2 Families and households

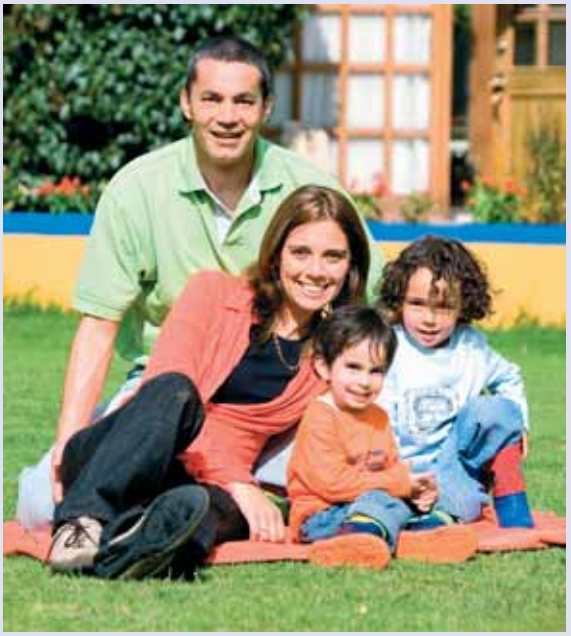
Introduction

Picture the family. Does the image on the right come to mind – mum, dad and the kids? This is the usual picture presented by advertisers. But, for more and more of us, it no longer reflects the reality of family life.

Families are changing. Married women who devote their lives to childcare and housework are a dwindling minority. Marriage itself is declining in popularity. More and more couples are living together without getting married. And more and more marriages are ending in separation and divorce. Families have become increasingly diverse.

What do sociologists make of all this? Some believe that the family is in crisis, and that this threatens the well-being of society as a whole. Others welcome change. They see the diversity of family life as an opportunity for choice. No longer does the old-fashioned idea of the family restrict women to the home, keep unhappy marriages going, and maintain destructive family relationships.

This chapter looks at these different views. It investigates changes in family life and examines the causes and effects of these changes.



chaptersummary

- **Unit 1** looks at the problem of defining the family and shows how families vary from society to society.
- **Unit 2** outlines the main sociological theories of the family and considers government policy towards the family.
- **Unit 3** examines the relationship between family life and industrialisation.
- **Unit 4** outlines and explains changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, childbearing, divorce and separation.
- **Unit 5** looks at family diversity, focusing on lone-parent families, reconstituted families and gay and lesbian families.
- **Unit 6** examines changes in the division of domestic labour and the distribution of power in the family and asks to what extent they are linked to gender.
- **Unit 7** focuses on children and asks how ideas of childhood have changed.
- **Unit 8** looks at changes in birth rates, death rates and family size in the UK since 1900.

Unit 1 Defining the family

keyissues

1. How has the family been defined?
2. What are the problems with definitions of the family?

1.1 What is the family?

In 1949, the American anthropologist George Peter Murdock provided the following definition of the family.

> 'The family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.'

Spelling out this definition:

- Families live together – they share the same *household.*
- They work together and pool their resources – to some extent they share domestic tasks and income.
- They reproduce – they have children.
- They include an adult male and female who have a sexual relationship which is approved by the wider society – for example, they have a marital relationship.
- This heterosexual couple have at least one child – either their biological offspring or an adopted child.

The nuclear family

George Peter Murdock based his definition of the family on a sample of 250 societies ranging from hunting and gathering bands, to small-scale farming societies to large-scale industrial societies. Although he found a variety of family forms within this sample, Murdock claimed that each contained a basic nucleus consisting of a husband and wife and one or more children, own or adopted. This is the *nuclear family*. Murdock believed that the nuclear family is 'a universal social grouping' – in other words, it is found in all societies.

activity1 defining the family

Item A Lone-parent family

A single mother and her children

Item B Extended family

An extended family

Item C Nuclear family

A heterosexual married couple and their children

Item D Gay family

A gay couple and their adopted childen

questions

1 Which of these 'families' fit/s Murdock's definition? Explain your answer.

2 Do you think those that do not fit should be regarded as families? Give reasons for your answer.

Extended families

Murdock saw the other family forms in his sample as extensions of the nuclear family. These *extended families* contain *kin* – relatives based on 'blood' or marriage – in addition to the nuclear family. The nuclear family can be extended in various ways.

Polygamy Marriage in the West is *monogamous* – it involves one wife and one husband. In many societies, marriage is *polygamous* – a person is permitted additional wives or husbands. Men may have more than one wife – a system known as *polygyny*. Or, in a small number of societies, women may have more than one husband – a form of marriage known as *polyandry.*

Other forms of extension Apart from additional marital

activity2 polygamy

Item A Polygyny

Adama is a wealthy man. He lives in a village called Sobtenga in Burkina Faso, a country in northwest Africa. Ten years ago he had two wives.

Zenabou, his first wife, thought polygyny was a good idea. It provided her with a 'sister' to share the burdens of domestic work and childcare. Now she is not so sure. Adama has taken two more wives, the youngest of whom, Bintu, is only 16. He is besotted with Bintu and she clearly enjoys the attention. Despite grumbling, his other wives accept the situation, for marriage is seen primarily as an economic affair. Adama's 12 oxen are proof that he can provide security for his wives and children.

Adama's wives – Zenabou, Bintu, Meryan and Barkissou

Polygyny is much more common than polyandry. It is found in many small-scale traditional societies, particularly in Africa. As the example of Adama suggests, polygyny is a privilege of the wealthy. Not every man can afford two or more wives and in any case there aren't enough women for this. Census figures from 1911 for the Pondo of South Africa show that only 10% of men had two wives and only 2% had more than two.

Source: Mair, 1971 and Brazier, 1995

Item B Polyandry

The Nyinba people of Nepal practice fraternal polyandry – two or more brothers are married to one wife. They inherited this custom from their Tibetan ancestors who migrated to Nepal centuries ago. They also inherited a love for trading and herding which, together with cultivating the meagre soil, make up the traditional Nyinba economy. Polyandry suits this economy. 'With one or two husbands always on herding or trading trips, one husband will always be at home to care for the wife,' explained Maila Dai, a trader from the village of Bargaau. 'We think polyandry is just like insurance for the wife. If one husband is no good or leaves his wife, there's always another brother.'

Polyandry among the Nyinba of Nepal. The 12 year old girl on the right is engaged to five brothers, three of whom are pictured here.

Polyandry has been explained as a way of preventing land from being divided up into less profitable units when a family of sons inherits from the previous generation. It also concentrates the wealth of each household by maintaining a large population of working adult males under one roof.

To the Nyinbas, its advantages are obvious. 'All our brothers work together,' explained Dawa Takpa, 'so we can be wealthy people. If we all go our own way, how can we survive? We have to study, do agricultural work, take care of animals and trade, so we have to work together.' 'For me,' said Tsering Zangmo, who at 21 is the wife of three brothers (the youngest of whom is seven), 'polyandry is fine. If I had only one husband, I would be very poor.'

When asked about jealousy between her husbands, Tsering Zangmo replied, 'But they are brothers. They are never jealous.' However when pressed she giggled and blushed, admitting, 'Well, they only have a very little jealousy. If you like one husband very much, you have to be secret so the others don't know. We make love in the middle of the night, lying naked in sheepskins. We'd never do it just before going to sleep or just before waking up as the others might hear us.'

Source: Dunham, 1992

questions

1 How can polygamous families be seen as extensions of the nuclear family?

2 Judging from Items A and B, what are the advantages and disadvantages of polygyny and polyandry?

partners, families can be extended in a variety of ways. For example, a three-generation extended family may include grandparents within the family unit. Similarly, uncles and aunts (brothers and sisters of the married couple) may form part of the family unit.

1.2 Diversity in family systems

Many sociologists and anthropologists have seen the nuclear family, either in its basic or extended form, as universal, normal and natural. Others have rejected this view. For example, Felicity Edholm (1982), in an article entitled 'The unnatural family', argues that there is nothing normal and natural about the nuclear family. She claims that family and kinship relationships are *socially constructed*. They are based on culture rather than biology. The links between husband and wife, parent and child, are constructed very differently in different societies. In Edholm's words, 'Relatives are not born but made'. Here are some examples Edholm gives to support her argument. They are taken from traditional cultures and may not apply today.

Parent-child relations – genes Ideas about the biological relationship between parents and children vary from society to society. For example, the Lakker of Burma see no blood relationship between mother and child – the mother is simply a container in which the child grows. As a result, sexual relationships between children of the same mother are permitted – because they are seen as non-kin, such relationships are not seen as incest.

Parent-child relations – adoption Most sociologists consider the tie between mother and child as basic and inevitable. However, in some societies, many children do not live with their biological parents. For example, in Tahiti, in the Pacific Ocean, young women often have one or two children before they are considered ready to settle down into a stable relationship with a man. They usually give these children for adoption to their parents or other close relatives. Children see their adoptive mother and father as 'real' parents and their relationship with them as far closer than with their natural parents.

Marriage and residence Some sociologists argue that 'marriage' varies so much from society to society that it makes little sense to use the same word for these very different relationships. For example, the basic social group amongst the Nayar of Northern India is made up of men and women descended through the female line from a common ancestor. Brothers and sisters, women and children live together – children are members of their mother's group, not their father's. Nayar girls 'marry' a man before puberty and later take as many lovers as they like. Her 'husband' may or may not be one of these lovers. Children are raised in their mother's social group. 'Husbands' and fathers do not share the same residence as their 'wives' and have little to do with their children.

A Tahitian family

According to Edholm, examples such as these show that the family is socially constructed. Rather than seeing the family as a natural unit created by biological necessities, it makes more sense to see it as a social unit shaped by cultural norms. And as culture varies from society to society, so do families. In view of this diversity, Edholm rejects the claim that the nuclear family is universal.

Family diversity today

Edholm's research focused on family diversity in non-Western societies. There is evidence that family diversity is steadily increasing in modern Western societies. In Britain, 26% of families with dependent children were headed by lone parents in 2000 (*Social Trends,* 2002). This was partly due to divorce, partly to never-married mothers, and, to a much smaller extent, to the death of one partner.

Reconstituted families – families in which one or both of the adult couple bring children from a previous relationship – are steadily increasing. There has also been a rapid growth in *cohabitation* – unmarried couples living together, often in a long-term relationship. And, in recent years, a small but growing number of lesbian and gay families have appeared.

This diversity in today's Western societies will be examined in later units.

1.3 Defining the family revisited

Where does this diversity of so-called families leave us? Is it possible to come up with a definition which covers this diversity? David Cheal (1999) summarises some of the responses to this problem.

