



**A/S Level
Study
Pack**



**Craig
Chester**

4: The Diversity of Contemporary Family and Household Structures

(4f): Ethnicity and Family Structure

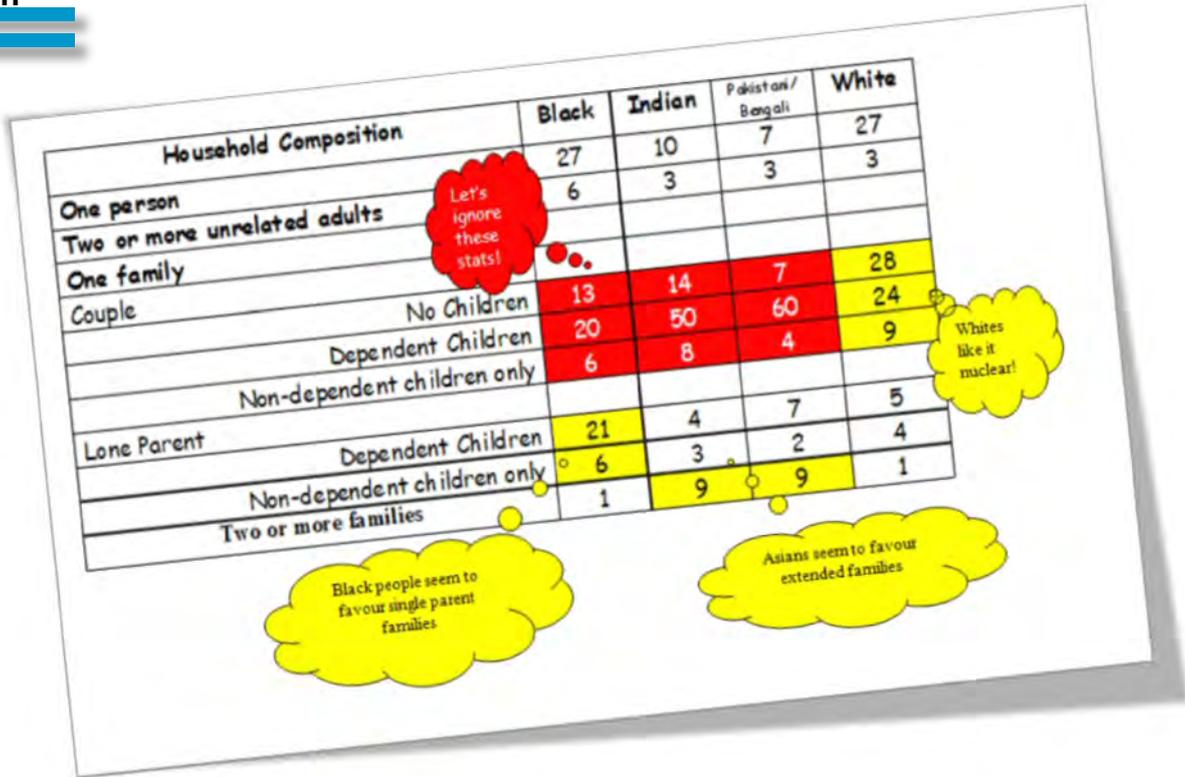
Key Concepts

Ethnicity: the notion that there are certain cultural and religious factors that provide groups of people with a distinct identity from other people may come from the same racial group, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland

Culturally Specific Family Structures: the belief that within a society that the people of the various ethnicities will have their own definitions of what constitutes a family.

Interethnic Families: Families with members from different ethnicities.

Introduction



The issue of diversity of family structure is often linked to the arrival of ethnic minority groups into Britain. Many contend that immigrants retain the family form that is associated with their ethnicity. Just as the nuclear family is *normal* to WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) other peoples have their own **culturally specific**

family structures. E.g. the extended family is thought to be dominant in the Mediterranean region and, therefore, it is often assumed that UK Italian households would contain grandparents and other relatives.



Consequently, sociologists have examined whether, or not, ethnicity is a factor that can be used to explain contemporary family diversity. More interestingly, interethnic relationships are no longer the subject of crass TV shows and are now increasingly common phenomena. Therefore, some might argue that the whole debate is irrelevant in post-millennium Britain.

Key Theorists

| Writer | Structure | Comment |
|---------------------|----------------|--|
| Ballard | South Asian | Ethnicity is a causal factor in family diversity |
| Westwood and Bhachu | South Asian | Ethnicity is not a causal factor in family diversity |
| Barrow | Afro-Caribbean | Ethnicity is a causal factor in family diversity |
| Phoenix | Afro-Caribbean | Ethnicity is not a causal factor in family diversity |
| Ali | Interethnic | Individuals can choose their ethnicity, therefore, it is pointless considering it to be a factor in family diversity |

Summary

Roger Ballard: His analysis begins with a description of the typical South Asian family in India: It was both horizontally and vertically extended with the paternal grandfather being the head of household. Many of these families came to England in the 1950's, however, because of the comparatively small size of our houses, such **co-residence** was not a viable option and average family size decreased. In spite of this change,

Ballard contends that South Asians have retained many of their traditional beliefs as regards family and marriage. For example, many young Indians (born and bred here) still believe in **arranged marriages** and that close links are maintained with other kin (even with family members who still reside in South Asia). Ballard concludes that the South Asians have retained elements of their traditional family structures that make it distinct and different from a British nuclear family. Recent research by Ghazala **Bhatti** reached similar conclusions to those of **Ballard**.

