

Sociology

Unit B672 (Socialisation, Culture and Identity) Revision

Sociology of the Family

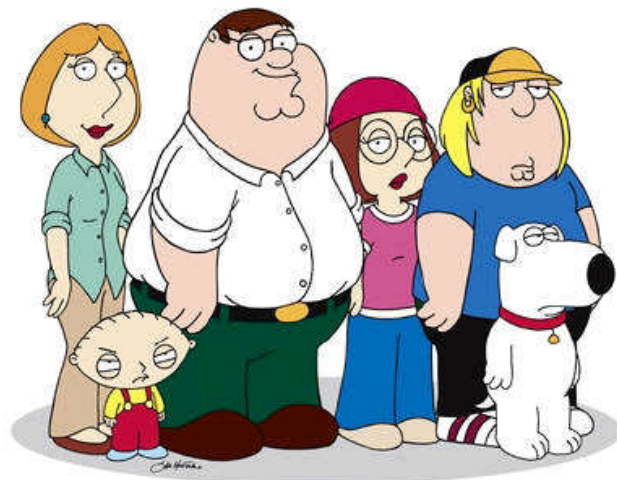
Part 1- Family and Identity

At some stage in our lives most of us will live in a family unit. This is why the family is very significant in our society. However, even though we are likely to have personal experience of family life, this does not mean that it is an easy topic for sociologists to study. This is because we can all experience difficulty in separating the facts about families from our own experience of them and our own personal beliefs about them.

What is the family?

Initially, the answer to this question might seem obvious. One possible-- but very narrow-- definition of the family is that it consists of a married couple and their children who all live together. Once we begin to probe this definition, however, the task of defining the family becomes much more difficult.

When we begin to look more closely at the idea of the family, the picture becomes much more complicated. It is very difficult to devise an adequate definition which includes all of the possible variations. Sociologists disagree on how to define a family. Some prefer to use the term “families” rather than “the family”, recognising that a variety of different household arrangements and family types exist in modern Britain.



How do sociologists approach the study of families and family life?

Our identity is shaped by our experiences in society and the people with whom we come into contact. The way others see us influences how we see ourselves.

Most of us are involved in, and are influenced by, many different groups in society. These groups (family, school, religion, peers, the mass media and

workplace) are **agents of socialisation** (teaching us society's culture) and **agents of social control** (controlling our behaviour).

“The family is the most important agent of socialisation.” Evaluate the arguments for and against this claim. [24]

In each group to which we belong, we learn to play different social roles. Some **roles** we can choose (such as being a parent), whilst others (such as daughter or son) are simply given to us. It is these **achieved roles** and **ascribed roles** which become an important part of our identity. The families we belong to can have a big effect on our identity.

Identify and explain two ways that families act as agents of social control. [8]

Some sociologists believe that the family plays an important role because it performs a number of essential **functions**, both for individuals and for society as a whole. This view, known as the **consensus** or **functionalist** approach, starts off from the assumption that people and society have basic needs that must be met if society is to function smoothly.

Functionalists identify four main functions of the family. These are reproduction, primary socialisation, emotional gratification and economic provision:

- **Reproduction:** Society obviously needs new members if it is to survive. The family has an important role in **procreation** and **childbearing**. The family reproduces the human rights and the future workforce. Sometimes families also help to regulate adult sexual behaviour. This is because the nuclear family in particular is based on **monogamy** (a relationship between two individuals-- a man and a woman). Consequently, marry people are expected to have only one sexual partner, and extramarital sex is viewed with disapproval.
- **Primary Socialisation:** Society needs to ensure that new members will support its **norms and values**. Through the primary socialisation process, which takes place within the family, we learn the culture and way of life of our society. In so doing, we learn how to fit in and how to conform. In this way, the family also acts as an agency of social control. The effects of not having undergone a process of primary socialisation are very serious.
- **Emotional Gratification and Nurture:** most of us need stable relationships with, and support from, other people. The family supplies



us with emotional and psychological support and comfort. It is a place of safety and security.

- **Economic Provision:** we all need financial support, food and shelter, particularly if we are young, elderly or sick. The family meets these needs.

Identify and explain two functions of the family. [8]

Living without culture- a case study-

Feral or “wild” children are those who, for whatever reason, are not brought up by humans. One famous example of feral children is that of two infant girls who were lost in the jungle in India in about 1918. The girls had been found living with wolves, in a cave-like den. The older girl was perhaps 6 or 7 years old and the other, who died a year later, perhaps a year younger.

When captured the girls were like animals. They were naked and ran in a sort of stooped crouch. They were afraid of artificial light. They were afraid of humans and kept a good distance. They did not display any characteristically human qualities. For example, they did not use tools of any kind, not even a stick. They did not know how to make a shelter. They did not sing. They did not show any affection or attraction or curiosity to humans. But what is especially striking is that the girls used no language. They used no noises or gestures to communicate. They didn't point at things or directions, or nod their head in agreement or disagreement. They preferred to eat with the dogs in the compound, which seemed to accept them. They ate by pushing their faces into the food, the way that dogs do, and they drank by lapping from a bowl.

(Singh and Zingg, 1942 “Wolf Children and the Feral man.”)