We don't know Faced with the diversity of family forms, some sociologists frankly admit that no one really knows what a family is. This is not a useful state of affairs. For example, how can different family forms be compared if a 'family' cannot be identified?

Extensions and reductions Following Murdock, some sociologists have seen all families as extensions or reductions of one basic and elementary form – the nuclear family. So, extended families are extensions, lone-parent families are reductions. Not everybody agrees that the variety of family forms can be seen as extensions or reductions of the nuclear family. For example, if a woman decides to produce a child by *in vitro* fertilisation and rear the child herself, can this be seen as a 'reduction' of the nuclear family?

Abandon the idea One solution is to stop using the term family and replace it with a concept such as *primary relationships* (Scanzoni et al., 1989). Primary relationships are close, long-lasting and special ties between people. There is no problem placing the wide diversity of 'families' under this heading. But, it does away with the whole idea of family – an idea which is vitally important to individuals, to the 'family group', and to the wider society.

Ask people From this point of view, families are what people say they are. If families are socially constructed,

activity3 family diversity

Item A The Ashanti

The Ashanti of West Africa are a matrilineal society (descent is traced through the mother's line). While a child's father is important, he has no legal authority over his children. This rests with the wife's family, particularly her brother. It is from the mother's brother that children inherit, though the father is responsible for feeding, clothing and educating them. Many Ashanti men cannot afford to set up a household of their own when they first marry. Since men never live with their wife's brothers, and children are the property of the wife's family, couples often live apart. Only about a third of married women actually live with their husbands.

Source: Fortes, 1950

An Ashanti puberty ritual at which a girl becomes a woman. She belongs to her mother's family.

Women and children in the Trobriand Islands

Item B The Trobriand Islanders

Some matrilineal cultures, such as the Trobriand Islanders, think that the father's role in the conception of a child is minimal. He simply 'opens the door' or, at most, shapes the growing embryo through intercourse.

Source: Beattie, 1964

question

The family is a social construction shaped by cultural norms and beliefs. Discuss with reference to Items A and B.

then sociologists should discover how people in society construct, define and give meaning to families. This approach may lead to a bewildering diversity of families. But, if this is the social reality within which people live, then this may well be the reality which sociologists should investigate.

key terms

Household A group of people who share a common residence.
Nuclear family A family consisting of an adult male and female with one or more children, own or adopted.
Extended family A family containing relatives in addition to the nuclear family. An extension of the nuclear family.
Kin Relatives based on marriage or genes.
Monogamy A system of marriage involving two adults, one of each sex.
Polygamy A system of marriage involving two or more wives, or two or more husbands.
Polygyny A system of marriage involving two or more wives.
Polyandry A system of marriage involving two or more husbands.
Reconstituted family A family in which one or both partners bring children from a previous relationship.
Cohabitation Living together as a partnership without marriage.
Primary relationships Close, long-lasting and special ties between people.

summary

1. According to Murdock, the nuclear family is the basic form of family. He sees all other family forms as extensions of the nuclear family.
2. Murdock claims that the nuclear family is a universal social grouping – that it is found in all societies.
3. Edholm argues that the family is a social construction based on culture rather than biology. She rejects the view that the nuclear family is universal.
4. Cross-cultural evidence indicates that family forms vary considerably. Recent evidence from Western societies indicates increasing family diversity.
5. Sociologists have responded to the problem of defining the family in the following ways.
   - By admitting that they don't really know what the family is
   - By seeing all family forms as extensions or reductions of the nuclear family
   - By rejecting the concept of family and replacing it with the concept of primary relationships
   - By accepting the definitions of the family used by members of society – the family is what people say it is.

Unit 2 The family and social structure

keyissues

1 What are the main sociological theories of the family?
2 How have government policies affected the family?

2.1 Functionalist theories of the family

Functionalist theories see society as made up of various parts, each of which contributes to the maintenance and well-being of the system as a whole.

Some functionalist theories are based on the idea that societies need *consensus* – agreement about norms and values – in order to survive. As a result, they are also known as *consensus theories.*

Functionalists often assume that if a social institution such as the family exists, then it must have a *function* or purpose – it must do something useful. As a result, the family is usually seen to perform functions which benefit both its members and society as a whole.

George Peter Murdock

According to Murdock (1949), the family is a universal institution with universal functions. In other words, it is found in all societies and it performs the same functions everywhere. These functions are vital for the well-being of society. They are:

Sexual In most societies, there are rules limiting or forbidding sexual relationships outside marriage. This helps to stabilise the social system. Without such rules, conflict may result.

Economic In many societies, the family is a unit of production – for example, a 'farming family' producing food. In the West today, the family acts as a unit of consumption – buying goods and services for the family group. These economic functions make an important contribution to the wider society.

Reproduction The family is the main unit for the reproduction of children. Without reproduction, society would cease to exist.

Educational The family is largely responsible for *primary socialisation*, the first and most important part of the socialisation process. Without socialisation, there would be no culture. And without a shared culture, there would be no consensus about society's norms and values.

Murdock believes that the nuclear family, either alone, or in its extended form, performs these 'vital functions'. He cannot imagine a substitute. In his words, 'No society has succeeded in finding an adequate substitute for the nuclear family, to which it might transfer these functions. It is highly doubtful whether any society will ever succeed in such an attempt.'

Talcott Parsons

The American sociologist Talcott Parsons focuses on the nuclear family in modern industrial society. He argues that the family has become increasingly specialised. Functions for which families were responsible in pre-industrial societies, for example, looking after the elderly or educating children, have been taken over in industrial societies by specialised institutions such as social services and schools (Parsons & Bales, 1955).

However, Parsons claims that the family retains two 'basic and irreducible' functions. These are:

1 the *primary socialisation* of children
2 the *stabilisation of adult personalities*.

Primary socialisation This is the first and most important part of the socialisation process. Parsons argues that every individual must learn the shared norms and values of society. Without this there would be no consensus, and without consensus, social life would not be possible.

For the socialisation process to be really effective, shared norms and values must be 'internalised as part of the personality structure'. Children's personalities are moulded in terms of society's culture to the point where it becomes a part of them.

The stabilisation of adult personalities This is the second essential function of the family. Unstable personalities can threaten the stability and smooth-running of society. According to Parsons, families help to stabilise adult

activity4 functionalism and the family

Item A Family shopping

Item B The 'warm bath theory'

Item C 'The bottle'

The drunken husband – a 19th century view of domestic violence

questions

1 Functionalists often argue that the family's economic function as a unit of production has been replaced by its function as a unit of consumption. Explain with some reference to Item A.
2 Look at Items B and C.
   a) Parsons' theory is sometimes known as the 'warm bath theory'. Why?
   b) Critically evaluate this theory. Refer to Item C in your answer.

personalities in two ways. First, marital partners provide each other with emotional support. Second, as parents, they are able to indulge the 'childish' side of their personalities – for example, by playing with their children.

Family life provides adults with release from the strains and stresses of everyday life. It provides them with emotional security and support. This helps to stabilise their personality and, in turn, the wider society.

Conclusion Although the functions of the family have become fewer and more specialised, Parsons believes they are no less important. He cannot imagine an institution other than the family performing these 'basic and irreducible' functions.

Criticisms of funtionalism

The following criticisms have been made of functionalist views of the family.

- Functionalists assume that on balance families perform useful and often essential functions both for their members and for society as a whole. Married couples are pictured as living in harmony, as good in bed, and as effective socialisers of the next generation. Critics argue that this does not reflect the realities of family life.
- As a result of this picture of happy families, functionalists tend to ignore the 'dark side' of family life – conflict between husband and wife, male dominance, child abuse, and so on. They give insufficient attention to the *dysfunctions* of the family – the harmful effects it may have on the wider society.
- Functionalists tend to ignore the diversity of family life in industrial society. For example, there is little reference to lone-parent families, cohabiting families and reconstituted families. Nor do they pay much attention to variations in family life based on class, ethnicity, religion and locality.
- Parsons' view of the family has been criticised as sexist since he sees the wife/mother as having the main responsibility for providing warmth and emotional support, and for de-stressing her hardworking husband.

key terms

Functionalism A theory which sees society as made up of various parts, each of which tends to contribute to the maintenance and well-being of society as a whole.
Consensus theories Functionalist theories based on the idea that societies need consensus or agreement about norms and values.
Function The contribution a part of society makes to the well-being of society as a whole.
Dysfunction The harmful effects that a part of society has on society as a whole.
Primary socialisation The first and most important part of the socialisation process whereby young people learn the norms and values of society.

2.2 New Right perspectives

Like functionalists, New Right thinkers see the family as a cornerstone of society. They also see a 'normal' family as the nuclear family unit. For example, John Redwood, a Conservative MP, stated in 1993 that 'the natural state should be the two-adult family caring for their children'. And for him, the two adults are a male and a female.

In recent years there has been growing concern about the state of the family. It is 'in decline', 'under threat', 'fragmenting', 'breaking down'. This view of the family was put forward by New Right thinkers from the 1980s onwards.

Evidence They point to the following evidence to support their claims. There has been an increase in:

- Lone-parent families
- Fatherless families
- Divorce rates
- Cohabitation
- Gay and lesbian couples.

As a result of these changes, the two-parent nuclear family headed by a married couple consisting of an adult male and female is steadily decreasing as a proportion of all families.

Causes The following have been seen as causing these changes.

- A breakdown of 'traditional family values'.
- Over-generous welfare benefits to single mothers which allow fathers to opt out of their responsibilities for raising and providing for their children.
- The influence of feminism which has devalued marriage, domesticity and childrearing, and encouraged women to seek fulfilment outside the home.
- Increased sexual permissiveness.
- Greater tolerance of gay and lesbian relationships as alternatives to heterosexual marriage.

Consequences According to the New Right, these changes have serious consequences. The 'fragmented family' is no longer performing its functions effectively. In particular, it is failing to provide adequate socialisation. This can result in children and young people underachieving at school and behaving in anti-social ways ranging from rudeness to crime.

Over-generous welfare benefits can lead to welfare dependency. Lone mothers become dependent on state benefits and, in effect, are 'married to the state'.

Solutions For the New Right, there are two main solutions to these problems. First, a return to traditional family values – life-long marriage and a recognition of the duties and responsibilities of parenthood. Second, a change in government policy – redirecting welfare benefits and social service provision to support and maintain two-parent families and penalising those who fail to live up to this ideal.

Sociology and the New Right New Right thinkers have tended to be journalists and politicians rather than sociologists. However, a few sociologists have developed

similar arguments. For example, Norman Dennis and George Erdos make the following points in *Families Without Fathers* (2000).

Increasing numbers of children are born outside marriage and raised by single mothers. This places the children at a disadvantage. On average, they have poorer health and lower educational attainment than children from two-parent families.