Westwood and Bhachu: A central feature of their approach is to question the assumption that one can generalise about the South Asian family. People included in this group originate from a variety of places (e.g. East Africa or Bangladesh) and have diverse religious beliefs (such as Sikhs or Muslims). Consequently, it is logical to assume that each of the above groups will have a family structure that is specific to their ethnicity. **Westwood and Bhachu** agree with **Ballard** in that they recognise that although families are becoming more nuclear, in terms of their overall structure, that **"the commitment to extended family members remains"** and, therefore, South Asian families are distinct from the modern British family. Nevertheless, these findings show similarities with the white working-class family of the 1950's as outlined by **Young and Willmott**. In conclusion, **Westwood and Bhachu** state that there is a plurality of family



structures in both British and South Asian families. However, this should not be a surprise because Indians and Pakistanis living here are British! This emphasis on ethnicity and family structure is divisive because it creates an artificial difference between whites and South Asians.

Jocelyn Barrow: The stereotypical image of the Afro-Caribbean family is of a lone mother with her dependent children. Indeed, statistics reveal that some 50% of West Indian children are reared in single parent families (2000). **Barrow** argues that this is a product of black immigrants replicating the *mother-centred family* which is a common family structure in the Caribbean. However, British mother-centred families cannot obtain the same degree of support from other kin, so *informal non-kinship based networks* (friends and neighbours) have developed in West Indian communities to help them. Moreover, **Barrow** contends that a plurality of family structures exist (e.g. nuclear families) in both the Caribbean and the U.K., therefore, it is wrong to over-generalize about Afro-Caribbean families.



Ann Phoenix: In a similar vein to **Westwood and Bhachu**, **Phoenix** argues the view that UK Afro-Caribbean families adopt West Indian kinship patterns is flawed. The vast majority of Afro-Caribbeans are 2nd or 3rd generation and, consequently, have no direct experience of life in the West Indies. **Phoenix** argues that by emphasising the supposed differences between white British and Afro-Caribbean families nurtures the idea that black people do not belong here. Moreover, she contends that working class Afro-Caribbeans have more with the white working classes than middle class West Indians. She argues that there is considerable diversity within British families irrespective of their ethnicity. In conclusion, **Phoenix** states that it is wrong to create a special category of family, *the Afro-Caribbean family*, rather sociologists should focus upon the structural factors that artificially divide us (e.g. social class) and determine their effect on the family.



Suki Ali: Her analysis works as a critique of the belief that being socialized into an ethnicity shapes the way we live our lives as advocated by **Ballard**. **Ali** argues that in postmodernity we can choose how we wish to define our cultural identities e.g. a third generation Kenyan Asian may call themselves Indian even though neither they nor their family have lived in India for over 100 years! In addition to this, the increasing number of people who live in *interethnic families* has further

blurred the definition notions of cultural identity. It is estimated that 26% of black Caribbean men and 25% of Chinese women have a white partner (1991 Census data). Therefore, she is highly critical of those who see ethnicity as a factor in contemporary family diversity as no one is able to accurately define and group people by this variable. She is an awkwarder!

Evaluation

Ethnic minorities account for approximately 8% of the British population. Therefore, if as **Barrow** claims different ethnic groups have culturally specific family structures then it would clearly be a causal factor in contemporary family diversity.

However, as revealed by **Social Trends** 1994, there is considerable diversity of family structure within ethnic groups and, therefore, it may be inaccurate to claim that Indians are culturally predisposed to live in extended households.



Ali's research into interethnic families also casts doubt on this question showing that mixed relationships are becoming increasingly normal.

In conclusion, we can see that even though cultural variations may impact on family life other factors such as divorce are more significant as causal explanations of family diversity.



20 Questions

1. Explain what is meant by culturally specific family structures
2. How does Ballard start his analysis?
3. Explain what is meant by co-residence
4. What elements of the UK Asian family still reflect family life in India?
5. According to Westwood and Bhachu, why was Ballard flawed?
6. According to Westwood and Bhachu, why was Ballard correct?
7. Whose earlier analysis of white working class families had similarities to that of Ballard & Westwood and Bhachu?
8. Why is it not a surprise that these similarities occur?
9. Which ethnic group did Barrow analyse?
10. Explain what is meant by the mother-centre family
11. Who do British black women turn to for help and support rather than members of their own family?
12. What cautionary note did Barrow conclude by stating?
13. What assumption did Phoenix state was flawed?
14. What might happen if sociologists continued to stress the differences between blacks and whites?
15. Who does Phoenix believe has most in common with working class black families?
16. Who does Phoenix believe has least in common with working class black families?
17. According to Barrow, what factor is more divisive class or ethnicity in society?
18. According to Ali, what can we increasingly do in our postmodern age?
19. Explain what is meant by interethnic families?
20. What belief does the rise in the number of interethnic families seriously undermine?



