapid, if temporary, increase in the number of children in society.

As these children reached adulthood in the 1970’s and ‘80’s we saw an increase in the number of people marrying. We shouldn’t, therefore, assume a rise in the number of people marrying means marriage has become more popular - it may simply mean there are more people in the population of “marriageable age”.

Is the decline in the number of people marrying simply a lifestyle choice?

2. Marriageable cohorts: In any given population some age groups (cohorts) are more likely than others to marry - and this is significant 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 1971, for example, the average age at first marriage for men was 25 and for women 23; in 2001 the figures stood at 30 and 28 and by 2005 this had further increased to 32 and 29 respectively). The more people there are in this age range the greater the number of likely marriages.

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 marriage statistics; children, for example, are not legally allowed to marry and the elderly are less-likely to marry. The size of these cohorts will have an impact on marriage statistics. For example, If we focus our attention on the:

Marriageable population rate we can note that, for this cohort, there was a *decline* in marriages (from 7.1 to 6.8) between 1981 and 1989 - something that signifies, perhaps, only a relatively tiny fall in the popularity of marriage.

Cohabitation: Observations

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** (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".

Having noted the problem of long-term historical comparisons of cohabitation patterns, more-recently (since the mid-1980's) attempts have been made to accurately estimate both the numbers of cohabiting couples in our society and their patterns of cohabitation. **Self and Zealey** (2007), for example, note a number of interesting points about cohabitation trends over the past 25 years:

- An overall increase in the proportion of people cohabiting.
 - For men and women under 60, the percentages of those cohabiting increased from 11% in 1986 ("the earliest year for which data are available on a consistent basis") to 24% in 2005 for men and from 13% to 24% for women.
 - Cohabiting males are more-likely than cohabiting females to have been married and then divorced.
 - The proportion of cohabiting couple families has, according to the **Office for National Statistics** (2007) increased in the past ten years (from 9% to 14% of all UK family types). To put this in context, this represents around 2.2 million families (compared with 12 million married families and 2.5 million single parent families).
- Gender:** **Haskey** (1995) notes that in the mid-1960's, approximately 5% of single women cohabited at some point in their lives. By the 1990s, this had risen to 70%, a figure confirmed by **Ermisch and Francesconi** (2000). However, they observed that, on average, such partnerships lasted only 2 years, were largely "experimental" and not intended to develop into long-term relationships. **Haskey** (2002) also notes that, of women marrying in the late 1960's, 2% had previously cohabited with their partner. By the late 1990's, this had risen to 80% of all women marrying. According to the Office for National Statistics' **General Household Survey** (2004), cohabitation amongst women aged 18-49 rose from 11% in 1979 to 32% in 2001.

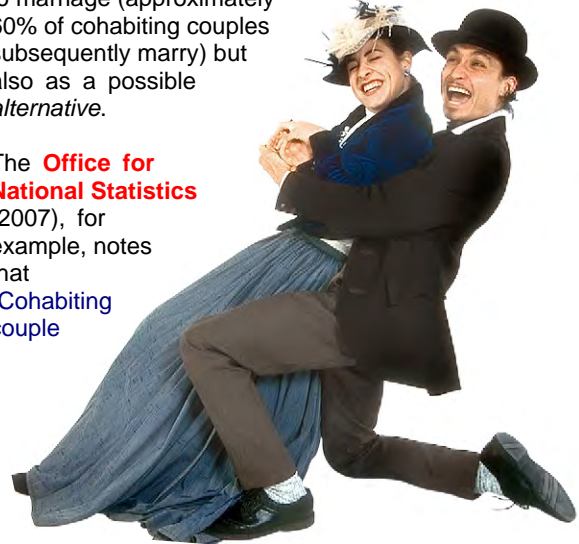
Age: According to **Summerfield and Babb** (2004):

- 13% of adults aged 16-59 reported living in a cohabiting relationship that had since dissolved.
- 25% 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.

- In 2005, 39% of single individuals aged 25 to 34 and 30% of those aged 35 – 49 were cohabiting (**Office for National Statistics**, 2007). These figures are in line with the **General Household Survey** (2004) which found that 25 - 29 year olds represent the main age group for cohabitation in our society.

Ferri et al (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 **Office for National Statistics** (2007), for example, notes that "Cohabiting couple



Cohabitation isn't just a feature of contemporary British society...

families are much younger than married couple families. In 2001, half of cohabiting couple families in the UK were headed by a person aged under 35, compared with just over a tenth of married couple families".

Among older age groups, **Berrington and Diamond** (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.

Current figures (2005) for male and female cohabitation (a snapshot, as it were, of those in a cohabiting relationship at any given point in our society) are summarised in the following table:

Great Britain: Percentage of non-married people cohabiting, by marital status and sex, 2005

Source: **Self and Zealey** (2007)

	Men	Women
Single	23	28
Widowed	24	06
Divorced	36	29
Separated	22	11

Cohabitation: Explanations

Given that cohabitation (or a *consensual union* as it's sometimes termed) is a similar form of living arrangement to marriage it's not too surprising to find the explanations we've examined in relation to marriage generally apply to cohabitation. Having noted this, however, we can briefly explore reasons for cohabitation in a little more depth:

Smart and Stevens' (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. In other words cohabitation for these female respondents was intended to be a test of their partner's behaviour and intentions and, in consequence, a trial period prior to any possible marriage commitment. Related to this idea **Self and Zealey** (2007) suggest that one reason for the general rise in cohabitation in the UK over the past 25 years may be the trend for both males and females to marry later in life; prior to marriage (which still seems to be a long-term goal for the majority) both males and females move into and out of **serial cohabitation** (one cohabiting relationship followed by another).

How we interpret the significance of this situation depends, to some extent, on our general perspective on family life and relationships; on the one hand it could be seen as indicating a general unwillingness to commit to long-term marriage-type family relationships (either through choice or some other intervening factor), while on the other it could indicate a desire on the part of both men and women to take appropriate steps to

ensure that when they do commit to something like marriage it is with a partner they already know a great deal about (sometimes referred-to as a **contingent commitment** – couples are willing to commit to each other in the long-term depending on how their relatively short-term cohabiting relationship works out).

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 because they believed it easier to back away from a cohabiting relationship if it didn't work-out as they'd hoped.

Opposition to marriage as an institution was also a factor, with some parents believing cohabitation led to a more equal form of relationship.

Smart and Stevens (2000) note two basic forms of "commitment to cohabitation" :

1. Contingent commitment involved couples cohabiting "until they were sure it was safe or sensible to become permanently committed or married".

2. Mutual commitment involved the couple feeling as committed to each other and their children as married couples.

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

1. Indistinguishable: Marriage and cohabitation were equally preferable.

2. Marriage preference: One or both partners viewed cohabitation as a temporary prelude to what they had hoped would be marriage.

3. Cohabitation preference: Each partner saw their relationship in terms of a moral commitment on a par with marriage.

Commitments to Cohabitation

Source: **Smart and Stevens** (2000)

Contingent Commitment

Mutual Commitment

Characteristics

The couple have not known each other long.

The relationship is established before cohabiting.

Absence of legal / financial agreements.

There are some legal / financial agreements.

The children are not planned (although they may be wanted).

Children are planned and / or wanted by both parents.

Pregnancy predates cohabitation.

Both parents are involved in childcare.

Significant personal change is needed if the relationship is to work.

There are mutually-agreed expectations for the relationship.

There is no presumption that the relationship will work - only a hope.

There is a presumption that the relationship will last.

Divorce: Observations

Callan (2002) notes that for most of British history divorce has been beyond the reach of the majority of the population - "The first divorce [in Britain] took place in 1551 and, over the next 187 years, 300 marriages were dissolved by private acts of parliament..." - and it wasn't until the mid-20th century that divorce became a viable possibility for both men and women, rich or poor.

Some basic UK "divorce trends" (the number of couples divorcing and the average age at which they divorce) are as follows:

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
2004	167	43	40
2005	155	43	40.6
2006	148	43.4	40.9

We can draw a range of conclusions from this data in terms of 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 (at around 180,000 each year) and then returned to its previous level (a result of the post 2nd World War baby boom bulge).
- **10 years:** we've witnessed a slight decline (and "evening out") in the numbers divorcing.

Three further patterns we can note occur in terms of:

1. Age, where patterns of behaviour related to this concept include:

- The 25 -29 age group has, historically, the greatest likelihood of divorce.
- The incidence of divorce declines with age (those aged 60+ have the lowest levels of divorce in our society).
- Divorce rates for all age groups have risen significantly over the past 50 years.
- Marriage at a later age reduces the risk of divorce (**Chan and Halpin**, 2001)

2. Gender: Behaviour patterns here include:

- Over the past 50 years the **divorce rate** (the number per 1000 in a population) for women has been higher than that for men.
- Both men and women in the age range 25 – 29 are most likely to divorce in our society.
- Divorce rates for both men and women peaked in the first three years of the 21st century and have since declined slightly.

3. Social Class: If we take social class to reflect a range of *socio-economic factors* (family background, levels of education and income and the like) there appears to be an *inverse relationship* between social class and divorce; that is, the *lower* your social class the *higher* the statistical likelihood of your marriage ending in divorce or, as **Clarke and Berrington** (1999) put it: "Adults from poorer socio-economic backgrounds have previously been found to experience higher rates of marital dissolution in Britain". **Chan and Halpin** (2001) also found that "Having a degree reduces divorce risks".

Divorce: Observations

Just as people decide to marry for a range of reasons, the same is true of divorce and we can, therefore, look at an illustrative selection of possible reasons, divided for convenience into two categories:

1. Social reasons identifies and outlines a range of factors (such as demographic, legal and economic changes) that operate at a *society-wide level*, beyond the control of any one individual or family. These factors represent, if you like, *structural* influences on people's behaviour that influence decisions about divorce (just as they influence decisions about marriage, cohabitation and the like).

2. Individual reasons acknowledges that one aspect of divorce that's frequently neglected by sociological analysis is the reasons people give for their personal behaviour. While structural factors are clearly important in explaining both levels of - and reasons for - divorce on a society-wide basis, the "individual dimension" should not be neglected as part of any general analysis / explanation of divorce in our society.

Social

In this particular category we can begin by noting:

Demographic factors as explanations for changes in the rate of divorce in our society. In a similar way to marriage rates being affected by population movement and change, divorce rates are also sensitive to these influences. In a general sense, for example, divorce is related to marriage in a couple of ways. Firstly, divorce is a *cultural choice* in that some societies allow it while other do not. In the latter, of course, just because there are no recorded divorces we shouldn't simply assume that all marriages are happy and fulfilling unions.

Secondly, just as marriage rates are affected by population factors (the number of people of "marriageable age" for example) divorce rates are sensitive to marriage rates. **Clarke and Berrington** (1999) note that "crude divorce rate measures" (such as the absolute number of people divorcing each year) are sensitive to social factors such as the "age and marital status structure of the population" – as we've suggested, those who "marry young" are statistically more likely to divorce while "populations with a large proportion of married couples will have more individuals who are at risk of divorce".

Legal changes: Just as we always need to take account of underlying demographic factors when analysing population movements and changes (such as the numbers marrying / divorcing each year), we need to be aware of potential *reliability* problems with divorce statistics. Although, because all divorces are recorded by law, we can be reasonably certain these statistics are recorded accurately the *legal definition* of divorce

has changed many times over the past century (it wasn't until the **1923 Matrimonial Act**, for example, that the grounds for divorce were made the same for men and women) 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 (**Self and Zealey** (2007), for example, note a doubling of the numbers divorcing following the **1971 Divorce Reform Act**).

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: In 1949 **Legal Aid** was made available for divorcing couples. This created opportunities to divorce for those other than the well off.

If we take account of how the removal of legal barriers influences divorce decisions, the fact that divorce tends to be higher amongst the lower social classes can be explained in terms of the idea that family conflicts over money are much more likely to occur in low, rather than high, income households.



Divorce - a sign of the times?

Divorce in the UK: Selected Legal Changes

Year	Act of Parliament	Main Change
Pre-1857	Divorce only possible by individual 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	The "irretrievable breakdown of marriage" (established by proving adultery, desertion, separation or unreasonable behaviour) became the only requirement. Divorce could be obtained within 2 years if both partners consented and 5 years if one partner contested the divorce. 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.