“The most important function of the family is primary socialisation.” Evaluate the evidence for and against this claim. [24]



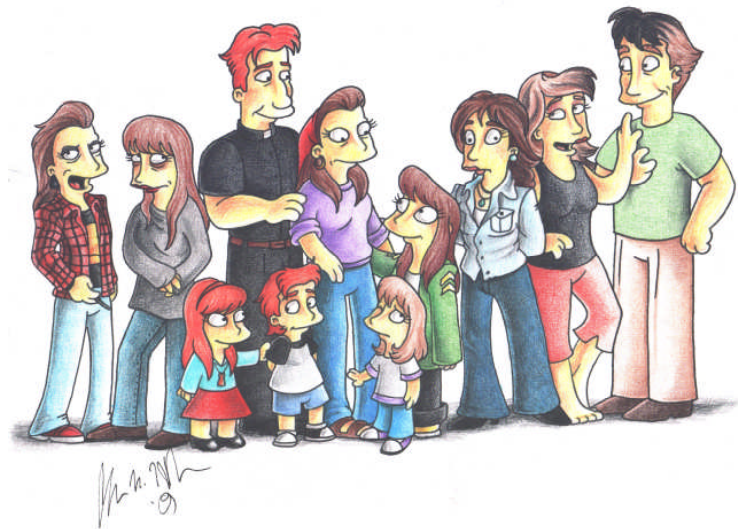
Part 2- Traditional Definitions of the Family

Nuclear and extended families

There are two basic types of family: **nuclear** and **extended**.

A **nuclear** family is one made up of an adult man, an adult woman and their dependent children. Traditionally, the man was the “**breadwinner**”, responsible for providing what the family needed to survive and prosper, while the woman was responsible for home and family. This kind of family has often been thought of as the “normal” or “typical” family.

An **extended** family contains a nuclear family, but added to it are other relatives. If there are three generations living together (grandparents, parents and children) this is a **vertically extended** family. If there are other relatives of the same generation, such as two brothers, their wives and children living together, this is a **horizontally extended** family. This kind of family has often been more common in the past than today, and more common in poor countries.



Almost everyone has extended family; nowadays though we are less likely to live with members of our extended family.

The extended family

Before the Industrial Revolution

It used to be thought that the extended family was typical of preindustrial Britain. More recently, however, sociologists and historians have rejected this view. Evidence suggests that before the Industrial Revolution there was not one main family type that existed everywhere as the norm.

- The extended family was one type of family to be found in preindustrial times. Evidence suggests that, before industrialization, many families in various parts of Europe were of the extended type.
- The nuclear family was also to be found before the Industrial Revolution. A historian named **Laslett** studied the Parish records of 100 villages in 16th to 19th century England. He argues that the average family was relatively small and that most households during this time contained an average of 4.75 people. Laslett concludes that nuclear families existed widely in preindustrial England -- in fact, they were the norm. Only 10% of households contained more kin than the nuclear family and this figure is the same as for 1966.

Laslett (1965) points out that in the period he studied the average age of brides was 24 and the average age of grooms was nearly 28. Life expectancy was in the low 30s. Few families, therefore, could live as three-generational extended families.

Early industrial families

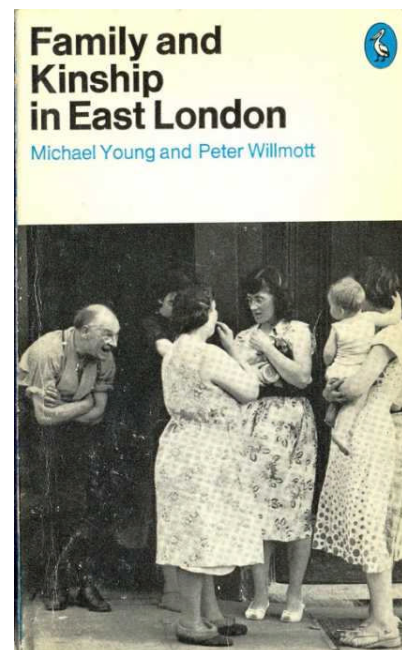
Anderson (1971) studied census data on Preston, an early industrialising cotton town in Lancashire, for the year 1851. He found that 23% of households contained kin other than from the nuclear family and that there was an increase rather than a decrease in family size at this time. This was because jobs were created in Preston's cotton industry and so relatives from the countryside migrated to the town to live with family members who were already there.

According to Anderson, it seems that working class families became more extended during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution.

The mid 20th century

Young and Willmott carried out a series of important studies of working-class families in London in the 1950s and 1960s. Their findings have added to our understanding of how families changed and developed.

Studying working-class families in **Bethnal Green** in the **East End of London** in the **1950s**, they found strong extended family networks. The extended family, built on strong relationships between married women and their mothers, was alive and well. For example 43% of daughters had seen their mothers within the last 24 hours. Women lived in the same street as all very close to their mothers, and relied on them for help and advice. The extended families were part of a strong local community.



When the East End was redeveloped, many of these families moved out to new housing estates in Essex. This broke up the extended family relationships. Women had less contact with their mothers because they lived further away and it was difficult to keep in touch. A new kind of family, the privatised nuclear family, based on a stronger bond between husband and wife, took over.