Dennis and Erdos's main concern is the effect on boys. They grow up without the expectation that adulthood involves responsibilities for a wife and children. This can result in irresponsible, immature, anti-social young men.

According to Dennis and Erdos, families without fathers are not an adequate alternative to the standard nuclear family. Families are not just changing, they are 'deteriorating'.

activity5 New Right perspectives

Item A Fatherless families

According to the American sociologist Charles Murray, increasing numbers of 'young, healthy, low-income males choose not to take jobs'. Many turn to crime (particularly violent street crime) and regular drug abuse.

Many of these boys have grown up in a family without a father and male wage earner. As a result, they lack the male role models of mainstream society. Within a female-headed family dependent on welfare benefits, the disciplines and responsibilities of mainstream society tend to break down. Murray believes that work must become the 'centre of life' for young men. They must learn the disciplines of work and respect for work. And they must learn to become 'real fathers', accepting the responsibilities of parenthood.

Murray believes that the socialisation and role models required to develop these attitudes are often lacking in female-headed, low-income families. He claims that, 'Over the last two decades, larger and larger numbers of British children have not been socialised to norms of self-control, consideration for others, and the concept that actions have consequences'. In Murray's view, when it comes to effective socialisation, 'No alternative family structure comes close to the merits of two parents, formally married'.

Source: Murray, 1990, 2001

Item B Welfare dependency

Item C A typical Victorian image

'The abandoned mother'

questions

1 Read Item A. Why does Murray see the nuclear family as superior to other family structures?

2 What points is the cartoon in Item B making?

3 How does Item C question the idea that welfare dependency has led to the breakdown of the family?

Criticisms of New Right views

Blaming the victims Critics argue that the New Right tends to 'blame the victims' for problems that are not of their own making. Many of these problems may result from low wages, inadequate state benefits, lack of jobs and other factors beyond the control of lone parents.

Value judgements The New Right sees the nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and children as the ideal. Other family arrangements are considered inferior. Critics argue that this reflects the values of the New Right rather than a balanced judgement of the worth of family diversity in today's society. Who is to say that families without fathers are necessarily inferior? Why should everybody be forced into the nuclear family mould?

An idealised view of the past New Right thinkers may be harking back to a golden age of the family which never existed. Even in Victorian times – supposedly *the* era of traditional family values – lone parenthood, cohabitation and sexual relationships outside marriage were by no means uncommon.

2.3 Marxist theories

Marxists reject the view that society is based on value consensus and operates for the benefit of all. Instead, they see a basic conflict of interest between a small powerful ruling class and the mass of the population, the subject class. The family is seen as one of a number of institutions which serves to maintain the position of the ruling class.

Modern industrial societies have a capitalist economic system. Capitalism is based on the private ownership of economic institutions, for example, banks and factories. In capitalist economies, investors finance the production of goods and services with the aim of producing profits. These investors form a ruling class. The subject class – the workers – produce goods and services and are paid wages for their labour. The ruling class are seen to exploit the subject class – they gain at the workers' expense since their profits come from the workers' labour.

Marxists argue that the economy largely shapes the rest of society. Thus, a capitalist economic system will produce a certain type of society. Institutions such as the family, the education system and the political system are shaped by the requirements of capitalism and serve to support and maintain it.

Inheritance and private property In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, first published in 1884, Friedrich Engels argued that the modern nuclear family developed in capitalist society. Private property is at the heart of capitalism and it was largely owned by men. Before 1882 in Britain, married women could not own property – it passed to their husband on marriage.

A key concern of the capitalist was to ensure that his property passed directly to his legitimate heirs – those he had fathered. According to Engels, the monogamous nuclear family provided the answer. It gave men greater control over women – until the late 19th century wives were seen as chattels, as their husband's property. With only one husband and one wife, doubts about the paternity of children are unlikely. And with only one wife, there are no disputes about which wife's children should inherit. Within the nuclear family, a man could be fairly sure that he had legitimate children with a clear right to inherit his wealth.

activity6 the next generation

question

Give a Marxist interpretation of the role of the family illustrated in this cartoon.

Maintaining capitalism In some respects, Marxist views of the family are similar to those of functionalists. For example, both see the family as a unit which reproduces and socialises children. In other respects, their views are very different.

Marxists see the family as a means for:

- Reproducing 'labour power' – reproducing future generations of workers
- Consuming the products of capitalism
- Providing emotional support for workers, so helping them to cope with the harsh realities of capitalism
- Socialising children to accept the inequalities of capitalist society.

From a Marxist viewpoint, the family helps to maintain an unjust and exploitative system.

Criticisms of Marxism

Marxist views of the family follow logically from Marxist theory. If, for example, the family provides emotional support for workers, then this helps them to accept the injustices of the capitalist system. This makes sense if capitalism is seen as essentially unjust. However, many sociologists reject this view of capitalism and, as a result, Marxist views of the family.

Sociologists generally agree that the economic system has some influence on the family. However, most would disagree with the view that the family is shaped by the needs of that system.

key terms

Marxism A theory which sees a basic conflict of interest between those who own the economic institutions and those who are employed by them.
Capitalism A system of production in which the economic institutions, eg banks and factories, are privately owned.

2.4 Feminist theories

Feminists start from the view that most societies are based on patriarchy or male domination. *Radical feminists* see patriarchy as built into the structure of society. *Marxist feminists* see it as resulting from class inequalities in capitalist society. Both see the family as one of the main sites in which women are oppressed by men.

Domestic labour Within the family most of the unpaid work – housework and childcare – is done by women. This applies even when women are working full time outside the home. Women make the main contribution to family life, men receive the main benefits (Delphy & Leonard, 1992).

Marxist feminists argue that the wife's unpaid domestic labour is invaluable to capitalism. She produces and rears future workers at no cost to the capitalist. And she keeps an adult worker – her husband – in good running order by feeding and caring for him (Benston, 1972).

Emotional labour The inequalities of domestic labour also apply to 'emotional labour'. Radical feminists claim that it's wives rather than husbands who provide emotional support for their partners. Wives are more likely to listen, to agree, to sympathise, to understand, to excuse and to flatter (Delphy & Leonard, 1992).

Marxist feminists take a similar view, seeing the emotional support provided by wives as soaking up the frustrations produced by working for capitalism.

Economic dependency Married women are often economically dependent on their husbands. In most couples, it is the wife who gives up work to care for the children. Mothers often return to part-time rather than full-time employment in order to meet their childcare and domestic responsibilities.

Male domination Feminists see the family as male dominated. As noted above, wives are usually economically dependent. Men often control key areas of decision-making such as moving house and important financial decisions. And they sometimes use force to maintain control. Domestic violence is widespread and the majority of those on the receiving end are women. Around 570,000 cases are reported each year in the UK and probably a far larger number go unreported (Hopkins, 2000).

Criticisms of feminism

Ignores positive aspects of family life Critics argue that feminists are preoccupied with the negative side of family life. They ignore the possibility that many women enjoy running a home and raising children.

Ignores trend to gender equality There is evidence of a trend towards greater equality between partners (see Section 6.2). Critics argue that rather than celebrating this trend, feminists remain focused on the remaining inequalities.

key terms

Feminism A view which challenges the power of men over women.
Patriarchy A social system based on male domination.
Radical feminists Feminists who see patriarchy as the main form of inequality in society.
Marxist feminists Feminists who see patriarchy as resulting from class inequalities.
Domestic labour Unpaid work such as housework and childcare, within the home and family.

activity7 housewives

Magazine cover from 1955

Magazine cover from 2003

question

How might a feminist analyse these magazine covers?

2.5 Social policy and the family

In recent years, governments have been increasingly concerned about families. And government policies have reflected this concern.

These policies are influenced by values. Should government policies be shaped by 'traditional family values' which see the nuclear family as the ideal? Or, should they recognise the increasing diversity of family life and support *all* family types?

The New Right

The New Right comes down firmly on the side of the nuclear family (see Section 2.2). It's the best kind of family and should be encouraged. The rest are second-best and should be discouraged. How does this translate into social policy?

Encouraging nuclear families Governments should 'explicitly *favour* married parenthood over all other choices for raising children' (Saunders, 2000). Taxes and welfare benefits should be directed to this end. The marriage contract should be strengthened and married couples should have special legal rights and safeguards.

Discouraging family diversity According to the New Right, over-generous welfare benefits have supported the rapid increase in lone-parent families. These benefits should be reduced so lone-parenthood becomes a less attractive option. Cohabitation should be discouraged by denying unmarried couples the legal rights and privileges given to married couples. And divorce should be made more difficult to discourage marital break-up (Morgan, 1999; Saunders, 2000).

Supporting all families

Critics of the New Right argue that governments should not

attempt to impose one type of family and force everybody into the same mould. Instead, they should recognise that families are diverse and the trend is towards increasing diversity. Government policy should therefore support *all* families (Bernardes, 1997).

It is not the job of government to force couples to stay together by making divorce more difficult. Nor should rights and privileges be denied to those who cohabit simply because they aren't married. Governments should not make judgements about which form of family is best and base policy on such judgements. They should accept the decisions people have made about *their* form of family life and develop policies to support all families.

Family policy in the UK

Conservative policy This section looks at family policy from 1990. The Conservative Party under John Major was in government from 1990 to 1997. It showed a clear preference for the married, two-parent nuclear family. Lone parents were denounced in what one writer described as 'an orgy of lone-parent bashing' (Lister, 1996). John Major himself heralded the virtues of 'traditional family values' in his Back to Basics campaign. However, this campaign was quietly brushed under the carpet, not least because many Cabinet members were divorced – hardly a reflection of traditional family values.

Talk rather than action characterised the Major years. There were only two significant pieces of legislation directed at the family. In 1991, The Child Support Act was passed which led to the formation of the Child Support Agency. The main aim was to force absent fathers to pay maintenance for their children in the hope of reducing welfare payments to lone mothers. Although the government claimed this would help lone mothers, any money received from the fathers was deducted from the mothers' benefits.

The Family Law Act of 1996 introduced a one year waiting period before a couple could divorce. The intention of the act was to support the institution of marriage. Couples were encouraged to take every possible step to save their marriage. However, the act was never implemented as judges saw it as unworkable.

Labour policy The tone of Labour's words on family policy was milder than those of the Conservatives. There was an attempt to steer a middle course between supporting both marriage and the nuclear family and providing help for other forms of family. There was no 'back to basics' but no 'anything goes' either. Labour has been careful not to condemn alternatives to the nuclear family (Lewis, 2001).