A further economic dimension to divorce is that increasing *female financial independence* (as greater numbers both worked and developed a strong career structure) has meant that the “economic costs” of divorce for women have declined. Whereas in the past, for example, a wife might have stayed married because she couldn’t afford the economic consequences of divorce, financial independence has lowered these potential costs and, in consequence, lowered a potentially significant barrier to divorce.

Firstly, as **Clarke and Berrington** (1999) argue, although factors such as socio-economic background (income, education and the like) can be **correlated** with divorce the push towards divorce itself may be related to demographic factors rather than social class per se; as they suggest “It is those factors which are more volitional, such as the timing and sequence of marriage and family formation, that are most important in predicting marital dissolution”. In other words, although lower class marriages may be more “at risk” of divorce than those of their middle and upper class peers it is because of the tendency for the former to marry at a

This idea illustrates an important *methodological point* when considering the significance of statistical data. When **Chan and Halpin** (2001), for example, note that “Women with a greater degree of economic independence face a higher divorce risk” we need to think about the relationship between “economic independence” and the “likelihood of divorce”; for example, does the “risk of divorce” among economically independent women increase *because* of their financial situation or is it the case that women whose marriage runs into difficulty (for whatever reason) are more-likely to divorce because their personal economic consequences are likely to be lower than for women who are financially dependent on their partner?

Two further factors we could mention as possible reasons for an increase in the numbers divorcing in our society include:

- **Religion:** Couples are less-inclined to stay together for religious reasons in the sense that the normative hold of religious beliefs in our society has gradually loosened over the years – an idea related, after a fashion, to:



- **Stigma:** The social disdain that was once attached to divorce is no longer strong enough to keep couples together.

Although the kinds of “social factors” relating to divorce we’ve just noted are significant in terms of explaining changes in the pattern of divorce in our society, they don’t tell the whole story, for a couple of reasons:

Is there as much social stigma attached to divorce in contemporary societies as there was in the past?

“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 correlate with 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.
Pre-marriage	Cohabitation increases the risk for those who subsequently marry.
Children	Couples with children are more likely to divorce than childless couples.

much younger age, for example, that is the **causal factor** in this equation. Thus “...factors such as the social background of parents may play a part in constraining behaviour and opportunities. For example, poor parental circumstances are related to poor educational achievement and an early age at marriage...When age at marriage is included into the analysis, social class may no longer be significantly associated with the risk of marital dissolution”.

Secondly, although family relationships are clearly influenced by socio-economic or demographic factors it’s important to look at the nature of individual relationships themselves if we are to produce a well-rounded analysis of explanations for divorce in our society.

Individual

We can note a range of individual factors and circumstances that are potentially significant in terms of explaining why people divorce:

War-time marriages have a high probability of ending in divorce. **Becker et al** (1977), for example, argue that stable marriage relationships are likely to be those where each partner is well-matched (in terms of

whatever each is looking for from the relationship) and that divorce or separation is likely to occur if either partner fails to live up to the other's initial expectations or "if either partner meets someone that is considered as a better match".

Marriage during war-time is more likely to have been entered into in haste and without either participant having taken the time to ensure they were well-matched (a situation that also, of course, applies, to marriages entered-into after a very short courtship).

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 individual women experience 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's nothing to hold their marriage together.

Secondly, that we increasingly have (media-fuelled) illusions about love, romance and family life - once the reality hits home (so to speak) many people opt for divorce as a way out of an unhappy marriage experience. **Becker et al** (1977), for example, argue that a mis-match between what someone *expects* to happen in a marriage and what *actually* happens is likely to result in divorce...



Britney Spears - her first marriage (to "childhood friend" Jason Alexander) lasted 55 hours (give or take a minute or two). Her subsequent marriage, to Kevin Federline, lasted substantially longer (nearly two years, give or take a month...).

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: Observations

Our ability to understand changing patterns of separation is complicated by::

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's made easier more people divorce - about the prevalence of separation. Once divorce became readily available, of course, separation as a way of ending a relationship became much less common.

Personal Factors in Divorce

Source: **Loughborough University** (2004)

"Let's Talk" Magazine

www.fjg.co.uk/lets-talk/documents/family%20issues.doc

Factor	Percentage
Extra-Marital Affairs	30
Couple Growing Apart	26
Family Strains	11
Emotional / Physical Abuse	10
"Workaholism"	5

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 5 years if only one partner consented. In terms of married couples therefore, separation is, as the following table suggests, likely to be a *prelude* to divorce rather than, as in the past, an *alternative*.

Percentage of first marriages in Great Britain ending in separation within five years: by year of marriage and gender.

Source: **Summerfield and Babb** (2004)

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

One area where we do have reliable data for contemporary separation is for marriages that breakdown in 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's not actually necessary to show the marriage has irretrievably broken down. The numbers are relatively small, only 387 separations were granted in 2005 (**Judicial Statistics**, 2006) and they tend to be granted to couples where things like religious beliefs forbid divorce.

Separation: Explanations

When thinking about separation (as you do), we can note two points. Firstly, we can't *reliably* establish comparative historical patterns of separation, mainly because there are no official statistical records and secondly, the concept itself is largely redundant in our society given the easy availability of divorce.

If we change the focus slightly to briefly examine the possible *consequences* of separation for the breakdown of marital or cohabiting relationships. **Rodgers and Pryor's** (1998) review of research reports in this general area 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.

Finally, **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).



Sign here? The number of couples separating in our society has never been officially recorded...

- Tried and Tested**
- Explain what is meant by a "baby boom" (2 marks)
 - Suggest **two** ways in which cohabitation has been made easier in the past 50 years (4 marks).
 - Suggest **three** reasons for the increase in the divorce rate since 1969. (6 marks)
 - Examine the ways in which social policies and laws may influence decisions about marriage, cohabitation, separation and divorce (24 marks).
 - Assess the view that marriage, as an institution, is no-longer as popular as it was in the past (24 marks).

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3. The nature and extent of changes within the family, with reference to gender roles, domestic labour and power relationships.

The focus, for much of the previous two sections has been on examining the institutional features of family life in our society. With a couple of exceptions – such as considering a range of specific, individual, reasons for divorce – we've tended to examine "family life" as almost being something "set apart" from the lives of the people who live it.

In this and the following section, therefore, we can both redress the balance and refine the focus somewhat to look a little more closely into the family group and the relationships we find there; in this section the focus is largely on adult relationships (gender, power in particular) while the following section looks more specifically at the nature of childhood.

Gender Roles: Observations

When think about both the nature of - and possible changes to – gender roles within the family the first thing we can usefully do is outline the distinction sociologists generally make between "sex" and "gender".

- **Sex:** **Giddens** (2005) notes that "sex" refers to the physical characteristics that lead to people being labelled "male" or "female". Sex characteristics are, in a sense, *biologically determined* and for the majority of human history "fixed" - in the sense that biological sex could not be physically changed (although it is now possible in our society to change 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 **Stoller's** argument (1968) that "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". Although, in recent times, this distinction has been challenged (by feminist writers such as **Butler** (1990) for example) it is arguably a reasonable starting-point for our current purposes.

Module Link

Culture and Identity

For an outline of **Butler's** argument, see the Section: "Sources and Different Conceptions of the Self, Identity and Difference"

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 places like Australia or Peru. In addition, its meaning changes to reflect different stages in our physical development - "boy", for example, is a different gender category to "man" and, in consequence, represents a different form of masculinity.



Femininity (what it means to be "a woman") similarly has different meanings at different times and in different places although, as **Beattie** (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]".

In terms of the above, therefore, when we start to talk about gender roles generally (and gender roles played out within the family group specifically) we are talking about the various ways our society assigns certain roles to males and females. On one level, for example, we can talk about:

Ascribed gender roles that involve labels like “mother” or “father” and:

Achieved gender roles – such as who performs domestic and paid labour or the balance of power within different families based on the way various gender roles are defined and performed. With something like *domestic labour*, for example, it would be useful to understand who performs it and why – is it seen as behaviour closely associated with particular male or female roles, for example, and, if so, how is the gendered division of labour created, maintained, policed and enforced?

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 over the years (something that links into ideas about social change in general and its possible effects on family life and relationships).

Module Link

Culture and Identity

Gender is an increasingly significant aspect of personal identity in contemporary UK society and this Module outlines and discusses a range of ideas about gender identities and their formation.

Gender Roles: Explanations

As we've just suggested when noting the distinction between *ascription* and *achievement*, gender roles have a couple of significant dimensions; firstly, a **social dimension** that relates to the very general way any society *expects* men and women to behave within the family group (something that relates to the values any society brings to bear on the content and performance of gender roles). We've met this idea before, for example, when we noted that the “traditional division of family labour allocated fathers the role of primary breadwinner and mothers the care of home and family”.

Secondly, however, we need to note a personal dimension to gender roles, one that gives individual family members the leeway to interpret their family roles in particular ways that may deviate from the “gender norm”. – an idea, once again, we've previously encountered in the argument that the traditional division of family labour outlined above may be breaking-down and changing in the contemporary UK.

Changing gender roles and identities - are the two connected?



Thus, rather than simply seeing gender roles *one-dimensionally* (as a set of *prescriptive practices* or things people *must* do when playing a particular gender role) an alternative way of thinking about gender roles (which we can, of course, relate to *domestic labour* and *power*) is to see them in terms of *identities*. That is, how family members organise their relationships on the basis of two concepts noted by **Hogg and Vaughan** (2002), namely:

1. Social identity - which relates to how our membership of social groups (such as a family) influences our perception and performance 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.

Social identities, therefore, reflect the way a “society in general” sees certain identities (which, in a family context, includes both gender identities and also those identities related to such roles as mother / father / son / daughter / adult / child and so forth). In other words when we play such roles and take on certain identities we are subjected to a range of **social pressures** that tell us roughly how we are expected to perform such roles.

2. Personal identity, on the other hand, works at the level of *social action*. How someone actually plays “the male or female role” (or, in a specifically family context, the roles of mother or father) is, according to **Goffman** (1959), open to *interpretation* and *negotiation*.

Thus, how individuals interpret and play the role of “husband” is conditioned by their perception of what this role means in general cultural terms (what husbands are expected to do) and in the more-specific, personal, context of the individual’s family relationships. In this respect, as **James** (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 **Fortier** (2003) puts it, “continuously re-imagined and redefined”. If we think of gender roles in terms of *identity*, therefore, we can note two things:

1. Change: In the past - for various reasons that we don't need to explore here - 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 her role within the family) – mainly because there were few, if any, alternative ways to be “a mother” or “a father” for people to reference. 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.



A time when Men were men and women were Women?

2. Diversity: Gender roles within contemporary families – although clearly having a degree or consistency (the role of “a mother” may still be marked-out differently to that of “a father”) – are not constrained as they were in even the recent past; people have more personal freedom to work-out their own particular interpretations of gender roles and identities and, in consequence, we see a range of different interpretations of their roles and identities.

Family groups with very similar social and economic circumstances, for example, may display marked differences in the way gender roles are allocated and performed and the meaning of “motherhood” in one family may be quite different to that of their next-door neighbour.

Evidence for the type of changes we've just described comes from a variety of sources: **Allan and Crow** (1989), for example, suggest “The creation of the home is an active process which is an integral part of people's family projects” and **Stacey** (1998) observes that in “postmodern 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”.

In a wider social context (structural changes to the family group in contemporary UK society) **Reich** (2001) links such changes to interpersonal family relationships on the basis that 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”.

From a feminist perspective **Scott** (2006) develops this theme by noting a “general pattern of change in household and family structures in Western European families” that can be linked to “the changing role of women, both in terms of individual autonomy [freedom] and in terms of female emancipation”. These, in turn are connected to demographic changes in our society “since the 1960s including high divorce, decreasing fertility, increased cohabitation and delayed marriage” and “changing ideologies concerning the importance of marriage and motherhood”.

Finally, **Willmott** (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 woman”.

Although it's possible to argue that gender roles and relationships within the family have changed over the last few decades, the question here is what have they changed from and what have they changed to – and, as you might expect, there is no clear sociological consensus over these the answers to such questions.

Patriarchy or Symmetry?

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 gendered family roles:

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 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** writers such as **Willmott and Young** (1973), who argued it was possible to track historical changes in family relationships, from the:

- **Pre-Industrial Family**, an economically-productive unit with the father as *patriarch* (head of household), exercising complete physical and economic control over his family, through the:

- **Asymmetrical Family** 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 - to the:

• **Symmetrical Family** 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 we've briefly characterised it, a third way of looking at gender roles within the home is one that (sort-of) 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; roles supposedly attuned 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*.