The increase in telephone and car ownership now helps people keep in touch with their relatives even if they live some distance away. There are grounds for thinking that extended family links remain strong. Extended families may live apart, but they get together for important occasions, such as Christmas, weddings and funerals. Moreover life expectancy has increased, and relatives care for many elderly people who live with them or nearby.

“The extended family is dying out.” Evaluate the arguments for and against this claim. [24]

The nuclear family

Although there have been so many changes in British family life, the nuclear family is still the type of family most often seen on television dramas and in soap operas. Advertisements also make use of the nuclear family.

As well as the media, politicians of all parties also talk a lot about “the family”. Political parties are keen to be seen as “the party of the family.” the kind of family they mean is the conventional nuclear family of the Father and husband who is the main breadwinner, the mother and wife who cares for home and family (although these days she may do some paid work as well) and one or two (but not too many) children. In advertisements the two children in this family are usually one boy and one girl, healthy, happy and white.

Sociologists argue that the media and politicians are in effect showing one particular kind of family as better than all other types of family- **the cereal packet family**. They show a stereotype, based in truth but misleading because it exaggerates the good features while not acknowledging the negative side (what we call the “**dark side**” of the family).

The stereotype contains two ideas:

- that families should be made up of father, mother and children
- that the father and mother should have different roles. It is



assumed that men are naturally better suited for the world of work, and that women are better at doing domestic work, looking after the home and family.

Functionalism

These ideas about the family are connected to a particular view within sociology, that of functionalism. For functionalists, the conventional nuclear family is the ideal family for modern society because it fits the needs of society so well, and makes the best use of men's and women's different natural abilities.

In the past, people had to rely on their families for many needs, for example to care for them when they were sick or old, to lend or give money, to teach them. And extended family then was more useful: a large family meant that there were more people to turn to. Today these functions have been taken over by, for example, doctors and hospitals, banks, schools and so on. We no longer need to be able to turn to large extended families. Modern industry also need people who can move to where there are jobs available. It is much easier to move a nuclear family to a new area than an extended one.

Although the family has lost many of its functions, it still has two important functions according to a functionalist sociologists, **Talcott Parsons**:

- The primary socialisation of children. Parents still need to teach their children the norms and values of their society, how to tell right from wrong and so on.
- The stabilisation of adult personalities. The family also provides comfort and security for example members as well as children. The second function has sometimes been called the “**warm bath**” -- the family has a warm, loving environment where the cares of the world can be washed away.



Is the nuclear family changing?

Less than a quarter of households in Britain are now couples with dependent children. This percentage has been falling slowly for many years; in **1961 it was 38%**. This suggests that the nuclear family is in decline.

A growing proportion of couples living together are not married, and a growing number of families are **reconstituted**-- that is, they are created from one or two families breaking up through separation or divorce.

Many people do spend parts of their lives in nuclear family still. If we are to the households we count as nuclear families couples before they have children, and couples after the children have grown up and are independent, then more than half of households are based on nuclear family relationships.

Another way of looking at the figures is to ask how many people are living in nuclear families at any particular time. The answer is about **40%** (if you are wondering how this can be so different from the figure of percentage of households, remember that nuclear family households on average contain more people).

The family in multicultural Britain

Minority ethnic groups who have come to live in Britain bring their own cultures and distinctive family patterns.

In many Asian communities **patrilocal extended families** are traditional. **Dench, Gavron and Young (2006)** studied family life in **Bethnal Green**. Extended families had almost disappeared from the white community, but were very common among Bangladeshis; over a quarter of Bangladeshis lived in extended family households, usually consisting of a married couple, their children and the husband's parents.



The mother-headed (**matriarchal**) household, often supported by other female relatives, has been recognised as one important family type in the West Indies. This type of family is still much more important among the Afro-Caribbean community in Britain than, for example, among Asian groups.

What can we learn about families and households from cross-cultural evidence?

Often the nuclear family is seen as normal and natural while all the family types are seen as deviant. Cross-cultural evidence, however, reminds us that different forms of family and household exist in different cultures. If we examine households around the world today, we will find a range of household organisations and personal relationships that are not based on the

nuclear family. In different cultures, people have alternative lifestyles and children are brought up in different ways.

What are some of these household arrangements?

Communes and kibbutzim (plural of kibbutz) are important examples of alternatives to the nuclear family household.

Communes

Col views were popular during the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the USA, and some still exist today. In broad terms, a commune is a group of people who share living accommodation, possessions, wealth and property. It is difficult to generalise about communes because they do vary but usually each adult has his or her own room and young children share a room. Communal households try to achieve equality in terms of the status of women and men, adults and children. **Kanter (1979)**, who has conducted research into communes, describes one in America which named its cat as head of the household on official forms rather than singling out one individual person.



Kibbutzim

About **3%** of Israel's population live in kibbutzim. A kibbutz consists of a group of people who live together communally, with shared ownership of land and factories. Originally, all children lived and slept separately from their parents in the children's quarters. They were looked after by "kibbutz mothers" and saw their biological parents for a few hours every day. More recently, however, this has changed and on some kibbutzim children now live with their biological parents up to the age of 15 when they move to the teenager's houses.

Each family has its own apartment the meals are eaten in the communal dining hall. All children born in the same year are raised and educated together, spending the day in the children's houses. It longer established kibbutzim, multigenerational families exist.