This can be seen from *Supporting Families* (1998) – a discussion document which suggested ways of providing 'better services and support for parents'. The emphasis is on *all* families. The government doesn't want to 'interfere' in family life, to 'pressure people' into a preferred family form, or to 'force' married couples to stay together. It accepts that many lone parents and unmarried couples raise children successfully. But, at the end of the day, 'marriage is still the surest foundation for raising children'.

This is what Labour said. What have they done?

Labour's family policy has formed part of its welfare policy. Summed up in Tony Blair's statement, 'Work for those that can, security for those that can't', this policy seeks to move those who can work from welfare into work and to improve benefits for those who can't.

Labour's New Deal schemes are designed to help people find paid employment. One of these schemes is aimed at lone parents, most of whom are lone mothers. Since April 2001, all lone parents are required to attend an annual interview about job opportunities. The Working Families Tax Credit tops up the wages of parents moving from benefits to low paid jobs.

Various childcare schemes have been introduced. For example, the Sure Start programme provides health and support services for low-income families with young children.

One of Labour's stated aims is to take all children out of poverty. Various benefits have been increased with this in mind. For example, Child Benefit has been increased by 26% in real terms from 1997 to 2001 (Page, 2002). According to the Children's Secretary Ed Balls, Labour has 'lifted 600,000 children out of poverty'. However, the number of children living in poor families rose for the first time in six years in 2005-06 by 200,000 to 3.8 million (*Guardian*, 30.10.2007).

Labour's policies focus on money and work – children need money, parents have a responsibility to work (Lewis, 2001).

Recent developments Political parties are increasingly recognising the realities of family life – that family diversity is here to stay. Politicians are realising that the clock can't be turned back, that they have a responsibility to support all families. Alternative family forms are no longer condemned.

This can be seen clearly from David Willetts' speech at the Conservative (Tory) Party Conference in October 2002. He announced, 'Let me make it absolutely clear: the Tory war on lone parents is over'. He admitted that families come in all shapes and sizes, and that the state had a duty to support them all. Talking about lone parents, he said, 'We'll support them and value them and, above all, we'll back them'. Yet, despite this, Willetts' claimed that the evidence was 'overwhelming' that it was better for children to be brought up by two parents in a stable marriage.

The Conservative leader David Cameron echoes these views. His argument runs as follows.

- 'Families matter because almost every social problem comes down to family stability.'
- Children need a stable family background.
- The evidence shows that a 'married family' is more likely than other forms to provide this stability. For example, married couples are less likely to break up than cohabiting couples.

- It therefore makes sense for the state to support the 'married family'.
- One option is to support marriage by using the tax and benefit system to give favourable treatment to married couples.

Although he recognises that governments should support all types of family, David Cameron clearly favours the 'married family' (www.conservatives.com). It is noticeable that the proposed tax allowances for married couples with children do not extend to cohabiting couples with children.

The Conservatives have tended to focus on marriage seeing it as the best social context for raising children. Labour have tended to focus on children, whatever the social context in which they are raised. They have been reluctant to single out marriage for support, arguing that it would discriminate against lone parents and cohabiting couples. Gordon Brown made the following statement at the 2007 Labour Party Conference.

'I say to the children of two parent families, one parent families, foster parent families; to the widow bringing up children: I stand for a Britain that supports as first class citizens not just some children and some families but supports all children and all families.'

summary

1. Functionalists argue that the family is a universal institution. It performs functions which are essential for the maintenance and well-being of society.
2. Parsons argues that the family performs two 'basic and irreducible' functions in modern industrial society – primary socialisation and the stabilisation of adult personalities.
3. The New Right sees the nuclear family as the ideal family form. They believe the nuclear family is under threat. Alternative family forms, particularly lone mother families, fail to provide adequate socialisation.
4. Marxists argue that the modern family has been shaped to fit the needs of capitalism. It helps to maintain an economic system based on exploitation.
5. Feminists see the family as patriarchal – it is dominated by men and serves the needs of men.
6. According to the New Right, government policy should favour marriage and the nuclear family.
7. Others argue that governments should recognise family diversity and support all family forms.
8. The main political parties now agree that family diversity is a reality and that governments have a duty to support all types of family. However, Conservatives tend to see the 'married family' as the best social arrangement for raising children. Labour tend to focus on supporting children, whatever types of family they are raised in.

Unit 3 The family and social change

keyissues

1 What is the relationship of the family to industrialisation and urbanisation?

2 Has there been a trend towards nuclear families?

3.1 The family in pre-industrial society

Farming families

Before the industrial revolution, most people lived on the land. Family members worked together to produce goods and services – the family unit was a *production unit*. Activity 8 Item A shows people working together in Medieval England. The people working together are probably from the same family.

In many developing countries today, the farming family continues as a production unit. This can be seen from Activity 8 Item B which describes a farming family in Manupur, a village in India.

Cottage industry

Before the industrial revolution, many goods were produced by craftsmen and women in their homes and in small workshops. This type of production is sometimes known as *cottage industry* as goods were often produced in cottages. As with farming, the family was the main unit of production in cottage industry. Activity 9 provides a description of families producing cloth in Halifax in West Yorkshire.

Kinship-based societies

Many small-scale, non-Western societies are organised on the basis of kinship. People's roles and the institutions of society are largely based on kinship relationships – relationships of 'blood' and marriage. Families are embedded in a wider network of kin, they are closely linked to people they are related to. Societies like this are sometimes known as *kinship-based societies.*

For example, many African societies were traditionally organised on the basis of *lineages* – groups descended from a common ancestor. Lineages often owned land and formed

activity8 farming families (1)

Item A Farming in Medieval England

Harvesting

Milking sheep to make cheese and butter

Item B Farming families in India

Husband and wife picking crocuses to make saffron in Kashmir, India

The day begins early for a farmer in Manupur, around four in the morning. He must first feed the animals (oxen, cows, buffalo) and give them water.

The oxen are tied to the cart at around five o'clock in the morning and the men are ready to go to the fields and work. Meals are brought to the field by the son, or, if necessary, by the daughter. The distance between the house and the farm is sometimes over a mile, and it would be a waste of precious time to go home.

During sowing and harvest times, work may go on as late as 10:00pm. Once home, the animals must be tended. If the farmer has a young son, grass has already been cut; if not, he must employ someone to do it. It remains for him to prepare the fodder, and to feed, wash, and clean the animals.

The farmer's wife has an even greater burden of work. She must prepare the meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) and tea (early morning, mid-afternoon, and late night). Meals are made for the husband and the children and, if there are few children, for the labourers who have to be hired. The buffalo must be milked twice a day, morning and evening. The milk is used to make lassi, a yoghurt drink for warm mornings, and to make butter late in the evening. Dishes must be washed after every meal.

Source: Monthly Review Press, 1972

questions

1 How might the people in each of the pictures in Item A be related?

2 Why is a family essential for the farmer in Item B?

political units – important decisions which affected all members of the lineage were made by a council of elders.

The importance of marriage in kinship-based societies can be seen from the following quotation and the example in Activity 10. The French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1956), recalls meeting a pathetic looking man during his research among the Bororo of central Brazil. The man was 'about thirty years old: unclean, ill-fed, sad, and lonesome. When asked if the man was seriously ill, the answer came as a shock: What was wrong with him? – nothing at all, he was just a bachelor, and true enough, in a society where labour is systematically shared between man and woman and where only the married status permits the man to benefit from the fruits of woman's work, including delousing, body painting, and hair-plucking as well as vegetable food and cooked food (since the Bororo woman tills the soil and makes pots), a bachelor is really only half a human being.'

Pre-industrial families

The evidence suggests that families in pre-industrial societies were often extended beyond the basic nuclear family. The example of producing textiles in Activity 9 suggests that the family was extended to include three generations – note the old woman in the picture.

activity9 cottage industry

Around 1720, Daniel Defoe (author of *Robinson Crusoe*) journeyed to Halifax in West Yorkshire. This is what he saw.

'People made cloth in practically every house in Halifax. They keep a cow or two and sow corn to feed their chickens. The houses were full of lusty fellows, some at the dye-vat; some at the loom, others dressing the cloths; the women and children carding, or spinning; all employed from the youngest to the oldest. The finished cloth was taken to the market to be sold.'

Source: "A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain" (1724–1727) by Daniel Defoe

Spinning in a cottage in the early 1700s

question

What evidence does this activity provide which suggests that the family is a unit of production?

There is evidence that the family was *multifunctional* – that it performed a number of functions. For example, as a production unit it had an economic function, as part of a wider kinship group it sometimes performed political functions, and by socialising children and providing them with job training, it had an important educational function.

A person's status or position in society was often ascribed – fixed at birth – by their family membership. Daughters tended to take on the status of their mothers, sons the status of their fathers.

3.2 Industrialisation, urbanisation and families

The industrial revolution began in Britain around 1750. It brought a number of important changes in society.

- A large part of the workforce moved from agriculture and small cottage industries to industrial work, producing manufactured goods in factories.
- Manufacturing industry was mechanised – machinery was used to mass produce goods. Small home-based

activity10 the economics of marriage

In many pre-industrial societies, marriage is essential for economic reasons. In traditional Inuit (Eskimo) society, men build igloos and hunt. Women gather edible plants and catch fish. Their skill in sewing animal skins into clothes is indispensable in the Arctic climate. Sewing is a skill that men are never taught, and many of the skills of hunting are kept secret from women.

Source: from Douglas, 1964

Inuit women beating fish skin to make into 'fish leather'

question

Why is marriage in traditional Inuit society essential for both husband and wife?

activity11 loss of functions

Item A Factory production

Item B National Health Service

Item C Home for the elderly

question

How can these pictures be used to argue that many of the functions of the family have been reduced or lost in modern industrial society?

family businesses could not compete with this.

- Towns and cities grew in size and the majority of the population was concentrated in large urban areas rather than small villages. This process is known as *urbanisation*.

This section examines the impact of these changes on the family.

Talcott Parsons – the isolated nuclear family

The American functionalist sociologist, Talcott Parsons (1951) argued that industrialisation has led to the *isolated nuclear family*. He sees this as the typical family form in modern industrial society. Compared to pre-industrial times, the nuclear family – the married couple and their children – are isolated from the wider kinship network. Although there are usually relationships with relatives outside the nuclear family, these are now a matter of choice rather than necessity or obligation and duty.

Loss of functions According to Parsons, the main reason for this isolation is a loss of functions performed by the family. For example, the typical modern family is no longer a production unit – its adult members are now individual wage earners. In addition, local and national government has taken over, or reduced the importance of, many of the functions of the family. Schools, hospitals, welfare benefits and the police force have reduced the need for a wide network of kin (see Activity 11).