One way to explore these ideas is to look at what happens "within the family group" using an indicator (*domestic labour*) that allows us to measure "who does what" both:

Quantitatively (such as measuring the amount of time each family member spends on particular household tasks) and:

Qualitatively, such as by identifying the kind of tasks (for example, physical and / or emotional labour) each family member performs.

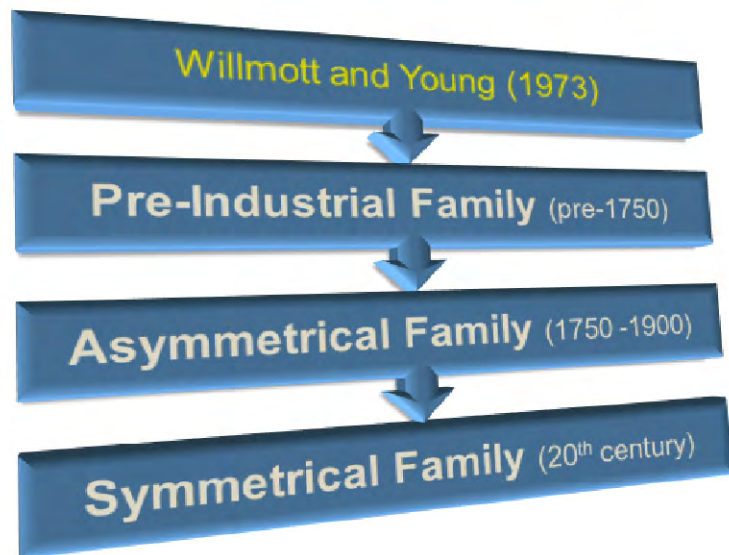
Module Link

Research Methods

Our ability to measure domestic labour statistically is a useful example of quantitative data. It also allows sociologists to make comparisons, both historical (in the same society over time) and cross-cultural (between different societies) and links into questions of data reliability (are we always measuring the same thing?) and validity.

Tried and Tested

- Explain what is meant by "masculinity" (2 marks)
- Explain how the concept of "sex" differs from that of "gender" (4 marks)
- Suggest **three** reasons for gender role diversity in the contemporary UK (6 marks)
- Examine the ways gender roles have changed over the past 100 years (24 marks).



Domestic Labour: Observations

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 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. We can outline recent evidence about domestic labour in our society in the following terms:

Time: Although we should note that statistical estimates of the amount of time spent on housework are highly-dependent on how this activity is both *defined* and *measured* (hence we frequently find quite wide variations between studies in the respective labours of different partners), official government measures and estimates do give us an insight into this behaviour.

The **UK Time Use Survey (Gershuny et al, 2006)**, for example, suggests that men (100 minutes) perform less domestic labour per day than women (178 minutes). The respective figures for **2000** were 140 minutes, as against 240 minutes, per day.

Type: Men and women not only take on different levels of housework, they also, by-and-large, perform different tasks for different lengths of time. Thus, while women generally spend far more time on routine domestic tasks (such as cooking,



The male breadwinner in his natural environment...

AS Sociology For AQA

shopping, cleaning and washing), men spend more time on tasks like repairs and gardening – something that suggests a broad division of sexual labour based on the association of women with “caring roles” (for themselves, their partner and their children) while men are more-closely associated with active labour (fixing electrical goods and so forth). Women, for example, spend twice as much time as their male partner on childcare duties. Interestingly, where there is no clear gender association with particular tasks (such as pet care) such tasks tend to be performed equally between men and women.



Module Link

Education

This type of “gender association” (whereby males and females are associated with different activities and choices) is mirrored in the education system where males and females tend to follow different academic and vocational courses when given the choice.

Age: Ramos (2003) notes how the amount of female housework increases with age - younger women do less housework than older women - an idea confirmed by Gershuny et al (2006) when they note that both men and women in the 16 – 24 age group spend around half as much time on housework as those in the 45 – 64 age group. Where children are involved, care for the youngest (0 – 4 years old) falls disproportionately on women (they spend nearly twice as much time as their partner on such care); somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, the gender gap *increases* in terms of care for 11 – 15 year old children – women spend three times as long on such care as men.

Comparative: According to the Future Foundation (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. As Gershuny et al (2006) suggest, this trend has continued into the early years of the 21st century.

Employment: Although Kan (2001) found levels of female housework were marginally reduced by paid employment (151 minutes to 177 minutes according to figures from Gershuny et al, 2005), retirement or unemployment increased female housework hours and reduced those of her partner – a trend that, once again, is confirmed by Gershuny et al. Throughout the 1990's, *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 more-likely to be equally distributed.

Income and Education: Kan (2001) noted how levels of both male and female housework decreased by income and level of education (high earners with a good level of education perform less domestic labour

Families and Households

than lower earners, for example) and one reason for this is likely to be the former pay others to carry out some forms of domestic labour (such as cleaning).

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 – even though they contribute to domestic tasks in a variety of ways (from washing and cooling to cleaning and ironing). Interestingly perhaps, a gender divide exists between male and female children (albeit less-pronounced than amongst adults) with males more-likely to do things like lawn-mowing and females slightly more-likely to cook, clean and tidy. Bonke (1999) notes that children generally make a relatively small contribution to domestic labour - contributions peak at 20 (approximately 2½ hours a week). In lone-children families, girls averaged 5 times as much housework as boys (2.5 hours / week as against 30 minutes).

Grandparenting: A final area we should note is the role played by grandparents in the care of children. Anderson et al (2000), 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.



Are grandparents an increasingly important resource in contemporary families?

Gershuny et al (2006) summarise the general pattern of domestic labour in the contemporary UK in terms of the fact that:

- Women of all ages, ethnicities and classes do more domestic labour than men.
- Men, on average, spend more time in the paid workforce than women.
- More domestic labour is carried-out at weekends than during the week, reflecting perhaps the number of women now in paid employment.
- Around 90% of women do some housework each day (compared with around 75% of men).
- Families with dependent children do more housework than those without (with the main burden of the extra work falling on women).

Domestic Labour: Explanations

As we've suggested, debates about domestic labour can be a **methodological** minefield in terms of:

Reliability: There is no clear and uncontested definition of "housework" - some researchers focus on domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning, 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 they put it) 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 over-estimate - and women underestimate - the amount of time spent on domestic labour.

While it is, of course, necessary to understand and take into account potential methodological problems, the broad consensus of sociological research opinion is as we've outlined it above – that women do the majority of domestic labour in our society. While there may be arguments over the respective amounts and types of domestic labour performed by men and women, what we have to examine here is possible explanations for this general pattern of behaviour – and to do this we can return to the distinction, noted earlier, between social and personal identities:

Social Identities

It's clear that, in some respects, cultural beliefs about male and female abilities and roles are significant in terms of explaining differences in domestic labour, an idea initially 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** (1985), for example, noted the "more traditional" the views held by couples about gender roles, the greater the level of domestic labour inequality. **Pilcher** (1998) found similar views among her respondents; Older respondents - unlike their younger counterparts - didn't talk about "equality" but thought instead in traditional ways about gender roles, responsibilities and relationships – something that reflected, she argued, their socialisation and life experiences and which reflected a situation where "**Men undertook limited household work, married women had limited involvement in paid work and a marked gendered division of labour was the norm**". Within this general patriarchal context we can note two distinct forms of social identity that seem to exert a powerful influence on perceptions of male and female identities:

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. To "be a woman", in this respect, means adopting both a certain way of thinking (in terms of the welfare of others) and behaving - as **Gershuny et al** (2006) demonstrate, responsibility for child care within the family still falls mainly on the female partner.

Masculinity: Conversely, traditional notions of masculinity are still, to some extent, bound-up with ideas about providing for a family by taking-on the main economic role. **McDowell** (2001), for example, noted the "**...continued dominance of a 'traditional' masculinity**" in her study of young working class men. Notions about how to "be a man", in this particular context, were intimately bound-up in being able to look after the economic well-being of both partner and children.

These "traditional" or "conventional" notions of femininity and masculinity are both powerful in terms of the hold they still exert over people and complimentary in the sense that ideas about one are reflected in ideas about the other – something that serves to continually reinforce such ideas by what *postmodern sociologists* term their:

Binary opposition:

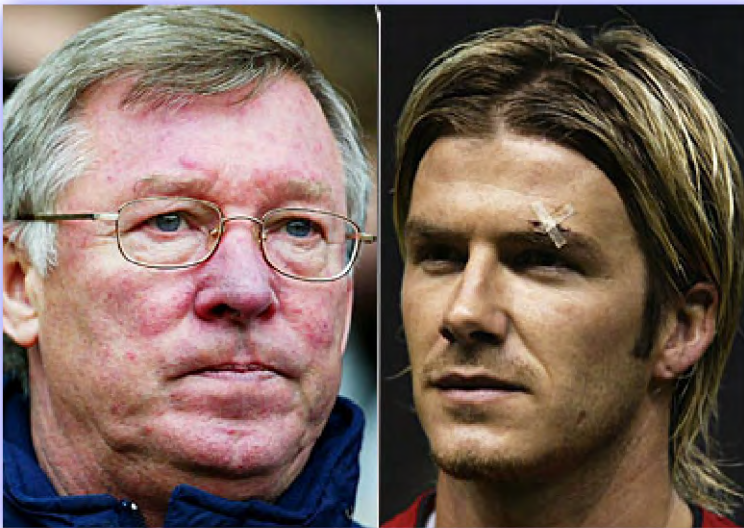
Men, for example, understand something about their masculine identity because it is defined in opposition to its mirror-image alternative– femininity (and *vice versa*, of course).



The evidence we've previously examined lends a degree of support to this general argument, both in terms of how domestic labour is distributed and performed and, more significantly perhaps, how this distribution has changed in recent times. The general trend for a more-equal distribution (with the gap between male and female labour gradually declining) reflects social changes in our society; economic changes have brought more women into the full-time workforce; political changes have given women greater rights within both the public and private domain (laws relating to sexual discrimination and equal pay, for example) and cultural changes have brought a change in general attitudes to both work and family life.

Personal Identities

While social identities can be both powerful and influential in determining how men and women see and think about such things as their gender status and abilities, it's evident that a further dimension we need to consider is how gender roles are interpreted and negotiated according to the specific family circumstances of those involved.



Fergie and Becks - Two different types of masculinity and personal identity?

We've seen, for example, how gender roles shift and change under certain conditions (such as unemployment, full / part time working and the presence or absence of children within the family). This idea is especially clear when we consider how class, age and educational differences impact on such roles. **Callaghan** (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** (1996) argues 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 (1999) however are more sceptical about "changing attitudes" filtering down to changing roles. They noted, for example, how some men used *learned helplessness* when trying to avoid domestic tasks - their "inability" to work domestic machinery (such as that technological imponderable,

the iron) served to throw domestic tasks back into the hands of their partners.

Two further points we could note here involve:

Over-estimations of male domestic labour when (male) subjects are required to self-assess the amount of housework they do.

Cherry-picking domestic tasks: As we've seen, the evidence suggests that the majority of female domestic labour involves the routine and mundane tasks required to keep the family functioning. Men, on the other hand, are more-likely to get involved in activities that are more interesting and personally rewarding; a case in point, for example, is that while women are more-likely to be involved in things like washing and dressing their young children, men are more-likely to count things like "reading a bedtime story" or "playing with their children" as part of their domestic labour.

To sum-up these general ideas we can identify three main reasons for the generally unequal distribution of domestic labour in our society:

- 1. Social identities** relating to deep-seated cultural beliefs about male and female "natures" exert a powerful pull, through the gender socialisation process, that leads to the reproduction of traditional forms of gender relationship (women as "carers" for example).
- 2. Socio-Personal identities** involving the way personal identities are *pragmatically* ("reasonably") shaped by social identities. 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. The reverse is, of course, also the case; in situations where the female partner is the highest earner and has the better career prospects the male partner may become a "house husband".

3. Personal identities involve looking at quite specific relationships between family members and may be played-out against a background of complex personal and cultural histories. For example, some men may be able to get away with doing little or nothing in terms of domestic labour (even where his partner works full-time); on the other hand, a man's personal relationship with his partner may not allow him to shirk his share of family responsibilities.