Identify and explain two alternatives to the family. [8]

Families in modern China

In an attempt by the Chinese authorities to control population growth, couples in China are, by law, allowed to have only one child. In the cities, couples are encouraged to sign a one child pledge in return for privileges such as an extra month's salary per year until the child reaches the age of 14. If the couple have a second child, the privileges are withdrawn and penalties such as

demotion or dismissal from work may be imposed. A woman who has an abortion is entitled to a holiday with pay. All methods of birth control are free. Some pregnant women, known in the press as “**birth guerrillas**”, hide out in the countryside until their baby is born. Male children are preferred and there are reports in the press of female infanticide -- the practice of killing female infants soon after birth.

During the 1980s, an increasing number of children were abandoned, partly as a result of the one child population control policy. Many children, particularly females, end up in state run orphanages. Chinese government statistics show that the majority of these children end up dying in the orphanages.

Historical evidence from India and the USA

The Nayar people

Historical evidence suggests that household arrangements and personal relationships have taken many forms in the past. Among the Nayar people of Kerala, India in the 18th century, for instance, the family group consisted of brothers, sisters and the sister's children. The Nayar were a warrior group and the men were absent for part of each year because they were hired as mercenaries. Before reaching puberty, a Nayar female was involved in a ritual marriage ceremony after which she could have a number of lovers. Each female had her own room where she might be visited at night by one of her lovers. She did not live with her husband but with her kin group -- her mother, brothers and sisters. Children were brought by, and lived with, their mother's kin group rather than in a nuclear family. Descent was traced through the female line.

The Oneida community

The Oneida community, based in New York State between 1848 and 1880, is an interesting example of a group which had an alternative form of marriage and family life. This community aimed to live by Christian moral standards. Oneidans rejected personal wealth and private property. Items such as clothes, watches and children's toys were jointly owned. All members were housed under one roof in the communal home, each having his or her own room. Marriage was based on group marriage and it was believed that all members of the community should love each other and not live as monogamous couples. Children were expected to treat Oneidan adults as they would their own parents. In effect, children, sexual partners and property were shared.



Part 3- Structural Changes in the Family

The decline of marriage

The number of first marriages has been declining steadily since 1971. In 1996, for example, there were **185,000** first marriages -- **less than half the number in 1970**. Remarriages, where one or both partners have been married before, now account for about **40%** of all marriages, whereas they were only about **20% of marriages in 1970**. Divorcees have more than doubled over the same period, although the rise seems to have levelled off in the last 20 years.



As a result of these changes, a smaller proportion of the British population is married (although most adults are married). More people are getting married later in life, or not marrying at all, or divorcing and not remarrying.

Types of married relationships

- **Monogamy** -- in modern Britain and the rest of Europe, the USA, and most Christian cultures, monogamy is the only legal form of marriage. Monogamy is a form of marriage in which a person can have only one husband or wife at the same time. Monogamy is not the most common form of marriage in the world, and it is found in **only about 24% of all societies**. In a society where monogamy is the only form of legal marriage, a person who marries while still legally married to someone else is guilty of the crime of **bigamy**- a serious offence punishable by imprisonment.
- **Serial monogamy** -- in modern Britain, most of Western Europe and the USA there are high rates of divorce and remarriage. Some people keep marrying and divorcing a series of different partners, but each marriage is monogamous. The term serial monogamy is sometimes used to describe these marriage patterns.
- **Polygamy** -- while marrying a second partner without divorcing the first is a crime in Britain, in most societies it is perfectly acceptable to have more than one marriage partner at the same time. Polygamy is a general term referring to marriage between a member of one sex and two or more members of the opposite sex at the same time. According to Murdoch, polygamy is found in about 76% of all societies. They're two different types of polygamy:
 - **Polygyny**- polygyny is the marriage of one man to 2 or more women at the same time. This is very common and is found in about **75% of all societies**. It is widely practised in **Islamic** countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It is also practised (illegally) among some **Mormons** in the State of Utah in the USA. The possession of several wives is often seen as a sign of

wealth and success and generally only those men who can afford to support several wives practice polygyny. Because of this, even where polygyny is allowed, only a small number of men actually practice it. In any case, the numbers of men and women in most societies are usually fairly evenly balanced, and they're not of women for all men to have more than one wife.

- **Polyandry**- polyandry is the marriage of one woman to 2 or more men at the same time. This is where Andy found in only about **1%** of all societies. Polyandry appears to arise when living standards are so low that a man can only afford to support a wife and child by sharing the responsibility with other men. It is found among the **Todas of southern India** and the **Marquesan Islanders**, and has been reported as occurring in parts of **Tibet**.

Identify and explain two types of marriage. [8]

Why is marriage less popular?

Feminists would argue that the decline of marriage is a result of women being more aware that they are exploited in the nuclear family. Fewer women are willing to tie themselves down to one man, and more are willing to look for more fulfilling alternatives. However, the number of women who remarry suggests that marriage continues to attract women; perhaps many see the problem more as finding the right partner rather than the nature of marriage itself.

Another reason may be the cost of the average traditional church wedding. The average cost is now about £8000. A registry office may be cheaper but many people will feel that they have missed out if they take this option.