Achieved status In modern industrial society, status is achieved rather than ascribed. In other words, a person's position in society is achieved on the basis of merit – ability and effort – rather than ascribed on the basis of family membership. Children are unlikely to follow their parents'

occupations. Job training is performed by the educational system and the employer rather than the family.

Geographical mobility In modern industrial society, extended family networks may be *dysfunctional* – they may be harmful to society. A modern industrial economy requires a geographically mobile workforce – workers who are able to move to places where their skills are in demand. Large extended families tend to be tied down by obligations and duties to their relatives. They are bulky and unwieldy units compared to the small, streamlined isolated nuclear family.

Summary Parsons argues that the isolated nuclear family is ideally suited to modern industrial society. Although it is slimmed down, it can still perform its essential functions – the socialisation of children and the stabilisation of adult personalities (see pages 67-68).

key terms

Production unit A group of people involved in the production of goods and services.
Cottage industry The production of goods in the home.
Kinship-based society A society in which social institutions and people's roles are largely organised on the basis of kinship relationships.
Lineage A social group made up of people descended from a common ancestor.
Multifunctional Performing a number of functions.
Industrialisation The move to the production of manufactured goods in factories.
Urbanisation The concentration of an increasing proportion of the population in urban areas – towns and cities.
Isolated nuclear family A married couple and their children who are largely independent from the wider kinship network.

activity12 farming families (2)

Item A Families in rural Ireland

The following description is taken from a study of farming families in Ireland in the 1930s.

An elaborate system of cooperation had grown up between farmers and their relatives. Men often lent one another tools and machinery. Women clubbed together to make up a tub or firkin of butter or lend a girl when a family was shorthanded for the work of dairying.

Help from extended family members is especially important at harvest time when grass is mowed and collected. One farmer was helped by the sons of three others, his second cousins, and in due course he mowed their meadows. Another was helped by the son of his cousin and his nephew. He took his mowing machine to do the fields of their fathers. There were, however, five cases of farmers who although obviously shorthanded had no help. Two of these were bachelors who could not return the help, and two 'strangers' who would not be expected to.

Source: Frankenberg, 1966

Item B Haymaking

Haymaking in Berkshire in 1906

Baling hay on a modern farm

questions

1 a) What evidence of extended families is provided by Item A?

b) How can this evidence be used to question Laslett's conclusions?

2 Judging from Item B, why are farmers today less likely to rely on extended family members?

Peter Laslett – the family in pre-industrial England

Historical research has questioned the view that most people in pre-industrial societies lived in extended families. The historian Peter Laslett (1965, 1977) examined parish records which record the names of people living together in households – 'under the same roof'. He found that only about 10% of households in England from 1564 to 1821 included kin beyond the nuclear family. The figure for Great Britain in 1981 was similar – around 9% – but by 2001 it had dropped to under 5% (*Social Trends*, 2002).

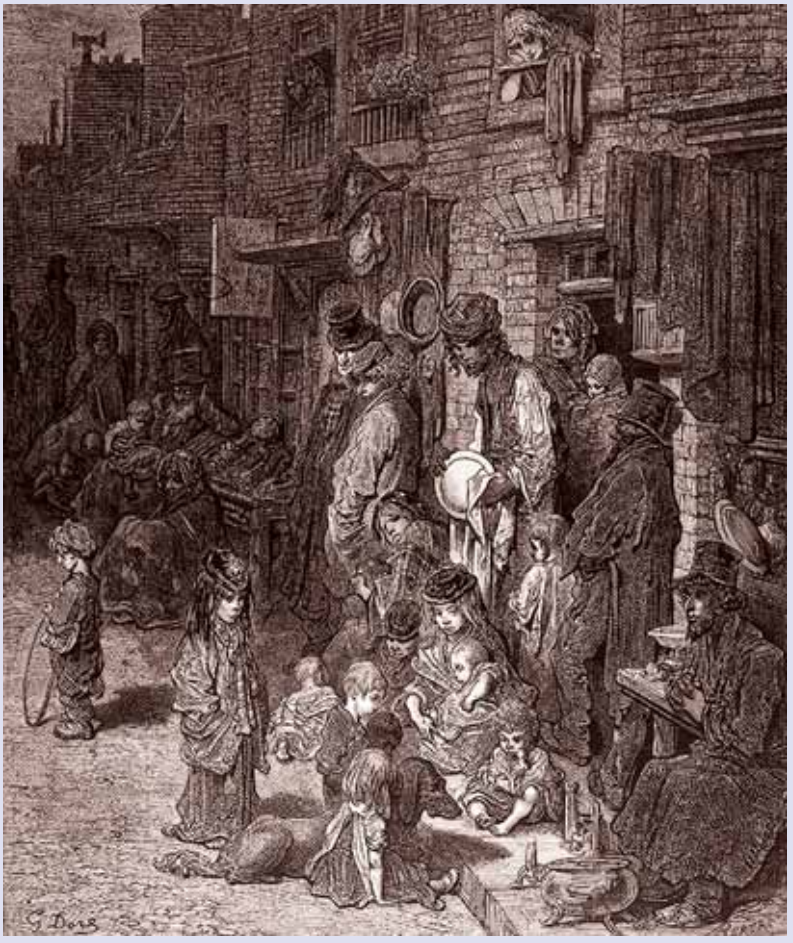
Laslett claims that his research shows that nuclear families were the norm in pre-industrial England. He found a similar pattern in parts of Western Europe. His research was based on *households*, but people do not have to live under the same roof to form extended families. It is not possible from Laslett's data to discover how much cooperation occurred between kin who lived in different households. Extended families may have been important even though relatives lived in neighbouring households. This can be seen from Activity 12.

Michael Anderson – the working-class extended family

Historical research by Michael Anderson (1971) suggests that the early stages of industrialisation may have encouraged the development of extended families. Anderson took a 10% sample of households from Preston in Lancashire, using data from the 1851 census. He found that 23% of households contained kin beyond the nuclear family. Most of these households were working class. This was a time of widespread poverty, high birth rates and high death rates. Without a welfare state, people tended to rely on a wide network of kin for care and support. Anderson's study suggests that the working-class extended family operated as a mutual aid organisation, providing support in times of hardship and crisis.

The mid-19th century was a period of rapid urbanisation as people moved from rural areas to work in factories – for example, in the cotton mills of Preston. Overcrowding was common due to a shortage of housing and a desire to save on rent. As a result, people often moved in with their relatives.

activity13 mutual support



Gustav Doré's engraving of Wentworth Street, Whitechapel, London in the 1870s

question

Suggest ways in which members of the working-class extended family might help each other during the 19th century.

3.3 Industrialisation, women and families

Ann Oakley (1974) argues that industrialisation had the following effects on women and family life.

During the early years of industrialisation (1750-1841) the factory steadily replaced the family as the unit of production. Women were employed in factories where they often continued their traditional work in textiles. However, a series of factory acts, beginning in 1819, gradually restricted child labour. Someone now had to care for and supervise children, a role which fell to women. The restriction of women to the home had begun.

Women were seen by many men as a threat to their employment. As early as 1841, committees of male workers called for 'the gradual withdrawal of all female labour from the factory'. In 1842, the Mines Act banned the employment of women as miners. Women were excluded from trade unions, men made contracts with their employers to prevent them from hiring women and laws were passed restricting female employment in a number of industries. Tied down by dependent children and increasingly barred from the workplace the restriction of women to the home continued.

Slowly but surely women were being locked into the mother-housewife role and confined to the home. In 1851, one in four married women were employed, by 1911, this figure was reduced to one in ten. From 1914 to 1950 the employment of married women grew slowly but the mother-housewife role remained their primary responsibility. Even by 1970, when about half of all married women were employed, most saw their occupational role as secondary to their duties as a wife and mother and their responsibility for the home.

Oakley concludes that industrialisation had the following effects on the role of women. First, the 'separation of men from the daily routines of domestic life'. Second, the 'economic dependence of women and children on men'. Third, the 'isolation of housework and childcare from other work'. The result is that the mother-housewife role became 'the primary role for all women'.

Recent evidence indicates that the position of married women is changing. By 2000, 75% of married or cohabiting women of working age (16-59) in the UK were economically active (ie, either in work or seeking work). There has been a steady decline in full-time mothers and housewives. In 1991, 17% of women of working age gave their occupation as 'looking after family/home'. By 2001, this had declined to 13% (*Social Trends,* 2002).

activity14 the mother–housewife role

question

How does this magazine cover from 1957 reflect Oakley's picture of the mother-housewife role in the 1950s?

3.4 Families in the 20th century

There is evidence that the working-class extended family continued well into the 20th century. Research indicates it was alive and well in the 1950s in a Liverpool dock area (Kerr, 1958), in a Yorkshire mining town (Dennis, Henriques & Slaughter, 1956) and in the East End of London (Young & Willmott, 1957).

Bethnal Green In their study of Bethnal Green in the East End of London, Michael Young and Peter Willmott define an extended family as 'a combination of families who to some large degree form one domestic unit'. The extended family does not have to share the same household – ie, live under the same roof – as long as its members are in regular contact and share services such as caring for children and elderly relatives. Activity 16 is based on Young and Willmott's research in Bethnal Green.

Greenleigh In the second part of their research, Young and Willmott studied families from Bethnal Green who had been rehoused in Greenleigh, a new council estate in Essex. Young and Willmott describe their family life as *privatised* – it had become home-centred and based on the nuclear family. Living 30 miles from Bethnal Green, wives lost regular contact with their mothers and became more dependent on husbands for companionship and support. Husbands were cut off from social contacts in Bethnal Green, for example, visiting the pub with workmates, and became more involved in domestic activities. Gardening, watching television and other home-centred leisure activities largely replaced the extended family.

Young and Willmott's findings are reflected in later studies such as John Goldthorpe and David Lockwood's (1969) research into affluent (highly paid) manual workers in Luton in the 1960s. Many had moved to Luton in search of better paid jobs. They led privatised, home-centred lives – the home and nuclear family were the focus of their leisure activities.

Stages of family life

Many sociologists have argued that there is a long-term trend towards the nuclear family. Michael Young and Peter Willmott take a similar view. In a study entitled *The Symmetrical Family* (1973), they bring together their earlier research, historical evidence, and data from a survey they conducted in London in the early 1970s. They argue that the family in Britain has developed through three stages.

Stage 1 The pre-industrial family The family at this stage is a production unit – family members work together in agriculture and cottage industries.