The above ideas suggest, therefore, that questions relating to domestic labour – such as who does it and why – revolve around a complex interplay of social and interpersonal relationships. On the one hand, the fact that women still do the majority of domestic labour in our society suggests social identities that influence male and female *self* and *other* perceptions remain strong (how you, for example, see your family role and, by extension, that of your partner). On the other hand,

the fact that differences in the amount of domestic labour performed by each partner have declined (and continue to decline) suggests that, at the very least, social changes are filtering through to personal identities and relationships.

A case in point here might be **Baxter et al's** (2005) research which suggests that "...time spent in a cohabiting relationship prior to marriage leads to fewer hours on housework after marriage, but only for women". In other words, the **pathway** taken into marriage "affects the level of gender equality within marriage. Specifically couples that cohabit prior to marriage were found to adopt more equal divisions of labour than those who married without a prior period of cohabitation".



The pathway taken into marriage impacts on gender inequalities.

Gender roles and relationships, in this respect, are shaped by both wider social factors (from gender socialisation through economic circumstances to cultural attitudes) and the various ways in which the respective partners personally relate to one another. Like any social institution, however, family groups involve **power relationships**. In other words, they involve "struggles for dominance" between family members - both adults and children - in areas like:

Physical resources (such as 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 (ideas like love, trust, affection, responsibility and care); in short, the range of emotional securities (and insecurities) that surround our relationships.

The idea that the family is an institution that involves struggles for domination (in areas such as domestic labour) leads us to consider next the nature and extent of power relationships within the family.

Tried and Tested

- Explain what is meant by "social identity" (2 marks)
- Suggest **two** ways that domestic labour differs from other types of labour (4 marks)
- Suggest **three** reasons for the reliance on grandparents for childcare (6 marks)
- Examine some of the methodological problems associated with the study of domestic labour (24 marks).
- Assess the view that domestic labour is no longer predominantly performed by women (24 marks).

Power Relationships: Observations

In any discussion of power relationships it is useful to begin by broadly defining what we mean by:

Power: According to **Giddens** (2006) 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 is probably the dimension that springs most readily to mind when you think of power because it involves *making* someone do something against their will - usually through the act or threat of violence.
- Authority,** however, is an important dimension of power 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.

Module Link

Power and Politics

If you want to know more about the key concept of **power** this Module discusses various aspects and applications of power.

We can identify examples of how power is exercised within families in the following contexts:

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 things like *physical violence* (assault), *sexual violence* (such as 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 reliably estimate since it generally happens “behind closed doors” within the privacy of the family group and victims may be reluctant to admit to or acknowledge their victimisation.

Module Link**Research Methods**

The difficulties involved in defining, identifying and measuring domestic violence can be used to illustrate problems of **reliability** and **validity** in sociological methodology.

Keeping this in mind, **Abrahams** (2002) has identified some significant facts about domestic violence:

Extent: **Jansson** (2007), based on research carried out for the **British Crime Survey**, notes that 3% of all women and 2% of all men in Britain had experienced either minor or severe violence at the hands of their partner in 2005 and **Dodd et al** (2004) report that 16% of all violent incidents involved domestic violence. The general trend in domestic violence over the past 25 years has a slightly unusual trajectory; according to **Jansson** in 1981 around 275,000 incidents of domestic violence were picked-up by the British Crime Survey – a figure that is currently around the same number of cases picked-up in 2006. However, domestic violence incidents peaked in 1994 at around 1.2 million cases.

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: **Coleman et al** (2007), again using **British Crime Survey** data, note that domestic violence is one of the main forms of criminal behaviour that is highly prone to repeat victimisation (with around 40% of victims suffering further victimisation and 25% suffering prolonged – 3 or more attacks - victimisation). High rates of repeat victimisation for domestic violence occur for two main reasons:

Firstly, victim and perpetrator are likely to live in the same household which leads to increased opportunities for violence and victimisation.

Secondly, although there has been a general increase in the willingness of victims to report domestic violence it remains, by-and-large, one of the more under-reported crimes. Part of the reason for this, **Kirkwood** (1993) argues, is that domestic violence has psychological consequences, including low self-esteem, dependence on the perpetrator and a tendency to minimise or deny the violence.

Module Link**Research Methods**

The problems of **validity** and the **interview effect** are clearly illustrated by domestic violence data. **Jansson** (2007), for example, notes that in face-to-face interviews carried out for the British Crime Surveys 0.6% of women and 0.2% of men admitted to victimisation – compared to the figures of 3% and 2% gained through anonymous self-reporting.

Gender: According to **Nicholas et al** (2007) the majority of victims of domestic violence (77%) are female. They also note that this form of violence was the only category of violence for which the risks were slightly higher than for men.

Reported crime: In 2000, just over 40% of female murder victims (92 women) were killed by present or former partners. The comparable figure for men was 6%.

Child Abuse

This is a further aspect of power within family groups, with writers such as **Humphreys and Thiara** (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**)
- 25% 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.

Power Relationships: Explanations

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 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've 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 and we can explore the theoretical side of these ideas by applying **Lukes'** (1990) argument that power has three main dimensions:

1. 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've 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.

2. 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 discussed or made, simply because the right of the stronger partner to take those decisions goes unquestioned.

3. 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 share the belief women are better at child-rearing 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.

Family Economies

As the above suggests, power relationships within family groups are not always played out in terms of violence or abuse; the vast 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).

Morgan (2001) suggests, therefore, that we should consider power relationships within the family in terms of "three economies":

1. The Political Economy relates to the economic aspect of family life which **Pahl** (2007) suggests involves understanding how money is received

Major Sources of Power: Lukes' (1990)

To Make Decisions

To Prevent Others Making Decisions

Remove Decision-Making From The Agenda

"controlled and managed within the household, before being allocated to spending on collective or personal items". More specifically, **Pahl** argues here for a:

Resource theory of power: In basic terms, power struggles are viewed as an inevitable aspect of our relationships (whether in the family, school, workplace or whatever) and "the greatest power tends to accrue to those who contributes the most resources" (which include money and status, love and affection, or things like "domestic work, child care or sexual services").

This idea links back to **Lukes'** dimensions of power in that it can be conceptualised and expressed in terms of **decision-making** – those who control the greatest family resources have the highest levels of power and, in effect, are in the most advantageous decision-making position.

Financial decision-making, in particular, 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 (1980) influential study of middle-class couples, for example, 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 over 25 years old, **Pahl and Vogler** (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.

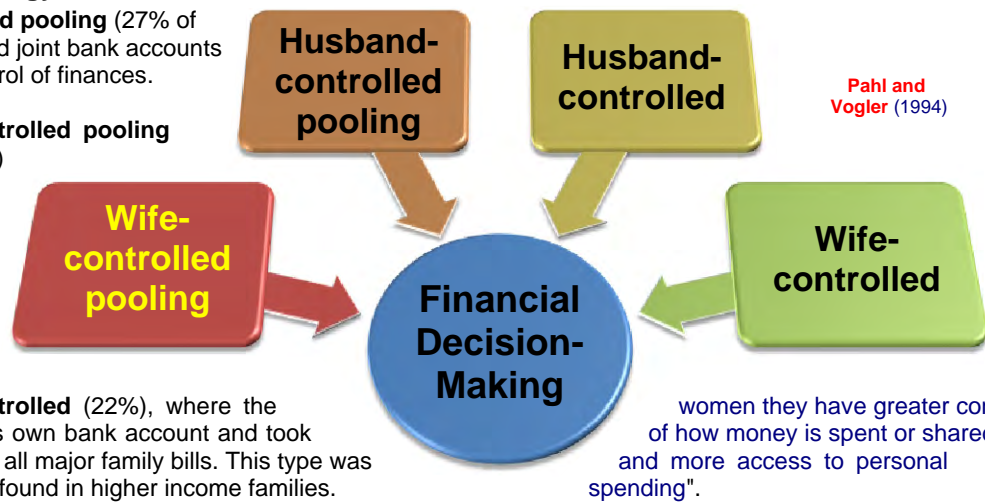
- **Husband-controlled pooling** (37% of couples) involved a joint bank account with the husband controlling financial decisions.

- **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 also in terms of the type of decisions made; men 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** (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 that financial decisions should be shared, but this didn't always seem to be the case in reality - particularly for women with low personal incomes (less than £400 a month); 25% of these women said their husband controlled family financial decisions. In general, the study suggested women *believed* they had some control over or input into financial decisions that were, *in reality*, taken by the male partner. As they noted: “**Bringing money into the household brings with it a sense of entitlement to decide how it is spent. Because men earn more than**



Work and Relocation: Other areas of major decision-making in dual-earner families include those involving paid work and relates to things like whose work has the greatest priority when, for example, the family is forced to move because of a change in employment. **Hardill** (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. This is indicative of greater male status within the family and, of course, higher levels of power – ideas that relate to:

Status enhancement, an interesting - and little-discussed - aspect of authority within families. It involves, according to **Coverman** (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 human *status symbol*, used to demonstrate their wealth and power.

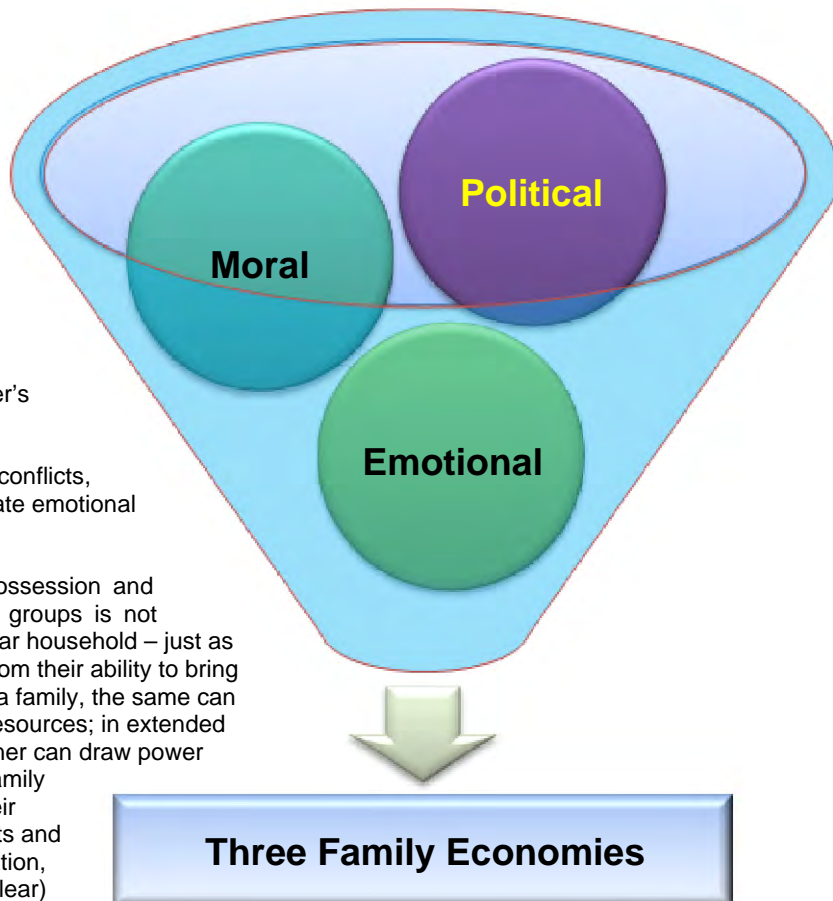
2. The Moral Economy: Although control of economic resources is clearly important, a further dimension is added by the various *values* and *norms* within a family group relating to areas like the roles and responsibilities taken on by different family members. Within a family, for example, it's perfectly possible for, say, the female partner to exercise high levels of power through her ability to organise family resources and behaviours even where she earns substantially less than her male partner. Once again we need to take account of personal identities within family groups – and how the various family members specifically relate to one another – when thinking about power relationships.

3. The Emotional Economy: **Morgan's** third dimension focuses more-specifically on interpersonal relationships (based on love and affection) that are almost unique to family life – a set of attractions that, in themselves, are a source of power (since, at root, if someone is “in love” with you this places you in a potentially strong, manipulative, position since you control what **Dallos et al** (1997) term “**affective power**”).