More recently, a new set of ideas has arisen and has been behind many government policies. This **New Right** view is concerned by what it sees as the decline of the nuclear family. The stable environment children need, it is argued, has been undermined by a whole series of changes beginning in the 1960s. These include:

- easier abortion and contraception
- more divorce and co-habitation
- the rise of lone parents
- more illegitimate births
- women going out to work in greater numbers -- they are seen as taking men's jobs and making it harder for men to be breadwinners.

All these changes are seen as evidence of collapse in morals and the crisis in the family, and as leading to other problems such as growing crime and drug abuse. We need, say the New Right, to return to traditional family values.

Identify and explain two reasons why a couple may choose not to marry. [8]

Divorce

There are about **170,000** divorces a year. This is about three times the number just before the **Divorce Act of 1971** made it easier to get divorced. Britain has one of the highest divorce rates in Europe (though it also has one of the highest marriage rates).

About **40%** of marriages taking place now will end in divorce. Usually it is women who start divorce proceedings; about two and a half times as many divorces are given to women than men.

Why are there more divorces?

The simple answer to this question is that it has become much easier to get divorced. Until the 20th century, divorce was a long, difficult and expensive procedure. Before 1971, the partner who wanted to divorce had to provide evidence of grounds for divorce, such as cruelty, desertion or adultery. People could not get divorced simply because they wanted to or because they felt the marriage had failed.



This changed in 1971, when it became possible to divorce because of **“irretrievable breakdown”** of the marriage, after a period of separation. It is no longer necessary to provide evidence of irretrievable breakdown.

However, the fact that divorce is easy this does not necessarily mean that people will want to take advantage of it. When divorces increased after 1971, this may have been because there were lots of marriages that had broken down – **“empty shell marriages”** -- and couples just waiting for the opportunity to divorce.

Other reasons why there may be so many divorces are:

- **Changing social attitudes**-- There has been a big change in attitudes to divorce. It is now seen as more acceptable, and sometimes as the best thing to do for the children. Divorce no longer means shame and social disapproval. High-profile divorces have helped this change in public opinion.
- **Higher expectations of marriage**—Feminists say that women particularly now realise they do not have to put up with a marriage which does not live up to what they expect and want. Women today are more likely to be able to support themselves after divorce, so there is an escape route from empty shell marriages.

- **Divorce has become much cheaper**-- It is now within everyone's reach. The lower figures in the past were partly because only the rich could afford divorce.
- **Growing secularization**-- secularization- the decline in religious belief- has meant that divorce is not seen so much today as breaking some bells or morally wrong, and many people today probably do not attach much religious significance to their marriage.
- **The growth of the privatised nuclear family** -- this has meant that, during marital crises, it is no longer so easy for marriage partners to seek advice from or temporary refuge with relatives, and there is also less social control from extended kin pressuring couples to retain marriage ties.

Identify and explain two reasons why a couple may seek a divorce. [8]

Effects of divorce

The husband and wife

Divorce is not just the legal process. It is emotionally stressful, usually accompanied by arguments and tension. Decisions have to be made about:

- how to divide possessions
- who will live in the family home and who will move out
- custody of children
- rights to see children for the parent who does not have custody.



Friends may take sides and lose contact with one partner.

For children

Custody of children is usually given to the mother, although courts now consider each case on its own merits before making a decision. Research has found that children whose parents are divorced or separated are more likely than other children to:

- live in poverty
- as children, behave in antisocial ways
- do less well at school



- as adults, have a low paid job
- become a parent at a younger age
- use drugs and smoke and drink a lot.

Boys and girls seem to be affected in the same way.

At first sight this seems to prove that divorce is bad for the children. However, most children of divorced parents are not affected in these ways, and do not suffer any disadvantage. It is not simply being a child of divorced parents that matters. What seem to count most are these factors:

- How well-off family is after divorce. As with lone parents, the problems may be as much to do with poverty as with the family.
- How much conflict areas before, during and after the divorce.
- How well parents cope with their new lives affects how well children adapt.
- Whether the divorce involves other changes such as moving in with a step family.
- How much contact children have with the parent they are not living with.

Cohabitation

Cohabiting used to be unacceptable and was called “living in sin”. Children born to co-habit in couples were treated as different and inferior because they were illegitimate. But **by the mid-1990s a quarter of all single women were co-habiting**. There had been a huge shift in public opinion so that people no longer feared strong disapproval.

There are different types of co-habitation:

- The commonest one in Britain seems to be the “**trial marriage**”; a couple lived together to see if they would be able to live together permanently. The intention is eventually to marry unless things go wrong.
- Another type is virtually the same as marriage except that no ceremony has taken place. The couple are committed to a permanent relationship; private promises to each other take the place of the traditional vows.
- Some cohabitation involves short-term relationships without commitment.

A lot of co-habiting relationships eventually lead to a marriage. This suggests that marriage as such is not being rejected, but delayed. This can be for economic reasons -- it gives time to save up, for the wedding or for a house.



More people are still in higher education in their 20s and may not feel financially independent enough for marriage for years.

“Marriage is no longer important.” Evaluate the arguments for and against this claim. [24]

Many different family types



There no longer seems to be one form of family that is by far the most popular. The conventional nuclear family has been in decline though this can be exaggerated. A wide range of family and household types now exists in Britain, and the disapproval that used to be attached to some types -- cohabitation, lone parent families, same-sex couples -- is now less strong than it used to be even a few decades ago. The existence of many different types of family is called **diversity**.