Stage 2 The early industrial family The industrial revolution disrupted the unity of the family as its economic function was taken over by large-scale industry. Men were

activity15 Bethnal Green

Item A Mother and daughter

The link between mother and daughter in Bethnal Green is often strong. The following example shows how much their lives are sometimes woven together. Mrs Wilkins is in and out of her mother's all day. She shops with her in the morning and goes round there for a cup of tea in the afternoon. 'Then any time during the day, if I want a bit of salt or something like that, I go round to Mum to get it and have a bit of a chat while I'm there. If the children have anything wrong with them, I usually go round to my Mum and have a little chat. If she thinks it's serious enough I'll take him to the doctor.' Her mother looked after Marilyn, the oldest child, for nearly three years. 'She's always had her when I worked; I worked from when she was just a little baby until I was past six months with Billy. Oh, she's all for our Mum. She's got her own mates over there and still plays there all the time. Mum looks after my girl pretty good. When she comes in, I say, "Have you had your tea?", and she says as often as not, "I've had it at Nan's".'

Source: Young & Willmott, 1957

Item B Contact with kin

Contacts of married men and women with parents

	Fathers		*Mothers*	
	Number with father alive	Percentage who saw father in previous 24 hours	Number with mother alive	Percentage who saw mother in previous 24 hours
Men	116	30%	163	31%
Women	100	48%	155	55%

Source: Young & Willmott, 1957

questions

1 In view of Young and Willmott's definition, does Mrs Wilkins in Item A belong to an extended family? Give reasons for your answer.

2 Mr Sykes who lives near his mother-in-law in Bethnal Green said, 'This is the kind of family where sisters never want to leave their mother's side'. How does Item B suggest that this kind of family is widespread?

increasingly drawn out of the home into industrial employment. The family was 'torn apart' – long working hours meant that men had little time to spend with their wives and children. Poverty was widespread. Kinship networks were extended, mainly by women, to provide mutual support. Extended families continued well into the 20th century in low-income, working-class areas such as Bethnal Green.

Stage 3 The symmetrical family This type of family first developed in the middle class. By the 1970s, it had spread to the working class. It has three main characteristics.

- It is nuclear.
- It is home-centred and privatised – family life is focused on the home. Husband and wife look to each other for companionship. Leisure is home-based – for example, watching TV. The family is self-contained – there is little contact with the wider kinship network.
- It is *symmetrical* – the roles of husband and wife are increasingly similar. Although wives are still mainly responsible for childcare, husbands play a greater part in domestic life.

Stratified diffusion Young and Willmott argue that the development of the stage 3 family has occurred through a process of *stratified diffusion*, whereby new ideas of family life were started by the higher social classes and gradually filtered down to the lower classes. As the working class has come to enjoy shorter working hours, more comfortable homes and a higher standard of living, family life has become increasingly privatised and nuclear. There is less need for the traditional mutual aid network of the extended family. There is more opportunity to devote time and money to home and children.

Stage 4 Young and Willmott suggest a possible fourth stage in family life. They argue that if stratified diffusion

activity16 three stages of family life

Item A Early 20th century

A Lancashire farming family

Item B 1954

Chatting over the garden fence

Item C 1970s

A shot from an Oxo commercial

question

Match each picture to one of Young and Willmott's three stages of family life. Explain your choices.

continues, then the upper classes will be setting the trends for family life in the future. Their survey included a sample of managing directors' families. It indicates a trend away from the symmetrical family towards a more asymmetrical form. Husbands were highly involved in their work and domestic responsibilities were left mainly to their wives. Couples spent less time in joint activities than the typical privatised family.

Criticisms of Young and Willmott

1 Their theory suggests an historical 'march of progress' in which family life gets better and better. They have been criticised for failing to address the negative aspects of changes in the modern family.

2 Many sociologists are unhappy about the concept of stratified diffusion, implying as it does that the working class automatically follow norms established by the middle class. Goldthorpe and Lockwood's Luton study, while showing privatised lifestyles among affluent manual workers, showed that they still retained a distinctive working-class outlook on life.

3 Feminists have attacked Young and Willmott's concept of the symmetrical family. For example, they claim that women are still mainly responsible for household tasks such as cooking and cleaning (McMahon, 1999).

4 The extended family may be more important than Young and Willmott's picture of the largely independent nuclear family suggests.

The modified extended family

The picture presented so far is a steady march of progress blossoming into the privatised, self-sufficient, self-centred nuclear family. Kin beyond the nuclear family appear to play a minor role. A number of sociologists argue that this process has been exaggerated. Important services are often exchanged between nuclear family members and extended kin, though the ties that bind them are not as strong as those in the traditional extended family.

The term *modified extended family* is sometimes used to describe such family groupings. Members come together for important family events and provide support in times of need. Improved communications, such as email, telephones, cars and air travel, mean that contact over long distances is easier than before.

The following studies suggest that sociologists have tended to underestimate the importance of kinship beyond the nuclear family.

North London in the 1980s Peter Willmott (1986) studied married couples with young children in a North London suburb. Two-thirds saw relatives at least once a week, nearly two-thirds were helped by mothers or mothers-in-laws when a child was ill, and nearly three-quarters were helped with babysitting – again mainly by mothers or mothers-in-law. Four-fifths looked to relatives, mainly parents or parents-in-law, when they needed to borrow money.

Luton in the 1980s In 1986-1987, Fiona Devine (1992) studied Vauxhall car workers and their families in Luton. In part, this was a restudy of Goldthorpe and Lockwood's 1960s' research which pictured the working-class family as privatised and self-contained. Devine's research suggests that the degree of privatisation has been exaggerated. Most couples had regular contact with kin – especially parents and, to a lesser extent, brothers and sisters. Many had been helped by kin to find jobs and housing when moving to the area.

Manchester in the 1990s Research in the 1990s largely confirms the findings of earlier studies. A study of Greater Manchester by Janet Finch and Jennifer Mason (1993) found that over 90% of their sample had given or received financial help from relatives, and almost 60% had shared a household with an adult relative (apart from parents) at some time in their lives. In addition, many reported giving and receiving practical assistance, emotional support, and help with children. While emphasising that family relationships are based on a sense of obligation, Finch and Mason also found that help was negotiated and not necessarily given automatically.

Declining contact, 1986-1995 The above studies indicate the continuing importance of kin beyond the nuclear family. However, there is evidence of a decline in contact with kin. The British Social Attitudes (BSA) Survey is based on a representative sample of adults aged 18 and over. The 1986 and 1995 Surveys looked at frequency of contact with kin. They indicate a significant decline. The figures suggest that people are less likely to visit or be visited by anybody at all – relatives or friends. The data showing this is presented in Activity 17.

Why has contact declined? The average journey time between relatives has increased only very slightly since 1986.There is no evidence that friends have replaced relatives. The most likely explanation appears to be the increasing proportion of women working outside the home. The most marked fall in contact has been among women in full-time employment – for example, a drop of nearly 20% seeing their mother at least once a week (McGlone et al., 1999).

Social change and the family – conclusion

Functions of the family There is no simple, straightforward relationship between industrialisation and the functions of the family, the structure of family relationships and the content of family roles. Sociologists generally agree that industrialisation ended the family's role as a unit of production. However, some argue that this has been replaced by an equally important economic function – the family as a *unit of consumption*. Goods and services are increasingly bought and consumed in the name of the family – houses, family cars, home improvements, family holidays and so on. Rising living standards resulting from industrialisation have enabled the family to become a unit of consumption.

Has the family lost many of its functions? Some

activity17 declining contact

Item A Contact with kin

	Frequency seeing relative/ friend at least once a week	
	1986 (%)	1995 (%)
Mother	59	49
Father	51	40
Sibling	33	29
Adult child	66	58
Other relative	42	35
'Best friend'	65	59

Source: McGlone et al., 1999

Item B Full-time work

	Frequency seeing non-resident mother at least once a week	
	1985 (%)	1995 (%)
Men in full-time work	49	46
Women in full-time work	64	45

Source: McGlone et al., 1999

Item C Keeping in touch

questions

1 a) Briefly summarise the data in Item A.
b) How does it indicate that friends have not taken over from family?

2 What does Item B suggest is the reason for reduced contact with relatives?

3 Items A and B refer to face-to-face contact with relatives. This may exaggerate the extent of the decline of contact. Why? Refer to Item C in your answer.

sociologists argue that the functions of the family have not been reduced or lost. Instead, they have been supplemented and supported. For example, Ronald Fletcher (1966) claims that traditional functions such as the care and education of children have been supported rather than removed by state schools, hospitals and welfare provision.

Structure of the family Does industrialisation lead to the development of isolated nuclear families? Not necessarily, as Anderson's study of Preston in 1851 indicates. However, many sociologists believe there is a trend in this direction. Although extended family networks continued well into the 20th century, available evidence suggests that they have largely disappeared in their traditional form.

However, the picture of the privatised, self-contained nuclear family has probably been exaggerated. Contact between kin beyond the nuclear family is widespread – sufficient to use the term modified extended family to describe many families. However, there is evidence that contact declined fairly significantly towards the end of the 20th century.

Family roles Have family roles changed as a result of industrialisation? To some extent yes, though not simply in one direction. For example, women were an important part of the labour force during the early years of industrialisation, most had turned to the home by the beginning of the 20th century, then most had returned to paid employment by the start of the 21st century.

Family diversity This unit has looked at some of the changes in family life since industrialisation. However, it has not examined some of the more recent changes mentioned in Unit 2 – the growth in lone-parent families, reconstituted families and cohabitation, the rise in the divorce rate, and the increase in gay and lesbian families. These changes will now be examined.

key terms

Symmetrical family A nuclear family in which the roles of husband and wife are increasingly similar. It is home-centred, privatised and self-contained.

Stratified diffusion The spread of ideas and behaviour through the class system from top to bottom.

Modified extended family A weaker version of the traditional extended family. Members don't usually share the same household. However, contact is regular and important services are often exchanged.

Unit of consumption A group of people who consume goods and services as a unit.

summary

1. Families in pre-industrial society performed a range of functions. These included economic, educational and welfare functions.
2. Pre-industrial families were often extended – they formed part of a wider kinship network. This wider network was needed to effectively perform the family's functions.
3. Talcott Parsons saw the isolated nuclear family as the typical family structure in industrial society. He argued that family members no longer needed to rely on large kinship networks because many of the family's functions had been taken over by specialised agencies.
4. According to Parsons, an industrial economy requires a geographically mobile labour force. The small, streamlined nuclear family meets this requirement.
5. Peter Laslett's research shows that only 10% of pre-industrial households in England contained kin beyond the nuclear family. However, family members do not have to live under the same roof to form extended families.
6. Michael Anderson's research on Preston households in 1851 suggests that the early years of industrialisation may have encouraged the formation of extended families in the working class. Such families may have operated as mutual aid organisations before the days of the welfare state.
7. During the early years of industrialisation, married women often worked in factories. They were gradually excluded from the labour force and restricted to the home. The mother-housewife role became their primary role. Today, the majority of women have returned to the labour force.
8. Defined by Young and Willmott as 'a combination of families who to some large degree form one domestic unit', extended families continued well into the 20th century in many working-class areas.
9. Young and Willmott claim that the family in Britain has developed through three stages: 1) the pre-industrial family 2) the early industrial family 3) the symmetrical family.
10. Studies from the 1950s to the early 1970s claimed that the typical family structure was nuclear. Families were pictured as privatised, home-centred and self-contained.
11. Studies from the 1980s and 1990s suggested that this picture of privatisation and self-containment was exaggerated. Kin beyond the nuclear family still played an important role. Many families could be described as modified extended families.
12. However, evidence from the British Social Attitudes Survey indicates that contact with kin beyond the nuclear family declined towards the close of the 20th century.