Pahl (2007) suggests that this type of “family power” has a number of intriguing aspects:

- **Who ‘loves’** the other the most: the partner who ‘loves less’ can use this to gain power over the one who ‘loves more’
- **Who ‘needs’** the other most: the partner who needs the other least is more able to leave the relationship.
- **Who best meets** their partner’s emotional needs.
- **Who is most able** to resolve conflicts, reduce emotional stress and create emotional well-being within the family.

Finally we can note that the possession and exercise of power within family groups is not necessarily confined to a particular household – just as either partner may draw power from their ability to bring certain economic resources into a family, the same can be true of moral and emotional resources; in extended families, for example, either partner can draw power from their ability to link into a family network of power (involving their parents, brothers and sister, aunts and uncles and so forth). In this situation, therefore, power within the (nuclear) family can be drawn from a reservoir of power existing in the extended family network (whether this involves financial help, the provision of services, emotional support or whatever).



Tried and Tested

- Explain what is meant by “power” (2 marks).
- Suggest **two** ways power relationships impact on family life (4 marks).
- Suggest **three** reasons for differences in power within the family group (6 marks)
- Examine the different ways power and control can be exercised in modern family groups (24 marks)
- Assess the view that domestic power relationships support the concept of the symmetrical family (24 marks)

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4. The nature of childhood, and changes in the status of children in the family and society.

Childhood: Introduction

The concept of childhood might appear, on the face of things, to be a fairly straightforward one in that it seemingly describes what might be considered a clear biological difference between those who are classed as “adults” in our society and those who have not, as yet, achieved this status. The reality is, however, rather more complicated than describing a simple progression through a range of biological stages since concepts of childhood have, both historically and cross-culturally, contained a variety of different meanings – and it is these meanings, relating to both changing perceptions of “childhood” and consequential changes in the status of children in both society generally and the family specifically, that we need to explore in greater detail here.

In this respect it is perhaps useful to keep in mind a distinction made by **Archard** (2004) when he argues that every human society has developed some sort of:

Concept of childhood – the basic idea that “children” are in some way or other different to “adults”. Where societies differ (both historically and cross-culturally) is in their:

Conceptions of childhood; that is, in the *meanings* they assign to these categories (the length of childhood, the rights and responsibilities assigned to adulthood but not childhood, the significance of the distinction between the two and so forth).

Childhood: Observations

Although ideas about “the nature of childhood” are necessarily connected to changes in the relative status of children throughout our society’s history we can begin our exploration by noting that it’s not always easy to precisely identify an agreed set of characteristics that serve to define “childhood” (for which reason we sometimes refer to the idea as a “*contested concept*” because there are always arguments about how to define it).

Biologically, we’re all young once and, with the passage of time, we all become older - but this simple statement hides a much wider and more complex set of (cultural) ideas.

Culturally, two ideas are significant:

1. Duration: It’s difficult to say exactly when child status ends (or even when it begins, come to that). In recent times, for example, the age when people are *officially classified* as “adults” in our society 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 (a redefinition of age categories) alters the way we perceive both childhood and, of course, children. In this respect we can see an initial distinction between:

Legal definitions relating to such things as when childhood “officially ends” and adulthood begins and childhood *norms* (what a child is legally able or unable to do) and:

Cultural definitions relating to unofficial ways of defining childhood and adulthood.

Although the two types of definition (official and unofficial) meet at various points they are not necessarily the same – something that serves to confuse both the status of children and childhood and the various ways people are expected to behave (both as children and *towards* children).

2. 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, for example, is very different to being an infant - so should we classify them all as children? In addition, the status of “teenager” - as **Hine** (2000) argues - is a relatively modern invention (the concept was first used in America during the 2nd World War - “teenagers” didn’t make much of an appearance in Britain until the mid-to-late 1950’s).



Are concepts of childhood and adulthood rooted in biology, culture or some combination of the two?

What this suggests is that although concepts of childhood and adulthood involve a biological element (at its most basic, perhaps, the latter is older than the former) of much greater significance is the meanings a culture assigns to the concept of age; both different societies and different cultures 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 (actually, it makes it *very* difficult), we can begin by looking at an:



Child mineworkers in Victorian (19th century) Britain.

Historical Dimension

The work of **Aries** (1962) is a useful starting point here, mainly because his work has stimulated extensive debate about the changing nature of childhood and the status of children. Although some of **Aries'** observations and claims have been questioned and criticised in recent times (**Shipman**, 1973; **Hendrick**, 1992) his work is useful because it helps us focus on a number of areas relating to the historical analysis of childhood:

Recent construction: **Aries** argues the idea of "childhood" as a distinctive phase in social development (the idea, in short, that the lives of children are qualitatively different to those of adults) is a *relatively modern* one in Western Europe. He argues, for example, that childhood as both a social and biological category has developed over the past 300 or so years – a significant time-scale because **Aries** links the development of childhood, as a special status, to **social change**. More specifically, childhood developed during 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".

Module Link Families and Households

This general argument provides further evidence to support the sociological contention that changes in family structure and behaviour can be linked to wider social changes.

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 quite 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-19th 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" - **Pollack** (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** (2004) 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".

Initially, therefore, we can observe a number of historical changes in the status of children:

Attitudes: If we accept that, according to **Jenks** (1996) "childhood is not a natural but a social construct", it follows that its status is, to a large degree, *determined by adults*. In this respect, **Jenks** notes two basic historical statuses of children that have existed, in one form or another, over the past 300 years:

1. 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".
2. 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".

Module Link

Research Methods

These two characterisations represent idealised (opposed) views – a technique that is often used in sociological research to both clarify research ideas and as a way of measuring the extent to which “reality” deviates from the research ideal.

Adult attitudes towards childhood and children (which are not necessarily the same thing) tend to veer between these two extremes of characterisation. As **Fionda** (2002), for example, suggests children in the contemporary UK are variously seen, especially by the State, as:

Objects of concern who need protection: This mainly involves protection from adults – at one extreme visualised in terms of child abuse and at the other seen in terms of not exposing children to the kinds of things that commonly exist in adult society and conversation (depictions of violence or sexuality, for example).

Autonomous possessors of rights: That is, as individuals in their own right who should enjoy similar levels of freedom to adults and who should not be denied the kinds of rights that adults take for granted. A case in point here might be laws relating to assault – the slap around the legs given by a parent to a child is generally seen as an adult right to discipline their child in our society (the same slap given to another adult could be prosecuted as assault). This is not, however, necessarily true in other cultures; Denmark, for example, banned all forms of corporal punishment in 1997 and **Holm** (2005) argues that hitting children not only represents physical abuse but also a form of sexual abuse...

Lacking moral consciousness: Children are exempted from some forms of responsibility to which adults would be made accountable. The age at which an individual becomes morally responsible for their actions (such as theft or even murder) is a matter for some dispute since it can be argued that one important aspect of childhood that differentiates it from adulthood is the fact that adults are adults because they have developed an understanding of morality.

Accountable for their actions: On the other hand, if children are to be given similar rights to adults then they must take responsibility for their actions.

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. Contemporary ambivalence towards how children should be seen and treated is, however,

Children seen as “little angels” or “little devils” - with nothing much in between the two extremes.



nothing particularly new. **Hendrick** (1990), for example, has identified a range of transformations in the status of children and childhood since 1800:

- The **Delinquent child** started to appear in the mid 19th 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).

Module Link

Education

“Compulsory” education “for all” in our society effectively began towards the end of the 19th century (with the Fisher Education Act (1870). Prior to this education was largely restricted to middle / upper class males). It was not until the 1944 Education Act, however, that “compulsory attendance” was rigorously enforced...

The transformation of childhood status (**Hendrick**, 1990)



• The **Psycho-medical child** was constructed towards the end of the 19th 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 **Hall** (1904).

• The **Welfare child** emerged in the 20th 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 20th century and focuses on the idea of children having their own needs which, in turn, should be protected and encouraged.

Fionda (2002) sums-up this general progression when she suggests that “Concepts of who and what children are and what childhood consists of have changed over time. Our historical and contemporary notions of childhood also change according to the context of the interaction between the child and the state”. In other words, the status of children in our society is conditioned, to some extent, by the way governments have sought to establish and enshrine “childhood” as a legal status. Thus, changes in the perception of children (from unruly delinquent brutes to people with their own specific needs and rights) has been mirrored in terms of:

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 19th 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. Children are no-longer, for example, employed as chimney sweeps (ask your grandparents) or down mines (ask your parents) – work that it was relatively common for “children” to perform in Victorian Britain (ask your – oh, never mind).

The regulation of childhood has, of course, continued throughout the 20th century and into the 21st 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 7pm. Sexual behaviour is also regulated by law and the following table demonstrates cultural variations (even within the UK) in the age of consent.

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 [Age 9 for women]	Illegal	Illegal
Korea	13	13	13
Saudi Arabia	Must be Married [18]	Illegal	Illegal
Spain	13	13	13
Tunisia	26	Illegal	Illegal
G. Britain	16	16	16
N. Ireland	17	17	17

Children’s Rights: The latter part of the 20th century has witnessed moves - both official and unofficial - to develop concepts of “Children’s Rights” - the idea children, like adults, have fundamental human rights requiring both statement and protection.

The **United Nations** “Declaration on the Rights of the Child” (1959), for example, defined the minimum rights a child should expect and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) laid down a range of universal rights for children.

United Nations “Convention on the Rights of the Child” (1989): Selected Articles

Source: <http://www.un.org/>

- 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.
- 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.

Tried and Tested

- (a) Explain what is meant by the “social construction of childhood” (2 marks).
- (b) Suggest **two** ways in which childhood has become a specially protected and privileged time of life (4 marks).
- (c) Suggest **three** reasons for the argument that the “childhood is a modern invention” (6 marks).

Childhood: Explanations

Heywood (2001) argues that “childhood”, as a social construct, is “the product of assorted historical, geographical, economic and cultural forces” and, with this idea in mind, we can look briefly at a range of possible reasons for the changing status of children over the past 300 – 400 years in our society:

Late 17th - 18th Centuries

[The **Early Industrial** period]

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. In part these new statuses can be broadly characterised as “dependent statuses” in that both women and children came to rely on men to provide for their daily needs.

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 child-care 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).

19th Century

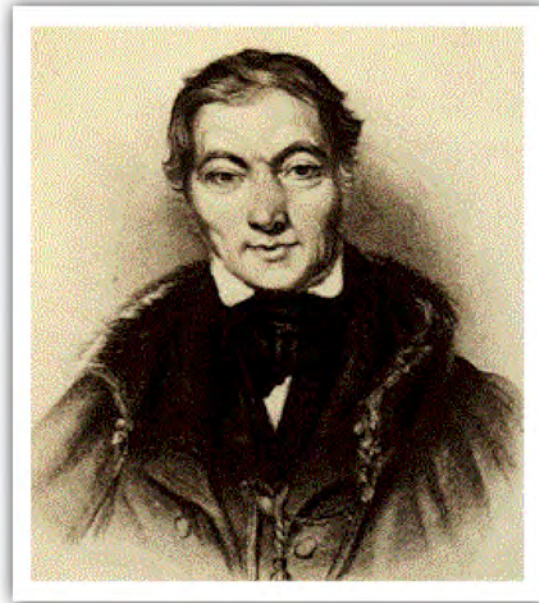
Governments in the 19th century also took an interest in the status of children, for a number of reasons:

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 developed (schools) 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 attitude changes to their status.



Robert Owen (1771-1858)

19th century social and educational reformer.

This general situation – of long-term social development spread over 200 – 300 years - is an interesting example of how wider social changes (such as the major economic changes introduced by the Industrial Revolution) feed into attitude changes. As it was progressively stripped of its economic function the family group no-longer worked together to produce the means for their continued existence; rather, one partner (for various reasons we don’t need to examine here, usually the male) began to work outside the home (in factories, for example) which meant they could no-longer perform their former (shared to some extent) childcare function.

The development of manufacturing industries outside the home relegated women, by and large, to a domestic labour and childcare function – they were no-longer instrumental in providing for the economic well-being of their family. As their role changed, however, so too did beliefs about and attitudes towards female abilities and capabilities.