Diversity also exists in the roles people take within families, as well as in the types of family. Even within nuclear families, women may work full-time, part-time or not at all; they may choose to stay at home as **househusbands**, or to attempt an equal relationship as “**New Men**”. Others may juggle different responsibilities, as parents and stepparents to children who may or may not live with them.

Other types of family include:

- **Lone parent families** -- one parent and his or her dependent children. Today lone parent families are usually the result of separation or divorce, but some people decide to bring up children alone. In the past lone parents were more likely to be the result of the death of one parent. Women often died in childbirth, men in wars and both sexes from diseases.
- **The reconstituted family** -- a reconstituted family is usually referred to as a “**step family**” and consists of parents and children. While both parents are the children's social parents, in that they bring their children up, they are not both their biological parents. A reconstituted family might come about as the result of a previously widowed woman with two children marrying a previously divorced man with one child.
- **Beanpole extended families** -- the shape of extended families is changing. People have fewer children, so extended families are “narrower”, with fewer siblings or aunts and uncles. At the same time, people are living longer, so extended families are becoming “taller”. Grandparents play a vital role in the beanpole family. More “dual-earner households”, single-parent families and divorces mean that grandparents are often called upon for childcare and for financial

support. They might also be looking after their own (often very elderly) parents. No wonder **Julia Brannen (2003)** called grandparents the “**pivot generation**”: the success of the family hinges on what they do. Grandparents might get great satisfaction from their (on page) family role. Evidence suggests that some find it a burden and a worry: having raised one family, they feel they deserve their retirement.

- **Empty nest families** -- originally nuclear families, but the children have grown up and left home. It was people live longer on average than in the past; the parents are now likely to have many more years of life ahead of them.
- **Boomerang families** -- nuclear families normally contain dependent children. Recently, or adult children are returning (or staying at) home to live with their parents, creating boomerang families. Parents might prefer this to be “empty nesters”, and children can benefit, especially financially. However, **Parentline Plus (2008)** said that, in some cases, “boomerang” children in their 20s and 30s turned their parents home into a battleground, causing money problems or them verbal or physical abuse.
- **Homosexual families** -- with changing social attitudes and laws, there has been a significant increase in same-sex partnerships and same-sex families. **The Civil Partnership Act (2004)** gave same-sex couples and officially recognised are only and similar legal rights to marry couples (e.g. pension and inheritance rights). About **17,000** civil partnerships were formed in the first year of the act, about 60% of them between men. A small, but growing number of children are brought up in same-sex families for all or part of their childhood. This has led to a debate about the advantages and disadvantages for children of living in this type of family.



Identify and explain two alternatives to the nuclear family. [8]

“Nuclear families are always the best.” Evaluate the arguments for and against this claim. [24]

Part 4- Changing family relationships

The symmetrical family

The Symmetrical Family is one where the roles of husband and wife or of cohabiting partners have become more alike (symmetrical) and equal. There are more shared tasks within relationships rather than a clear division between the jobs of male and female partners. Both partners are likely to be wage earners. It remains a popular impression that most families in modern Britain are symmetrical. The assumption has been that there has been a change from segregated to integrated conjugal roles, and the emergence of a more equally balanced family with male partners taking more responsibility for housework and childcare. Conjugal roles are simply the roles played by male and female partners in marriage or in a cohabiting couple. There are said to be two main types:

- **Segregated conjugal roles**, where male and female partner play very different roles in the family, with a clear division and separation between the male role and the female's role.
- **Integrated (or joint) conjugal roles**, where there are few divisions between male and female partner's roles.

This supposed change is thought to have occurred for a number of reasons:

- **The improved status and rights of women** have forced men to accept women more as equals and not simply as house wives and mothers.
- **The increasing number of working women** has increased women's independence and authority in the family -- where the female partner has her own income, she is less dependent on her male partner, and has more power and authority. Decision-making is therefore more likely to be shared.
- **The importance of female partners' earnings** in maintaining the family's standard of living may have encouraged men to help more with housework -- a recognition that the women cannot be expected to do two jobs at once.
- **Improved living standards** in the home, such as central heating, TV and other forms of technology, have encouraged men to spend more time at home, and share home-centred leisure with their female partners.
- **The decline of the close-knit extended family** and greater geographical mobility in industrial society have meant there is less pressure from cane on newly married or cohabiting couples to retain traditional roles -- it is therefore easier to adopt new roles in a



relationship. There are often no longer the separate male and female networks (of friends and especially kin) for male and female partner to mix with separately. This increases their dependence upon each other, and may avoid the teasing of men who adopt new roles from friends who knew them before they got married or began cohabiting.

Identify and explain two recent changes in family structure. [8]

The myth of integrated roles?

Young and Wilmott suggested in 1973 that **conjugal roles were becoming symmetrical**. They thought that this new family type developed first among middle-class families and was gradually spreading to working-class families. They call this the “**principle of stratified diffusion**.”

They interviewed 2000 adults in London, and 400 adults between the ages of 30 and 49 filled in “time budget diaries.”

They found that the symmetrical family had similar roles, not identical roles. More wives had paid work and husbands were spending more time at home, helping with housework and childcare; decisions were also more likely to be shared. However, the husbands were still the main **breadwinner** and wives did not expect their husbands to take an equal role at home, just give a bit of help. Middle-class men generally helped more than working-class men.

