



**A/S Level
Study
Pack**



**Craig
Chester**

4: The Diversity of Contemporary Family and Household Structures

(4e): Other Household Structures

Key Concepts

SPINSTER / BACHELOR: An unmarried woman / an unmarried man.

PREDOMINANT IDEOLOGIES: similar to views expressed by writers who have focused on *heterosexual ideology* and *patriarchal ideology*. Specifically, predominant ideologies define what is *normal* (e.g. getting married) or *abnormal* (e.g. living alone).

KIPPERS: Kids in parent's pockets eroding retirement savings – adults that never leave home.

BOOMERANGS: Adults that move in and out of their parent's home as their circumstances change, e.g. they return from university.

Introduction

Such is the grip that the ideology of the nuclear family has over society that when we think of families and households we almost instinctively imagine mum, dad and the two kids sharing the family home. We have already shown how this assumption does not reflect the reality of contemporary family diversity (e.g. number of cohabiting couples). However, further analysis shows that it is also wrong to assume that all households contain families or that all families are based around heterosexual relationships. In this section we will, therefore, examine some other household structures that can be found in contemporary Britain. Namely: flat sharers; gay and lesbian homes and those who live alone.



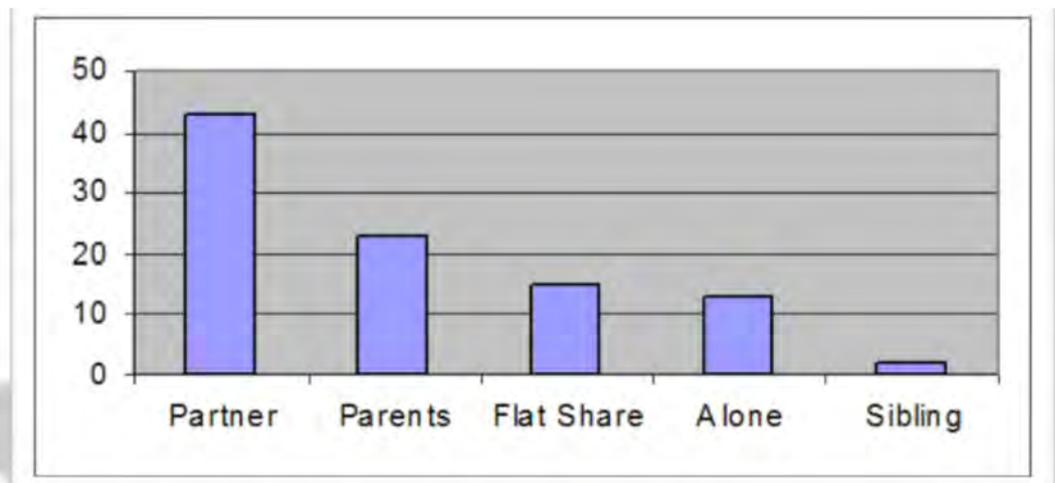
Key Theorists

Writer	Structure	Comment
Bernardes	Living alone	The stigma of living alone is disappearing so more people do so!
Heath	Flat sharing	Product of economic realities and the desire to live with others
Weeks et al.	Gay / lesbian families	As homophobic attitudes decline people have the confidence to express their sexuality - creating gay / lesbian family units

Summary

Jon Bernardes: In the English language the term *spinster* conjured up all sorts of negative connotations (wicked witch or frigid) where as its male equivalent *bachelor* implied a young sexually active male. Both of these terms implied deviation from an expected stage in the life course (adults should get married) reflecting the *predominant ideologies* of society. However, statistics now reveal that the percentage of people living alone (not including OAPs who may have become widow/widowers) has risen from 4% of households (1961) to 15% (2002). There are many reasons for this trend e.g. the rise in divorce rates. However, Bernardes suggests that what is deemed normal or abnormal may be changing and that living alone is increasingly becoming accepted as a lifestyle choice rather than a source of deviance

Sue Heath: Her work has certain similarities with **Beck's risk society**. Heath acknowledges that the today's young people do not tend to move directly from the family home into their marital homes as those in previous generations generally did. Therefore, this creates doubt and uncertainty in the minds of young adults – how are the supposed to live? In 2002, YouGov commissioned a survey of 1000 people aged between 20 and 30 to find out about their living arrangements in response to this question - the results of which are represented by the attached graph. Some never leave home and are referred to by market researchers as *kippers*. Others move in and out of their parent's house as their circumstances change – *boomerangs*. In the current climate of high house prices it is unlikely that they will become an owner-occupier. Therefore, an increasingly common response is to become a *flat sharer*. Heath found that this allowed young people to have the benefits of being in a family unit (love, support, friendship and encouragement)



without the hassle of living with your relatives! This household structure has become glamorized by TV shows such as *Friends* and *This Life*. Although flat sharing is unlikely to be a permanent living arrangement, it is important to recognize that an increasingly large number of people will spend some part of their lives as a flat sharer.

Weeks et al: The too claim that life in postmodern society is characterised by our ability to make choices. In previous generations, such was the extent of homophobia that many gay people denied their true sexuality and entered into sham marriages. Fortunately, attitudes have changed and this is demonstrated by the passing of the 2004 Civil Partnerships Bill (allowing “gay weddings”).



Weeks et al. argue that many gay and lesbian people have the power to create a family that reflects their needs. For example, a gay person may adopt a child and then his partner may apply to become a legal guardian of that child. This has obvious similarities with the ideas of **Calhoun** and **Giddens** about choice in the postmodern age. Moreover, the number of gay families with children is bound to rise with the increased availability of IVF treatment.

Evaluation

Any consideration of contemporary family diversity can no longer ignore these household structures because it is clear that more and more people live in them.

The key question is then to what extent do these household types contribute to the creation of this phenomenon? It is impossible to tell how many of those who live alone or flat share would prefer to live - or will end up living - in a nuclear family structure at some point in their lives. These structures may simply reflect the stage of the **life course** that these people are at, as opposed to a distinctive choice.



Similarly, although most people are happy to see gay people being given more equal rights it is rather naïve to assume that they will ever comprise more than a small minority of the population. Therefore, it would seem that although we cannot ignore other household structures it would be wrong to assume that they are a main factor in contemporary family diversity.

20 Questions

1. What is the difference between a family and a household?
2. What two words are used to describe an unmarried man and woman respectively?
3. Explain what is meant by a kipper
4. Identify three reasons why young adults may boomerang back and forth from their parents home
5. Explain the difference in perception of a bachelor and a spinster in the eyes of members of society
6. What proportion of people now lives alone?
7. What conclusion does Bernardes draw?
8. Whose earlier work has similarities with those of Heath?
9. What are today's young people unlikely to do?
10. Why is it increasingly unlikely that young people become owner-occupiers?
11. Apart from flat-sharing, what other options do single young people have?
12. What benefits do young people gain from being a flat-sharer?
13. Is flat-sharing likely to be a permanent arrangement?
14. What is postmodern society characterised by?
15. What were gay and lesbian people forced to do in previous generations?
16. What law demonstrates modern attitudes towards gay and lesbian couples?
17. What can a gay couple now do?
18. Whose earlier work has similarities with those of Week et al.?
19. Why is the number of gay / lesbian couples with children likely to increase in the near future?
20. Explain why these modern household structures are not the main cause of contemporary diversity? (1 sentence)