As women (lower and middle class women at least) increasingly became “homemakers” perceptions of children started to change; they became perceived as objects in need of care, control and attention (something which fitted neatly into the new female family roles) – or in **Robertson’s** (2001a) evocative characterisation, children gradually became to be seen as “economically worthless and emotionally priceless”

19th Century Britain: Child Labour and Selected Acts of Parliament

Year	Act	Selected Provisions
1802	Health and Morals of Apprentices Act	Apprentices to work no longer than 12-hour day (and not to start before 6 am). The Act was not enforced...
1819	Factory Act	12-hour day limit for children in cotton mills. Ban (not enforced) on employment of children under 9.
1833	Factory Act	Employed children must be over 8 years old. Maximum 9-hour working day for those aged 9 - 13, increasing to 12 hours for those 14 - 18. Ban on night working for children.
1834	Chimney Sweeps Act	Ban on apprenticeship for children under 10. Children under 14 banned from employment as chimney sweeps unless apprenticed. Act not enforced.
1842	Mines Act	Ban on women, girls, and boys under 10 working underground. Ban on boys under 15 working machinery.
1840	Chimney Sweeps Act	Ban on anyone under 21 being forced to climb chimneys
1844	Factory Act	Children under 13 limited to working 6 1/2 hours per day. Children aged 13-18 limited to working 12 hours per day.
1847	Factory Act	Children under 18 limited to 58-hour working week.
1860	Mines Act	Ban on boys under 12 working underground (unless they could read and write).
1875	Chimney Sweeps Act	Licensing of chimney sweeps - only those not using children as "sweeps" granted license.
1878	Factory and Workshops Act	Ban on employment of children under 10.
1891	Factory Act	Ban on employment of children under 11.

20th 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

Module Link

Crime and Deviance

Some Functionalist theories of youth subculture argue that "youth" is a period that develops in contemporary societies to help individuals "mange the transition" between childhood and adulthood.

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 an idyllic period before the cares and responsibilities of adulthood.

Education: This is increasingly promoted - especially at the post-16 level. The 2004 Labour government set a target of 50% of all 18 year olds attending University

(compared with approximately 15% 30 years ago). This, again, serves to redefine notions of childhood, based on the dependent status of children.

Contemporary Trends

Earlier we noted **Archard's** (2004) argument that concepts of childhood (the meanings a culture gives to this phase in biological development) have varied both *historically* and *across different cultures* – although, following **Jencks** (1996) lead, it's arguable that in our society basic concepts of children have variously veered between stressing the need for tight adult control of "unruly youth" and arguing for the corrupting influence of adult controls on "innocent youth".

Heywood (2001) captures something of the flavour of this when he notes that "Childhood, according to the seventeenth-century cleric Pierre de Bérulle, 'is the most vile and abject state of human nature, after that of death'. It is tempting to agree – not least as an antidote to all the sentimental nonsense surrounding the supposedly pure and innocent child of the Victorian era...Such extremes serve to remind us that childhood is a social construct, which changes over time and, no less importantly, varies between social and ethnic groups within any society".

Given this general situation, therefore, it's not too surprising to discover that contemporary trends in the understanding of childhood reflect a number of different viewpoints which, for the sake of convenience, we can categorise in terms of three broad interpretations:

1. Disappearance: This position reflects the idea that "childhood", as we've generally understood it over the past 50 or so years, is changing at an increasingly rapid pace and the major motor of change, according to **Postman** (1985) is the development of modern communication systems. Initially this involved the development of television but increasingly we can extend this trend to include mobile phone and Internet technology.

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.



Is what was once an adult world now available to all?

New technologies – such as the mobile phone and modern computers with fast access to the Internet - have arguably closed this gap further. The Internet, for example, effectively allows children access to information and images that, in former times, were denied (if at all revealed) until adulthood. Two further aspects can be usefully noted here:

Firstly, cyberspace – unlike physical space – is one where distinctions of age can be difficult to maintain under certain conditions; in other words, it is much easier for both adults and children to interact "on equal terms" in ways that would not necessarily be possible in the physical world.

Secondly, the cyber world is not necessarily compartmentalised in the same way as the physical world – children and adults can, under certain circumstances, freely mix – blurring distinctions (such as status differences and the norms of interaction that normally govern adult – child relationships) that generally apply in the physical world.

Although, as you're probably aware, a lot of recent media (and government) attention has been focused on the potential for adult sexual exploitation of children through Internet technologies, there are much broader

issues of identity in play here. As we've noted above, in the cybernetic playground "children" can behave as adults (or, at least, how they believe adults behave) and vice versa – adults are free to express their "childishness" in a relatively safe (virtual) environment. **Robertson** (2001b) adds a range of further ideas to the "disappearing childhood" mix when he notes idea like:

Consumption: From an increasingly young age children are taught to see the world through the eyes of consumers as they're encouraged to buy goods and services that were formerly the preserve of adults (mobile phone technology being a case in point). Advertisers target "children's markets" in ever more sophisticated ways, leading to the development of a "consumption culture" amongst children that mirrors that of the adult world.

Rights: In a situation where children start to be seen as "autonomous individuals" in their own right (rather than as, in former times, "parental property" or dependent beings) they acquire the kinds of "rights" that were formerly only extended to adults. The flip-side to the acquisition of such rights is their treatment as "adults in miniature" which, in turn, leads to the development of more sophisticated ways of living and behaving.

Autonomy: The flip-side to autonomy is the exercise of choice, whereby children become more rebellious, sexually precocious and, indeed, active. In other words children become submerged into an adult world that requires they become ever-more sophisticated in their outlook.

Permissiveness: In addition, with autonomy and rights comes a change in the way children are raised – they are given greater control over their own social development and, of course, held to be responsible for the mistakes and misconceptions they make in a similar way to adults.

2. Reappearance: **Postman** (1985) argues that we are seeing a blurring of the distinction between childhood and adulthood – one where the status of children is rapidly changing to a situation, as he describes it, 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".

This perception, **Robertson** (2001b) suggests, is mirrored by such things as changes in child-rearing practices – where children are allowed to develop in ways that are less "adult directed" and more focused on allowing them to find their

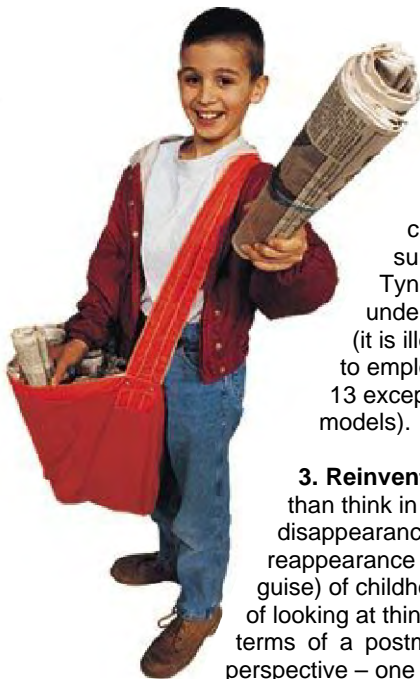


Are contemporary societies characterised by the idea of "Children but not Childhood"?

AS Sociology For AQA

own general way in life – and the various ways children are drawn into (and included in) the adult world (through things like conspicuous consumption). Where the status of children changes so too does the way they are both defined and treated by adult institutions (such as the legal system, schools and the workplace).

When we think about “child labour”, for example, the conventional perception is that it involves children in developing countries (such as India or China) “forced” to work in factories under adult conditions for little or no pay (and there is, of course, a great deal of both truth and irony in this perception – irony in the sense that many of the fashion items young children in the UK are encouraged to consume are produced by children of a similar age...). However, as **Dottridge and Stuart** (2005) have pointed-out, “child labour” also exists in developed countries like the UK: Around 70% of children currently work part-time and “This is usually nothing more sinister than dropping newspapers through letterboxes, clearing café tables or shampooing hair. The young people involved are learning how to operate in the adult world and are gaining independence and some sense of responsibility”. As one 15 year old respondent working as a part-time waitress said ““I enjoy working as it makes me feel independent. I don’t always have to rely on my mum to give me the money to go out”.



However, as **O’Donnell and White** (1998) discovered, around 25% of working children in their survey of North Tyneside were under the age of 13 (it is illegal in the UK to employ those under 13 except as actors or models).

3. Reinvention: Rather than think in terms of the disappearance or reappearance (in a former guise) of childhood, a third way of looking at things is in terms of a postmodern perspective – one that argues that although changes are taking place

in the way children are perceived and treated this is neither *one-way* (children effectively becoming “little adults”) nor necessarily evidence of childhood’s disappearance. Rather, as with many things, childhood is being reinvented, so the argument goes, as it accommodates itself to wider social changes.

Thus, on the one hand we have clear (and probably lasting) changes to the nature of childhood; children, as we’ve suggested, are increasingly consumers of products but they’re also shapers of these products; rather than seeing them as passive receivers of “adult culture” an alternative way of understanding is to see this in terms of the development of relatively sophisticated “childhood cultures” (in much the same

Families and Households

Are children increasingly encouraged to adopt adult identities and behaviours?



basic way as children, over the past 50 or so years, have always taken fragments and elements of adult culture and shaped them in ways that fit their own particular needs and preconceptions). The postmodern child, in this respect, inhabits a world that is quite different to that of their modern predecessor (of even as recently as a generation ago) in that they are exposed to a far wider and richer range of experiences; this world is, however, still markedly different to the adult world, in range of (restrictive) ways.

Postmodern Paradox

Children remain subject to restrictions and practices that are not apparent in the adult world. For example, they still experience various spatial and cultural segregations - as **Robertson** (2001b) observes “children are segregated into age graded institutions (schools)” and it’s arguable that the period we currently classify as “childhood” has been extended in ways that outreach those of any previous historical epoch – one of the *paradoxes* of the postmodern world is that childhood in the contemporary UK is *longer* than at any time in human history while simultaneously appearing to be *shorter*

One consequence of this *postmodern paradox* (children “growing up more quickly” while at the same time being considered dependent on adults for longer) has been the growth in professional / expert opinion – people whose job it is to both understand children and, by extension, explain their needs and requirements to adults. The “professionalisation of childhood” is further evidence of the adult confusion surrounding childhood; where the boundaries are sufficiently blurred we require experts to tell us exactly where they are to be drawn (or not, as is sometimes the case with expert opinion). Finally, of course, we should remember that children in our society lack a range of rights that adults take for granted – the vote, to ability to drive, marry, have sexual relationships and the like.

Tried and Tested

(d) Examine the ways childhood is “the product of assorted historical, geographical, economic and cultural forces” (24 marks)

(e) Assess the arguments for the “disappearance of childhood” (24 marks).

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5. Demographic trends in the UK since 1900; reasons for changes in birth rates, death rates and family size.

Demographic Trends: Observations

We can begin by thinking about birth rates, death rates and family size in the UK during the 20th century in a relatively discrete way; that is, we can identify a number of general trends for each in isolation from one another (even though, as we will see, it is probably more sociologically useful, once we've established basic trends, to understand how these demographic factors are both interrelated and the general consequences this interrelationship has for family life).

Birth Trends

According to **Chamberlain and Gill** (2005), the total number of live births in the UK fell from a peak of just over 1.1 million at the *start* of the 20th century to around 700,000 at the *close* of the century. Although live births had risen to around 720,000 by 2005, **Self and Zealey** (2007) note this represents "34% fewer births than in 1901 (and 20% fewer than 1971)". Statistically, therefore, the general picture is one of an overall **decline** in UK births, even when we allow for the major "data spikes" (significant increases in live births) that followed both the 1st and 2nd World Wars ("baby booms") and a further spike in the mid-1960's as the post-war baby boom worked its way through the general population.

In terms of birth *rates* the general picture is one of similar, if perhaps more-pronounced, **decline**.

Live Births per 1000 UK Population

Source: **Tiffen and Gittins** (2004)

1900	29
1950	16
2000	12

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

General fertility has substantially declined, including both the number of live births and the birth rate.

Family size has declined from an average of 3 to around 1.6 children.

Motherhood: 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.

Death Trends

Notwithstanding the existence of a couple of notable "data spikes" between 1914 -18 and 1940-45 (so-called "death booms" reflecting the effects of World Wars), the number of people dying each year in the UK throughout the 20th century has, as **Penneck and Lewis** (2005) note, remained roughly constant. At the start of the century, for example, there were around 640,000 deaths per year, while this figure had fallen slightly to around 605,000 deaths by the century's close. These figures, however, hide a rather different story once we allow for *population increases* (around 20-odd million) over the course of the century. As with birth trends, therefore, we get a more valid picture by looking at:

Death rates rather than raw numbers::

Deaths per 1000 UK Population

Source: **Penneck and Lewis** (2005)

1900	16
2000	10

As this more-valid form of statistical analysis demonstrates, the general trend over the past one hundred years in the UK is for a substantial fall in the death rate.