- There does seem to be evidence of some role integration in leisure activities and decision-making, but housework and childcare remain predominantly “women’s work”.
- While men are perhaps more involved in childcare than they used to be, this would appear to be in the more enjoyable activities like playing with the children and taking them out. The more routine job such as bathing and feeding and taking children to the doctor still remain predominantly women's work.
- A survey by the **Child Poverty Action Group** in 1984 found that the time spent looking after children under the age of five was about 50 hours each week, and **mothers put in 87% of this time**.

Gershuny (1992) gave a more optimistic view, showing that men are gradually taking on a greater share of household tasks; he used the term “lagged adaptation” to show that there seems to be a time lag between women taking up paid work and then getting more involved at home.

Anne Oakley felt that Young and Wilmott exaggerated the amount of symmetry in conjugal roles. Oakley (1974), a feminist sociologists, conducted in-depth interviews with 40 London mothers who had young children. The mothers still felt housework and the children were their responsibility and were grateful for any “help” fair partners gave. This study, too, found that middle-class men were more likely to help at home, especially with childcare.

- Evidence from the **1988 British Social Attitudes Survey** suggests that women still perform the majority of domestic tasks around the home, even when they have paid jobs themselves.
- Even among full-time working women, where one would expect to find the greatest degree of equality, cooking in the evening meal, household cleaning, washing and ironing, and caring for sick children were still mainly performed by women. A ***World in Action*** TV documentary in June 1991 found house work was the second largest cause of domestic rows at the money.
- It is still predominantly women who get the blame if the house is untidy or children dirty or badly dressed.

Both of these studies showed unequal conjugal roles. Oakley highlighted the inequality. Young and Willmott highlighted the fact that roles were changing.

Duncombe and Marsden (1995) argued that women had a “**triple shift**”: this involved paperwork, house work and children, plus “**emotion work**”. They interviewed 40 white couples who had been married for 15 years. The wives felt that men were unwilling to carry out the “emotion work” needed to keep their relationship special (e.g. showing love and affection, remembering anniversaries); the husbands did not seem to see the problem.

Edgell (1980) studied decision-making in a small sample of middle-class families and found that the decisions the couple felt were most important (e.g. moving home) were usually made by the man.

Recent studies show that men do not always dominate family decisions. Even in communities where the man’s status as family head is important, women, at the centre of the family, often seem to have a great deal of influence. Economic power affects family power, so higher female earnings or male unemployment can give women more say in family decisions.

While there does seem to be some evidence of husbands doing marginally more around the home in recent years, this change would appear to have been massively exaggerated. In the majority of marriages the traditional roles of women and men remain.

“Family roles are equal today.” Evaluate the arguments for and against this claim. [24]

The change in position of children in the family

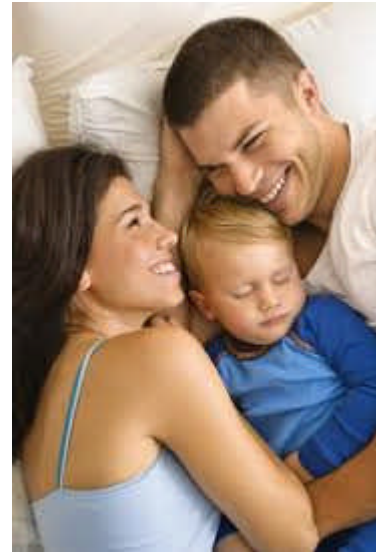
The 19th century

In the 19th century, the father and husband was the head of the family, and often had a great deal of authority over other family members. He would have little to do with his children. In upper and middle class families, children might see relatively little of their parents, often being sent off to private boarding schools or being looked after by a nanny or governess. In working-class families, children in the early 19th century were seen as workers and an

economic asset to the family, as they were able to work in the factories and mines and bring money into the house. Generally, children had low status in the family, and the children were expected to “be seen and not heard.”

The 20th century

During the course of the 20th century, families have become more child-centred, we family activities and outings often centred on the interests of the children. Parents are more involved with their children, spending more time with them, taking an interest in their activities, discussing decisions with them, and treating them more as equals. Often, the children's welfare is seen as the major family priority, frequently involving the parents in considerable financial sacrifice and cost.



The causes of child-centredness

- Families have got smaller this century, and this means more individual care and attention can be devoted to each child.
- In the 19th century, the working week was between 70 and 80 hours for many working class people. Today, it is more like 39 hours and is continuing to get shorter. This means parents have more time to spend with their children.
- Increasing affluence, with higher wages and a higher standard of living, has benefited children as more money can be spent on them and their activities.
- The Social Security system provides a wide range of benefits designed to help parents care for their children. The welfare state has increased demands on parents to look after their children properly: social workers, for example, have a wide range of powers to intervene in families of behalf of children, and have the awesome power to remove children from families if parents fail to look after them properly.
- Paediatrics, or the science of childhood, has developed this century, with a wide range of research and popular books suggesting help parents should bring up their children to encourage their full development. For example, Dr. Spock's childcare books have been sold to millions of parents.

Critical views of the family

The “**cereal packet**” image of the “typical family” has already been questioned, but the view of the warm and supportive “happy family” which is often presented in the mass media has been questioned on a more fundamental level by many sociologists.