Unit 4 Changing family relationships

keyissues

1. How have patterns of marriage, cohabitation, childbearing, separation and divorce changed?
2. What explanations have been given for these changes?

4.1 Marriage

Apart from a few ups and downs, the number of marriages per year in the UK increased steadily from 1838 (when they were first recorded) until the early 1970s. Since then there has been a significant decline, from 480,000 marriages in 1972 to 283,700 in 2005 (unless mentioned, the figures in this unit are taken from *Social Trends* and National Statistics online).

These figures refer both to *first marriages*, in which neither partner has been married before, and to *remarriages* in which one or both partners have been married before.

First Marriage The number of first marriages in England and Wales peaked in 1940 at 426,100 (91% of all marriages) then fell to 146,120 in 2005 (60% of all marriages).

Remarriage Remarriages increased from 57,000 in 1961 (14% of all marriages) to 98,580 in 2005 (40% of all marriages). Most remarriages involve divorced persons rather than widows and widowers. The largest increase occurred between 1971 and 1972 following the introduction of the Divorce Reform Act of 1969, and then levelled off.

Age at marriage Over the past 40 years, people have tended to marry later. In 1971, the average age for first marriages in England and Wales was 25 for men and 23 for women. By 2005, it was 32 for men and 29 for women. The increase in cohabitation – living together as a couple – partly accounts for this. Many couples know see cohabitation as a prelude to marriage.

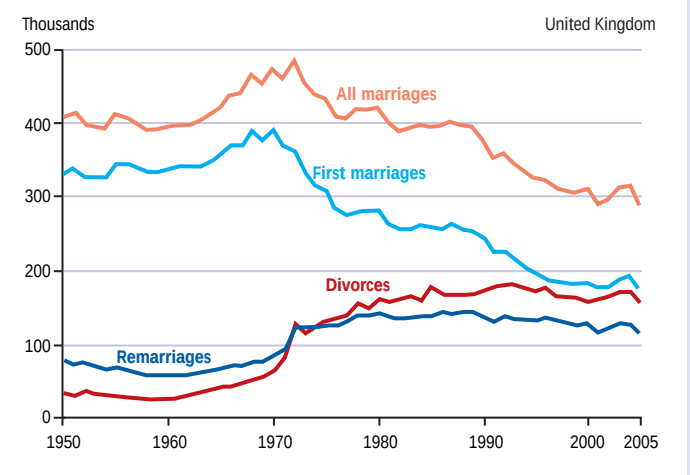
Civil partnerships The Civil Partnership Act came into effect in the UK in December 2005. The Act grants same-sex couples identical rights and responsibilities as opposite-sex married couples. There were 18,059 civil partnerships formed in the UK between December 2005 and the end of December 2006.

key terms

First marriage A marriage in which neither partner has been married before.
Remarriage A marriage in which one or both partners have been married before.

activity18 patterns of marriage

Item A Marriages and divorces



Source: *Social Trends*, 2007, Office for National Statistics

Item B Keep on marrying

Patsy Kensit with husband number three, Liam Gallagher. The marriage is now over.

Joan Collins with husband number five, Percy Gibson.

Item C Wary of marriage

Sue Sharpe studied working-class girls in London schools in the early 1970s. She found their main concerns were 'love, marriage, husbands, children, jobs, and careers, more or less in that order'. A third wanted to be married by 20 and three-quarters by 25.

When she returned to the same schools in the early 1990s, she found the girls' priorities had changed to 'job, career and being able to support themselves'. In her words, 'Young people had witnessed adult relationships breaking up and being reconstituted all around them. Girls in particular were far more wary of marriage. Now, only 4 per cent wanted to be married by 20, although there was still a feeling of "A wedding day – that sounds good fun".'

Source: Sharpe, 1976 and 1994

questions

1 a) Describe the trends shown in Item A.
   b) What does Item A suggest about the relationship between divorce and remarriage?
2 Why does the term 'serial monogamy' fit Patsy Kensit's and Joan Collins's marital history?
3 How might Item C help to explain
   a) the decline in marriage
   b) the later age of marriage?

Singlehood

Some people never marry. They either choose to remain single or fail to find a suitable marriage partner. There are increasing numbers of 'never-married' people. For example, in England and Wales only 7% of women born between 1946 and 1950 remained unmarried by the age of 32, compared with 28% of those born between 1961 and 1965. There is a similar trend for men.

Many 'never-married' people cohabit – they live with a partner as a couple. There has been a steady increase in cohabitation in recent years as the following section indicates. There has also been a steady increase in singlehood – living without a partner.

Creative singlehood In the past, being single was seen as a negative status, particularly for women. They had 'failed' to find a marriage partner, their situation was 'unfortunate', they were 'spinsters' and 'old maids' – terms with negative overtones.

Today, views are changing. The term *creative singlehood* is sometimes used to describe a positive view of singlehood whereby people choose to remain single as a lifestyle option.

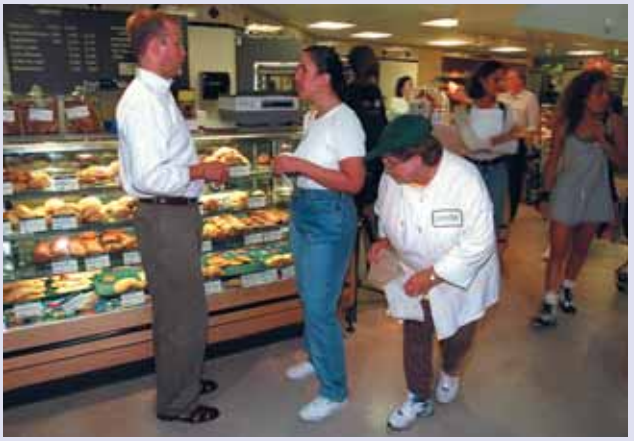
activity19 singlehood

Item A Creative singlehood

Never-married people who live alone tend to see their situation in positive terms. They have chosen to remain single. They emphasise the importance of independence and freedom. As one single woman in her 30s put it, 'It was the freedom of it really, come and go when I like'.

Others emphasise the importance of work. One woman said, 'Until the age of 30 there was always a man in my life, but around the age of 30, it all started to change and work took over. By the age of 35, I had come to the conclusion that I should knock it on the head and concentrate on work'.

Source: Hall et al., 1999



Singles' night in a supermarket

Item B Single women

Women are choosing to live alone because they have the capacity to do so. New opportunities in education and employment over the past few decades mean there is now a third way for women between living with and looking after their aged parents, or getting married. Single women tend to have much more developed and intense social networks and are involved in a wide range of social and other activities. Single men, by contrast, tend to be lonely and isolated. The signs are that living alone is good for women but bad for men.

Source: Scase, 2000

Girls' night out

questions

1 How does the term creative singlehood apply to Item A?

2 Why are more women choosing to remain single? Refer to both items in your answer.

4.2 Cohabitation

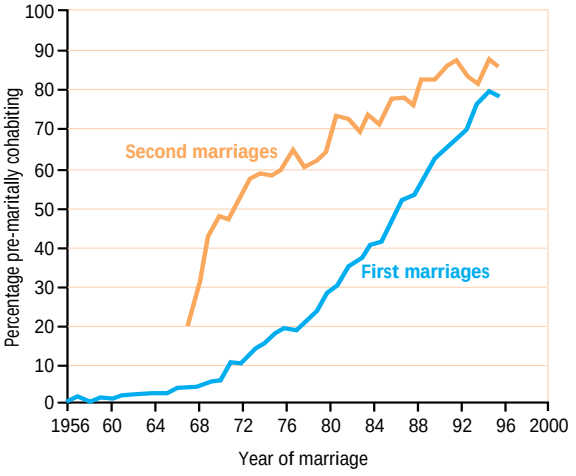
Definition Cohabitation is living together as a couple without being married. It involves a shared residence in which a couple set up home together. Love is the most common reason people give for cohabiting (McRae, 1999).

Extent and age From 1976 to 1998, the proportion of non-married women under 50 who were cohabiting more than trebled – from 9% to over 27%. Cohabiting couples tend to be young – nearly 40% of non-married women aged 25 to 29 were cohabiting in 1998. The picture is similar for men (Haskey, 2001).

In Britain in 2005, 24% of non-married men and women under 60 were cohabiting, around twice the proportion in 1986 (*Social Trends*, 2007).

Cohabitation and marriage Cohabitation before marriage has now become the norm. Figure 1 shows the proportions of first and second marriages in which the couple lived

Figure 1 Cohabitation and marriage



Source: Population Trends 2001, National Household Survey

together before marriage. For first marriages in the 1950s the figure was less than 2%, by 1996 it was 77%. For second marriages, the figure rose from less than 20% in 1967 to 84% in 1996 (Haskey, 2001).

Reasons for cohabitation The 1998 British Household Panel Survey asked people why they chose to cohabit. These are the reasons they gave.

- For most people, cohabitation is part of the process of getting married – it is a prelude to marriage, *not* an alternative to marriage.
- Over half saw cohabitation as a trial marriage – it provided an opportunity to test the relationship before making it legally binding.
- Around 40% saw cohabitation as an alternative to marriage – they saw advantages to living together rather than marrying.
- Some mentioned the absence of legal ties – this gave them more freedom to end the relationship (*Social Trends*, 2002).

Causes

Over the past 50 years, cohabitation has increased rapidly. What accounts for this increase?

Changing attitudes Attitudes towards sexual relationships and living arrangements outside marriage have changed. Cohabitation is no longer seen as 'living in sin' or described with negative phrases such as 'living over the brush'.

Evidence for change can be seen from the 1996 British Household Panel Survey. Asked whether they thought 'living together outside marriage was always wrong', a third of those aged 60 and over thought it was wrong compared with less than a tenth of those under 30 (*Social Trends*, 2002).