Module Link

Research Methods

When analysing any form of demographic data the **validity** of such analysis will normally be increased by looking at **rates** (the number per 1000 in a population) rather than raw numbers. By way of further example, a case in point here is the analysis of crime statistics.

Family Size Trends

One way to check the validity of birth rate statistics is to compare them with statistical trends for average (*mean*) family size – and when we do we find that, as predicted, there has been a steady, long-term, *decrease in* average family size. **Diamond** (2007), for example, identifies the following changes in the **fertility rate** (the number of children born per woman) from the mid-19th century to the present:

UK Fertility Rate	
Source: Diamond (2007)	
Year	Act
1901	3.5
1911	2.8
1921	2.4
1931	1.8
1941	1.8
1951	2.4
1981	2.6
1971	2.0
1981	1.7
1991	1.8
2001	1.6
2005	1.7

Grenham (1995) summarises the general trends in UK fertility / average family size in the following terms:

Trends in UK Fertility / Average Family Size
Source: **Grenham** (1995)

1870s	Between 5 and 6 children.
1930s	2 children
1950s	Post 2 nd World War baby boom creates an increase in average family size.
1960s	“Baby bust” – gradual decline in fertility rates until 1970s.
1980s	Continuing decline in fertility rates and gradual fall in average family size (between 1.8 and 1.6 children).
2000s	Slight rise in fertility and average family size (product once more of post-war baby boom as the grandchildren of the original baby-boomers start their own families).

There are a couple of interesting points we can note in relation to fertility / average family size. Firstly, the sensitivity of these trends to social changes - the most obvious of which is the 2nd World War and the “ripple effect” this has produced in terms of “Baby Booms” and “Baby Busts” (but we could also note changes like the introduction of reliable female contraception in the 1960s as a further example of important social changes).

Secondly, **Grenham** notes that the long-term decline in fertility / average family size is something that “has

been shared by the rest of the industrialised world.” This suggests that any explanation for the general decline in fertility needs to take into account that this phenomenon is not unique to the UK.

Tried and Tested

- Explain what is meant by “birth rate” (2 marks).
- Summarise UK trends in fertility and family size over the past century.(4 marks).

Demographic Trends: Explanations

It’s possible to specify a range of reasons that, in alone and in combination, have contributed to the respective falls in birth rates, death rates and family size.

Birth Trends

A number of explanations for changes in UK birth rates over the course of the 20th century can be noted:

War / Economic Depression: As we’ve suggested, UK birth rates have been sensitive to both war and economic depression (such as that seen in the 1930s). During the 2nd world war, for example, the birth rate fell significantly – symptomatic of a general reluctance to marry and start families during the period of violent upheaval and uncertainty. **Tiffen and Gittins** (2004) note how this relationship holds true across just about every developed industrial nation during the 20th century.

Birth Control: They also suggest a couple of specific reasons for a decline in birth rates over the past 40 or so years; firstly, the increased availability and reliability of **contraception** (the female contraceptive pill, for example, entered mainstream use in the mid 1960s) and, secondly, the legalisation of **abortion** (available free and on demand under the National Health Service) in 1967. For **Botting and Dunnell** (2000), legal abortions have “contributed to the falling birth rates” amongst various age groups. Over the past 25 years, for example, 35% of all conceptions for the 18 - 19 age group ended in terminations. Overall, around 20% of all conceptions are currently legally terminated. Although birth control techniques are significant reasons for the declining birth rate they don’t, of course, explain why people want to limit the size of their family in the first place.

To explain this, therefore, we need to note a further set of explanations.

Lifestyle Choices and Changes

One feature of the latter part of the 20th century, as **Abercrombie and Warde** (2000) note, has been an increased female participation in the workforce, both as part of what the **Rapoport and Rapoport** (1969) termed “**dual-career families**” - both adult partners being economically active at the same time and

therefore contributing *dual incomes* to the household / family – and as **single career** men and women.

Part of this changing economic process involves a delay in the average age of 1st marriage and a consequent delay in conception and childbirth. This, as the **Office for National Statistics** (2005) notes, involves a change in fertility patterns: “In 2004, for the first time, the fertility rate of women aged 30-34 overtook that of women aged 25-29”. This trend towards “later family formation” goes part-way to explaining a general decline in birth rates (given that women have a limited fertility span - usually estimated, for official statistical purposes, at ending around 45 years of age – and are unlikely to have large families during their 30s / early 40s).

Childbirth within marriage is, of course, only part of the story; as **Self and Zealey** (2007) note, 42% of UK live births now take place *outside marriage* (to single or cohabiting parents) and these statistics tell us little or nothing about why the general birth rate has remained low. We need, therefore, to consider a further reason:

Childlessness: An interesting feature of modern households is both the number of childless individuals / couples and the general increase in childlessness over the past half century (as evidenced by the following table):

Childless Women	
Source: Adapted from Self and Zealey (2007) and Summerfield and Babb (2004)	
Year	Percentage childless at age 25
1969	11
1975	12
1995	25
2000	25

Self and Zealey (2007) note that “The proportion of women reaching the end of their childbearing years (age 45) who remained childless” rose from 11% in 1985 to 18% in 2005 and **McAllister and Clarke** (1998) identified two main reasons that help explain why people “choose childlessness” (and perhaps provide further pointers to understanding why women are having fewer children):

1. Risk: “People choosing lives without children held conventional views about partnerships and parenting - but were averse to taking risks”. This idea, in turn, was related to a couple of further points:

- **Life course:** “For women living alone, single parenthood was not considered a viable option” and highly qualified career 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.



2. Financial Pressures: When we think about concepts like risk and security we are perhaps getting closer to explaining both current birth rates and, by extension, the trend towards smaller family sizes. A significant consideration here is the:

Cost of children, summarised by the studies in the following table:

Average Cost of Children: Selected Studies	
Study	£ per week per child
Davies and Joshi (1999)	117
Family Expenditure Survey (2000)	52
Pregnancy and Birth magazine (2001)	64
Middleton et al (2002)	49

Although these figures raise questions of both reliability and comparability (different costs are included and excluded by different studies), they do, perhaps, give us a general view of potential childcare costs – and while it’s arguable as to whether potential parents rationally calculate the “costs of children” in any specific way, they will have, at the very least, a general picture of costs in a couple of areas:

Education: The introduction of compulsory education post-1944 added to childcare costs by extending the period of “childhood dependency” (the school leaving age was raised to 16 in 1972). It also meant restrictions were placed on the economic activity (and income) of children. More recently, the introduction of University tuition fees has added to (mainly middle and upper class) family costs.

When looking at how something like “childcare costs” are calculated by different studies we always need to ask whether “like is being compared with like” (a reliability problem) - in other words, do different studies include the different costs under “childcare”?

Work: One parent is effectively removed from paid work during pregnancy and pre-school child development (although both private and state nursery care is available, the cost of such care has to be off-set against the earning power of the parent).

Aside from the general “costs of children” **Grenham** (1995) notes a couple of additional child-related factors in the explanation for declining birth rates and family size.

Firstly, he argues, contemporary families have “Less need for children as a protection against old age and illness” and, secondly, for many families there is a competitive trade-off between having children and maintaining a higher general standard of living.



New car or new child?

In other words, the money that would have been spent on raising children is available to spend on consumer goods and services instead and in dual-income families the decision to have a child potentially means the loss of one partner’s income. We could also note **Tiffen and Gittins’** (2004) argument that many women now have different *aspirations* to both their mothers and grandmothers, in the sense they are less likely to accept personal and social identities built around the home and motherhood.

Finally, the explanations for declining birth rates we’ve just outlined are framed in terms of the various ways people *act* (such as using contraception or wanting to maintain a particular lifestyle and living standard) or *react* (the experience of life during wartime, for example). An alternative reason for this phenomenon can be framed in terms of the historical characteristics of successive:

Birth cohorts: We can relate the idea of childlessness to the fact of increased life expectancy for both men and women. Where (crude) birth rates are calculated as an average for all women, **Tiffen and Gittins** (2004) note that if “a higher proportion of the population live well beyond the normal childbearing years of 15–45, the birth rate falls for that reason alone”. Similarly, **Johnson** (1993) points-out that a decline in the birth rate for any given birth cohort (“a group of people born in a given year”) has a cumulative effect - successive birth cohorts are smaller than the one before. The effect, he suggests, “is for the number of...children in society to decline, followed by the number of young adults as the lower fertility rate works its way up the age structure”.

In other words long-term birth rate decline, although affected by short-term factors such as **war** or **population migration** (**Office for National Statistics** (2005) figures show around 20% of births in England

and Wales are currently to mothers born outside the UK – the birth rate would be significantly lower than it currently stands without this intervening variable) is an almost automatic consequence of an original birth rate decline.

Death Trends

As with birth rates, the general trend in the UK throughout the 20th century has been for a *decline* in death rates. While **macro events** like the 1st and 2nd World War increased the general death rate at various points, **Chamberlain and Gill** (2005) argue that the stability of **crude death rates** (defined by **Grenham** (1995) as “the number of deaths in a year expressed as a percentage of the average population”) is a consequence of two basic factors: Firstly the aforementioned increase in the size of the population and, secondly, “the decline in mortality and its increasing concentration at older ages”.

Penneck and Lewis (2005) note two distinct phases in the age distribution of death rates throughout the 20th century.

Firstly, by the end of the century many more people are surviving into their 60s and secondly, far higher numbers are now surviving into “later old age”:

Average Life Expectancy (years) at Birth by Sex

Source: **Self and Zealey** (2007)

Year	Male	Female
1901	34	49
1951	64	70
1981	72	78
2001	77	81

We can outline reasons for this general trend in terms of two, not necessarily unrelated, broad categories (medicine and public health).

Medicine and Health Care

Self and Zealey (2007) note that “developments in medical technology and practice” help to explain declining death rates and it’s possible to identify examples of medical developments that have improved people’s chances of both staying alive and enjoying a relatively long life span. These include:

Vaccination against diseases like polio and diphtheria that steadily reduced their death toll amongst infants and children. In 1913, for example, the **Department of Health** (2004) notes there were around 8,000 deaths attributed to diphtheria; over the past 20 years it has caused just 2 deaths.

Medicines: The development of antibiotics, for example.

Practices: Developments in surgery (such as heart by-pass operations) have meant those who would, in former times, have died can continue to lead a relatively active life.

Prevention: **Penneck and Lewis** (2005) argue that “In the first half of the 20th century, advances in the prevention of infectious and respiratory diseases led to a great reduction in infant and child mortality” – something confirmed by the following table:

UK Infant Mortality: rates per 1,000 live births
Source: **Self and Zealey** (2007)

Year	Rate
1921	84
1945	49
1956	25
2005	05

Self and Zealey (2007) attribute the fall in infant mortality rates – “one of the major factors contributing to an overall increase in life expectancy” – to three “areas of improvement”:

- Diet and Sanitation.
- Antenatal, postnatal and medical care.
- Vaccines and immunisation programmes.

Module Link Stratification and Differentiation
An interesting point to note here is that despite the National Health Service and the provision of free health care “on demand”, major inequalities still persist in infant mortality rates between *social classes*:

UK Infant Mortality rates per 1,000 live births, 2005
Source: **Self and Zealey** (2007)

Occupational Class	Rate
Class 1: Large employers / higher managerial occupations	3
Class 5: Routine occupations	6
All occupations	5

Public Health Measures

While advances in medicine and health care are clearly significant, of arguably more value in terms of increasing general levels of life expectancy are a raft of improvements in the **physical environment**. Examples here include:

- **Housing** - such as slum clearance and the development of cheap, good quality, public housing after the 2nd World War.
- **Public sanitation** - this includes, for example, steps to ensure public exposure to sewage / waste is minimised as well as things like ensuring people understand basic sanitation principles (how, for example, disease can be spread by unsanitary practices).
- **Sewage / waste disposal** - including improvements in the treatment of sewage / waste.



• **Clean water:** The **Department of Health** (2004) suggests that, over the past century, “the two most significant contributions to better health have been clean water supplies and vaccines”.