“The media presents an unrealistic view of the family.” Evaluate the arguments for and against this claim. [24]

The “dark side” of family life

While the family is often a warm and supportive unit for its members, it can also be a hostile and dangerous place. The growing privatisation of family life can lead to emotional stress in the family. Family members are thrown together, isolated from and lacking the support of extended kin, neighbours, and the wider community. Tempers become easily frayed, emotional temperatures and stress levels rise, and -- as in a pressure cooker without a safety valve -- explosions occur, and family conflict is the result. This may lead to violence, divorce, psychological damage to children, perhaps even mental illness and crime.

The breakdown of marriages which leads to divorce is often the end result of long running and bitter disputes between partners. The intense emotions involved in family life often mean that incidents that would appear trivial in other situations take on the proportion of major confrontations inside the family. The extent of violence in the family is coming to increasing attention, with rising reports of the physical and sexual abuse of children, the rape of wives by their husbands, and wife and baby battering. One in four murders takes place in the family. This is the darker side of family life.

Because of the private nature of the family, accurate evidence of the extent of violence and abuse inside the family is difficult to obtain, and fear or shame means that it is almost certain that most of such incidents are covered up.



The abuse of children

There are two kinds of abuse of children: **sexual abuse** and **physical abuse**. Sexual abuse refers to adults using their power to perform sex acts with children below the age of consent. Physical abuse refers to sexual violence. Much child abuse goes undiscovered, but social workers suggest it is far more common than we are led to believe.

Evidence suggests that **one in 8** females and **one in 12 males** have had at least one sexually abusive experience before the age of 16, nearly always carried out by males (97%), and much of it by relatives. Rape Crisis Centre figures suggest that the number of females under the age of 16 experiencing sexual abuse may be as high as one in four.

The **NSPCC in 1989** estimated that there were at least **17,000** children under 16 facing physical or sexual abuse in England and Wales, with a further **19,000 at risk**, including those facing neglect and emotional abuse. Between 1983 and 1989, the estimated number of children registered as at risk, neglected, or sexually, emotionally, or physically abused more than trebled from just under **12,000 to over 36,000**.

Violence against women

There is widespread evidence of violence by men against their female partners -- battered wives. Such violence is often not taken very seriously by the police or courts, being dismissed as a “**domestic dispute**” -- which seems to suggest violence against women is seen in some quarters as an ex-vegetable and normal part of a relationship! Certainly the type of physical violence women are subjected to by their male partners would quite probably result in prosecution and imprisonment if it was carried out against a stranger outside the family. The widespread growth of refuges for battered women since the 1970s reflects the extent and seriousness of the problem of violence against women in the home, much of which goes unreported and undiscovered.

Rape in marriage

Rape is when someone is forced to have sex against his or her will, often accompanied by the actual or threatened use of violence. In 1989 a survey carried out for Granada television's **World in Action** programme reported that over one in four (28%) of women had been raped, with most rapes being committed by husbands on their wives.

- One in seven women (**14%**) in the survey **had been raped by their husbands**, compared with 12% by acquaintances and boyfriends, and 2% by strangers.
- **4/5** of the raped wives reported that raped by their husbands was a **frequent occurrence**.
- Nearly half (**44%**) of the rapes within marriage **were accompanied by the actual or threatened use of violence**.
- **One in five** wives suffered physical injury.

Such sexual violence in the family, then, would appear to be disturbingly common, but only as recently as **1991** was rape within marriage confirmed as a criminal offence by the Court of Appeal.

Identify and explain two examples of the “dark side” of family life. [8]

The feminist criticisms of the family

Feminist writers -- those concerned with establishing equal rights for women -- have been responsible for highlighting much of the violence against women in the family. However, they also have a range of other criticisms of the family,

arguing that it is an institution that serves men's needs better than women's. Below is a summary of feminist criticisms of the family:

- Far from the popular impression of growing equality between male and female partners in the family, inequalities continue. As seen earlier, women still have most of the responsibility of the housework, even when they are in full-time employment. Most women work both outside the home in paid employment, and inside the home as house wives and mothers. They have two jobs to the man's one.
- Feminists emphasise that housework is, in fact, unpaid labour. The value of the house work performed free by many women is illustrated by the Mercantile and General insurance company's "**Housewife's Sickness Income Benefit**", introduced in 1991. This paid benefits up to **£10,000 per year or £192 per week** to cover the costs of hiring help should housewife been no longer able to perform domestic tasks such as food preparation, shopping, cleaning, and other household tasks.
- It is still mainly women who give up paid work (or suffer from loss/restricted job opportunities) to look after children, the old, the sick, and male partners. Women still take most of the responsibility for child care and child rearing, and are most likely to get the blame from society if these tasks are not performed "properly".
- Women's position in the family remains a primary source of discrimination and disadvantage in the labour market. Employers are often unwilling to employ or promote married women. Marriage poses no such problems for men.
- The family is a major source of **gender role socialisation**, which causes women to underachieve (do less well than they are able) in a wide range of areas, and which keeps women in a secondary position to men in many areas of social life.

Looked at from these points of view, women have much to lose from the present organisation of the family.

"Families benefit men more than women." Evaluate the arguments for and against this claim. [24]