To this general list we could also add things like the development of the **Welfare State** (post-1944) and its provision for a:

- **National Health Service** involving an integrated network of General Practitioners and hospitals.
- **National Insurance and Pension** provisions that ensured some level of financial security for the retired.

Module Link Wealth, Poverty and Welfare
To explore developments in the Welfare State in more detail, see the section on “**Welfare Provision**”

Lifestyle Choices and Changes

Towards the end of the 20th century we can note subtle, but significant, developments in these areas in the sense that there is a greater awareness and recognition of a range of “behaviours” that contribute to both individual health and longevity. Examples here include:

Smoking: **Penneck and Lewis** (2005), for example, note the “dramatic reduction in death from circulatory diseases (in part caused by the decline in smoking)”.



Cleaner air: The **Clean Air Acts** (1956 and 1993), for example, placed restrictions on smoke emissions (both from private and industrial premises).

Health Education – a greater awareness, for example, of the importance of balanced diets, daily fruit and vegetable intakes, limits on alcohol intake and the like.

Finally, a couple of significant ideas we need to note in the context of death rates are:

Poverty: The poor generally suffer greater health problems (and, as statistics for life expectancy show, die younger) than those who are not poor. The general UK trend throughout the 20th century has been for the population, on average, to experience higher levels of affluence and, in consequence, there were fewer people living in desperate poverty at the end of the century than at the beginning. We would, therefore, expect to see a decline in death rates to reflect the fact fewer people suffered the life-threatening effects of poverty.

Affluence: On the other hand, increasing *prosperity* brings into play a different range of life-threatening problems – **obesity**, for example, is now a major cause of premature death in the UK (around 30,000 people die each year from health problems related to obesity).

Thus far we've examined birth and death rates in relative isolation from each other and while it's possible to see falling birth and death rates as unconnected, it's also possible to suggest this relationship (or **correlation**) is not coincidental; in other words, to argue that changes in *both* are related to wider processes of **social change** – an idea that is given some credence by the fact that this phenomenon is not unique to the UK.

As **Tiffen and Gittins** (2004) demonstrate, the trend throughout the industrialised nations of the world (Western Europe, Scandinavia, Japan, Australia, the United States and so forth) during the 20th century has been consistently the same: falling birth, death and fertility rates coupled with rising life expectancy.

Demographic Transition

Although a range of different interpretations of this theory exist we can, for the sake of convenience focus on **Notestein's** (1945) contention that the historical development of any society is characterised, as **Newson et al** (2005) put it, "by a progression from high mortality and high fertility to low mortality and low fertility". In other words,

demographic transition theory suggests the trends we've identified are part and parcel of a *general demographic change* that occurs in the transition between four basic social stages in a society's historical development:

Stage 1:
Pre-industrial (or *pre-modern*) society transforms into:

Stage 2:
Early industrial (or *early-modern*) society transforms into:

Stage 3:
Late industrial (or *late-modern*) society transforms into:

Stage 4:
Post-industrial (or *postmodern*) society.

Types of Society (Britain): Selected Characteristics

	Pre-Modern	Early-Late Modern	Post-Modern
Time Scale	Pre-16 th century	16 th - late 20 th century	Late-20 th century to present
Main Economic Activity	Pre-industrial (Agricultural)	Industrial (Machine-based mass production)	Post-industrial (Goods and services)
Scale	Local	National / International	Global

Broad social transitions in UK society: Mid-16th to 21st century

The following table demonstrates how, according to **McFalls** (2003) birth, death and population rates correlate with the above stages across all industrialised nations.

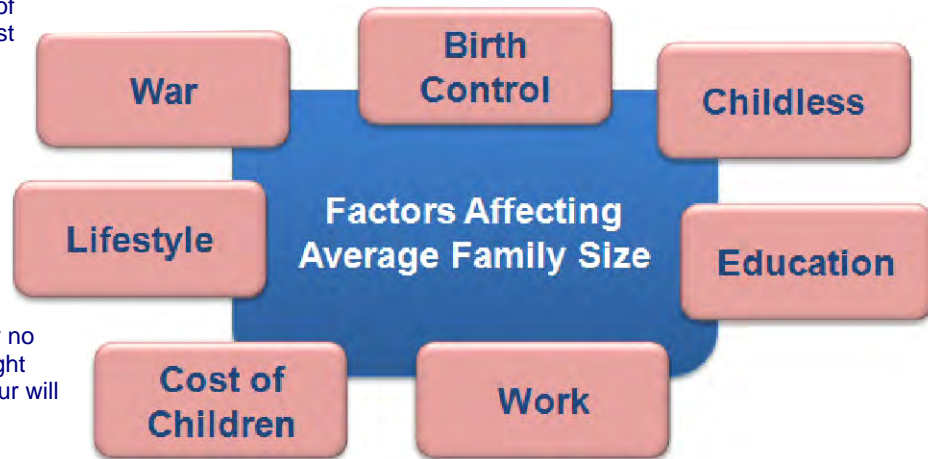
Demographic Transitions: All Industrialised Countries
Source: **McFalls** (2003)

	Birth rate	Death rate	Population
Stage 1	High	High	Low
Stage 2	High	Falling Rapidly	Growing
Stage 3	Falling	Low	Increasing
Stage 4	Low	Low	High

In terms of the general theory, a key variable here is:

Industrialisation - a process whereby machines (*mechanisation*) are extensively applied to the production of high volumes of consumer goods. One result of this process is the development of factories and the ability to *mass produce* consumer goods (such as clothes or cars). Industrialisation, therefore, is seen to be the initial “motor of social change” (it effectively drives the *process of change*).

As **McFalls** (2003), for example, argues: “Most societies eagerly accept technological and medical innovations, as well as other aspects of modernization, because of their obvious utility against the universal enemy: death... Social attitudes, such as the high value attached to having many children, are slower to change. It can take generations for people accustomed to high childhood mortality to recognize that low mortality means that they no longer need to have eight children to ensure that four will survive to adulthood”.



Birth Control: The availability of cheap and reliable contraception allows limits to be placed on family size.

Lifestyle choices and changes: For example, increased female participation in the workforce has meant less time being given to the development of large families.

Childlessness: Where large numbers remain childless, this has an impact on average family size.

Cost of children: Part of the decision to limit family size relates to the cost of raising children, especially in the light of:

Family Size Trends

We can start the final part of this section by noting an obvious relationship between falling birth and death rates and family size. The former, for example, suggests a decline in average family size for completed families, while for the latter “family size” relates more to the long-term survival of its members as a relational group; that is, for example, the contemporary survival of grandparents into an increasingly-lengthy old age means they contribute, in some way, to the overall size of families in the UK (in a way they did not in, say, the 18th century, where life expectancy was much lower than it is today).

In terms of explaining why family size in the UK (and the majority of the developed world) has declined over the past century **Self and Zealey** (2007) provide a neat summary when they suggest the following “contribute to the trend of smaller families”:

- Changing attitudes to family sizes.
- Delayed entry into marriage or cohabitation.
- Increased female participation in education and the labour market.

More specifically, we can note how many of the factors affecting birth rates also play greater or lesser parts in limiting average family size:

War: In the UK, for example, average family size declined slightly during the 2nd World War and increased during the post war “baby boom”.

Education: The period of “dependent childhood” being lengthened by changes to the education system.

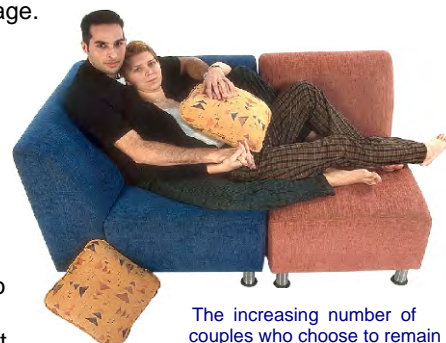
Work: Limits on when and where children can work contributes to both the lengthening of childhood and the economic effectiveness of children. Whereas in the past children contributed to family income, in the contemporary UK they are far more likely to represent a drain on that income.

Theories

We can complete this Section by picking-up on some of these ideas and outlining a selection of general theories that have been advanced to explain the decline in average family size in the UK during the 20th century.

Wealth Flow theory: The general idea here is that the decision to have children (and how many) is sensitive to both the specific *economic circumstances* of a family group and a wider sense of economic advantage or disadvantage.

Caldwell (1976), for example, suggests the general outcome of the transition from agricultural to industrial society is that children come to be seen as less of an economic



The increasing number of couples who choose to remain childless in our society has contributed significantly to a decline in average family size.

asset (through their ability to work) and more as an economic *liability*. In basic terms, therefore, where wider economic and social changes turn children from a source of wealth (flowing from the child to the parent) into a drain on family resources (family wealth flowing from adults to children) people take the **rational decision** to limit the number of children they produce.

Related to this general theory, albeit in a way that argues rational decisions about family size are taken in the light of a slightly different set of economic and social considerations, is the idea of:

Optimal Investment: This proposes that decisions are made on the basis of a “cost / benefit” analysis that takes account of both *economic factors* (the likely costs of raising a child set against benefits that might accrue to the family through the productive work a child might do) and *social / psychological factors* (such as the comfort and care – or simply pleasure – family members derive from the presence of children). Calculations over family size, therefore, are influenced by factors such as:

- **Psychic income:** According to **Becker** (1991) the *psychological pleasures* to be gained from children potentially increase their demand (the more children, the greater the psychic income accruing to parents). However, the increased economic costs of children means parents “limit their investment” by producing a smaller number in whom they invest a great deal of time, money and effort.

Consumption choices: **Newson et al** (2005) note that (potential) parents now have a greater range of consumption choices, such that “**They can compare the costs and benefits of a child with those of, for example, a new car. As the range of opportunities to acquire consumer durables increases, there is a decline in the relative importance of children in the range of goods to choose from**”.

Support Networks: **Sear et al** (2003) argue modern families increasingly lack the **kin support networks** (relationships with people such as grandparents, aunts and uncles) that potentially provide the resources - a grandparent looking after children while both parents work, for example - to allow for larger families. **Anderson** (1989), however, disputes the idea kin relationships have declined throughout the 20th century (he argues that despite smaller family sizes “**lower mortality meant that adults would have had roughly the same number of brothers and sisters alive**” now as in the past). He further argues that, in the late 19th / early 20th centuries, “**those on whom demographic fortune shone favourably had much larger kinship universes than almost anyone alive in Britain today**”.

However, the key variable here is probably the *quality* of those relationships and **Luscher** (2000) uses the concept of **ambivalence** (“uncertainty”) to suggest that in the light of family changes over the past 40 or so years – such as increased rates of cohabitation – people are increasingly reluctant to either commit to having children with their partner or they limit the number of children in case of family breakdown.

Status Objects: The general idea here is that parents - consciously or otherwise – view children (partly) as measures of their own status; the success of children in their subsequent adult lives reflects back on parents who use this as a means of measuring their own self-worth. Family size is consciously limited to make the greatest possible economic and emotional investment in a small number of children. An alternative, related, explanation here is:



Are children more-likely to be an economic liability to their families than in the past?

Elite self recruitment: In modern societies parents (especially wealthy ones) invest financial resources in their offspring (through things like private education or loans to help establish a home, business or career) to ensure sons and daughters are recruited into the same, or higher, occupational levels. While writers such as **Nicholas** (1999) have tracked the way “a high status

education precipitated unequal access to leading business positions”, **Reay** (2000) has noted how middle and upper class parents invest large amounts of time and effort (*emotional labour*) in their children’s education to try to ensure educational success.

Prestige Influence theory: A final explanation to consider focuses on the idea that the behaviour of those “lower down the social scale” is influenced by the behaviour of those at the top. Thus, as the industrialisation process generally took hold in the UK the initially most successful entrepreneurial families (the middle classes) were seen to gain status and wealth through investment in both the education and future work roles (such as the developing managerial professions) of their children– and this investment meant, as we’ve suggested, smaller family sizes amongst this class. For those lower down the social scale there was, so the argument goes, a gradual realisation that improved **life chances** for their offspring came from imitating the behaviour of their economically successful counterparts.

Tried and Tested

- Explain what is meant by “demographic trend” (2 marks).
- Suggest **two** ways lifestyle choices may affect death rates (4 marks).
- Suggest **three** reasons for the changes in birth rates during the 20th century (6 marks).
- Examine explanations for the change in average UK family size over the past 50 years (24 marks).
- Assess the view that demographic changes are the result of structural changes in UK society (24 marks).

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