Effective contraception From 1967, reliable contraception was made readily available to unmarried women with the passing of the NHS (Family Planning) Act. For the first time, full sexual relations could be an expression of love for a partner rather than a means of reproduction. Effective contraception made it possible for couples to cohabit with little fear of pregnancy (Allan & Crow, 2001).

Changes in parental control, education and housing There is some evidence that parental control over children has decreased over the past 50 years. The 1960s are often seen as the decade when young people revolted against the authority of their parents and the 'older generation'.

The expansion of higher education means that increasing numbers of young people are leaving home at an earlier age for reasons other than marriage. For example, there were 173,000 female undergraduates in the UK in 1970/71 compared with over 1.4 million in 2004/05. As a result, many young people have more freedom from parental authority at an earlier age, and they are able to live in their own housing. This makes it easier for couples to cohabit. In addition, building societies are now more likely to lend to unmarried couples – at one time they were very unlikely to lend to those 'living in sin' (Allan & Crow, 2001).

Changes in divorce The divorce rate has increased rapidly over the past 50 years. Couples in which one or both partners are divorced are the most likely to cohabit. Having already achieved independence from their parents, they are less likely to be affected by parental control. Also, if their divorce has not gone through, cohabitation is their only option if they want to live as a couple.

The rise in divorce means that the view of marriage as a 'union for life' has less power. This may lead many people to see cohabitation, without its binding legal ties, as an attractive alternative to marriage. Some people actually give 'fear of divorce' as a reason for cohabiting (McRae, 1999; Allan & Crow, 2001).

4.3 Divorce and separation

This section looks at the breakup of partnerships. It is mainly concerned with divorce.

Trends in divorce

In the UK, as in other Western societies, there has been a dramatic rise in divorce during the 20th century. This can be seen from the actual number of divorces each year and from the increase in the *divorce rate* – the number of divorces per thousand married people.

Table 1 shows both these measures for *decrees absolute* (final divorces) in England and Wales from 1931 to 2006. Both the number and rate of divorce peaked in 1993. Since then, there has been a gradual decline.

Table 1 Divorce: decrees absolute (England and Wales)

Year	Numbers	Rate per 1,000 married population
1931	3,668	0.4
1951	28,265	2.6
1964	34,868	2.9
1969	51,310	4.1
1972	119,025	9.5
1981	145,713	11.9
1991	158,745	13.4
1993	165,018	14.2
1996	157,107	13.9
1998	145,214	12.9
2000	141,135	12.7
2006	132,562	12.2

With reference to various issues of Population Trends, Office for National Statistics

Interpreting divorce statistics

Divorce statistics provide an accurate measure of one type of marital breakdown – the legal termination of marriages. However, marriages can end in other ways.

Separation The married couple end their marriage by separating – living in separate residences. However, they remain legally married. Some couples obtain separation orders granted by magistrates' courts.

Empty-shell marriages The couple live together, remain legally married, but their marriage exists in name only. Love, sex and companionship are things of the past.

As the divorce rate increased, there may have been a decrease in separations and empty-shell marriages. From 1897-1906, around 8,000 separation orders were granted each year compared to 700 divorces. By 1971, only 94 separation orders were granted compared to over 74,000 divorces. There are no figures on informal ('unofficial') separations. Nor are there any figures on the extent of empty-shell marriages. Such marriages were often maintained in order to 'keep up appearances' and avoid the stigma (shame) of divorce. This stigma considerably reduced during the last half of the 20th century.

As the next section indicates, divorce has become easier and cheaper throughout the last century. In view of this, people who previously separated or endured empty-shell marriages are probably more likely to choose divorce.

Cohabitation Marriage is only one form of partnership. As noted earlier, cohabitation is an increasingly popular form of partnership. Available evidence suggests that, in any given period, a significantly higher number of cohabitations are terminated than marriages (Allan & Crow, 2001).

Conclusion Are partnerships becoming more unstable, more likely to break up? In view of the evidence outlined above, it is not possible to answer this question. However, one sociologist, Robert Chester (1984), believes that the increase in divorce rates probably reflects an increase in marital breakdown – though he admits this cannot be proved.

key terms

Divorce The legal termination of a marriage.
Divorce rate The number of divorces per thousand married people.
Separation A married couple who end their relationship and live in separate residences but remain legally married.
Empty-shell marriage The couple share the same residence, remain legally married, but their marriage exists in name only.

Explaining changing divorce rates

Changes in the law Before 1857 a private Act of Parliament was required to obtain a divorce in Britain. This was an expensive and complicated procedure beyond the means of all but the most wealthy. In 1857 the Matrimonial Causes Act set up a new court for divorce. The grounds for divorce included adultery, cruelty and desertion. At least one partner had to be proven guilty of one of these 'matrimonial offences'. Although the costs of obtaining a divorce were now reduced, they were still beyond the reach of most people.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century a series of Acts simplified divorce proceedings, reduced the costs involved and widened the grounds for divorce. The financial burden of divorce was eased for the less well-off by the Legal Aid and Advice Act of 1949 which provided free legal advice and paid solicitors' fees for those who could not afford them.

The Divorce Reform Act of 1969 involved a major change in the grounds for divorce. Before this Act, a 'matrimonial offence' had to be proven, a 'guilty party' had to be found. However, many people who wanted a divorce had not committed adultery, been guilty of cruelty, and so on. The 1969 Act defined the grounds for divorce as 'the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage'. It was no longer necessary to prove guilt but simply to show that the marriage was beyond repair. The Act came into force in January 1971 and was followed by a rapid rise in the divorce rate.

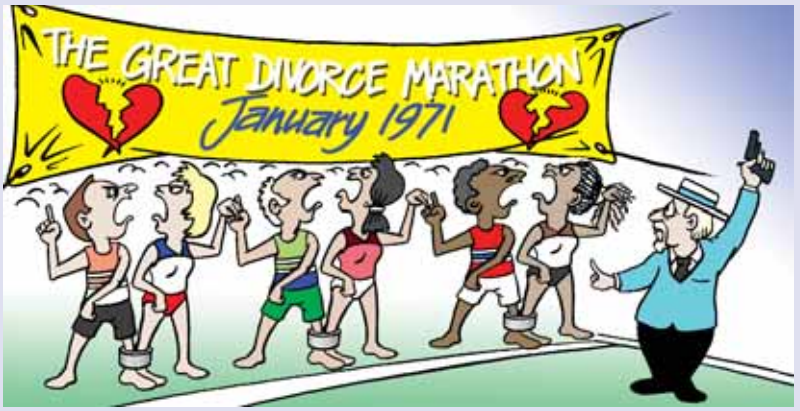
The Matrimonial Family Proceedings Act of 1984 came into effect in 1985. This Act reduced from three years to one the time a couple had to be married before they could petition for a divorce.

Changes in the law have made divorce a lot easier. The grounds for divorce have been widened, the procedure has been simplified and the expense reduced. Changes in the law have provided greater opportunities for divorce. However, this doesn't explain why more and more people are taking advantage of these opportunities.

Changing expectations of love and marriage Since the 1950s, a number of sociologists have argued that changes in people's expectations of love and marriage have resulted in increasingly unstable relationships. Functionalists such as Ronald Fletcher and Talcott Parsons claim that people expect and demand more from marriage. Because of this, they are less likely to put up with an unhappy marriage and more likely to end it with divorce. Ronald Fletcher (1966) argues that a higher divorce rate reflects a higher value placed on marriage. In terms of this argument, the fact that a large proportion of divorcees remarry suggests that they are not rejecting the institution of marriage but simply expecting more from the relationship.

More recently, the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1992) has seen a trend towards what he calls *confluent love*. This form of love focuses on intimacy, closeness and emotion. It forms the basis of relationships rather than the feelings of duty and obligation reflected in the traditional marriage vows of 'for better or worse, for richer or poorer, 'til death do us part'. Intimate relationships based on confluent love tend to last as long as partners find satisfaction and fulfilment.

activity20 divorce and the law



Divorce rates (England and Wales)

Year	Rate
1931	0.4
1951	2.6
1964	2.9
1972	9.5
1981	11.9
1991	13.4
2000	12.7
2006	12.2

With reference to various issues of *Population Trends*, Office for National Statistics.

question

How might changes in the law have affected the divorce rate?

The decision to marry is increasingly based on confluent love. When marriage ceases to provide the intimacy demanded by confluent love, individuals are likely to end it. If Giddens is correct, then marriage is an increasingly unstable and fragile institution, and divorce will become more frequent.

Overloading marriage Research from the United States indicates that individuals have become increasingly dependent on their partners for emotional support. From 1985 to 2004, research participants reported they had fewer close relationships with friends, colleagues, neighbours and extended family members. Increasingly isolated, they demanded more and more support from their partners. According to the American historian Stephanie Coontz (2006), this can lead to marital breakup by overloading the relationship.

Individualisation According to the German sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2001), today's society is characterised by individualisation. The norms which define appropriate behaviour are becoming less powerful. As a result, people are increasingly liberated from the restrictions society places on their behaviour and free to develop as individuals. A high value is placed on self-expression, individual fulfilment and independence. Individualisation can place a strain on marriage, since marriage can restrict freedom and self-expression. High divorce rates can be seen as a result of individualisation.

Changing social values Throughout the 20th century divorce became more socially acceptable. Couples were less likely to stay together in order to 'keep up appearances' and to avoid the stigma and shame formerly associated with divorce.

The rising divorce rate has led to the 'normalisation' of divorce. This, in itself, has made divorce more acceptable as a means of dealing with a failed marriage (Cockett & Tripp, 1994).

The economic position of women Women have often been 'trapped' in unhappy marriages because they cannot support themselves and their children without their husband's income. Unless they can become economically independent, their opportunities to divorce are severely restricted (Kurz, 1995).

Over the past 50 years, married women's chances of economic independence have improved significantly. Increasing numbers of women have entered the labour market, divorce settlements have taken more account of the financial needs of women, and welfare benefits for women with dependent children have improved (Allan & Crow, 2001). Although most women find themselves financially worse off after divorce, they are able to live independently from their former husband.

Women and marriage Feminists have seen rising divorce rates as symptomatic of all that is wrong with traditional patriarchal marriage – male dominance and the unequal division of domestic labour, with women still largely responsible for housework and childcare even when they are employed outside the home (see page 71). It is women rather than men who are increasingly dissatisfied with marriage.

There is some evidence for this view. Divorced men are more likely to remarry than divorced women. According to Diana Gittins (1993), this is because women are more disillusioned with marriage. In the 1940s, around two-thirds of divorce petitions were brought by husbands. By 2000, the situation was reversed with 70% of petitions brought by wives (*Population Trends, 109*, 2002). This may indicate that women are more dissatisfied with marriage than men. Or, it may reflect a greater need to settle financial and housing arrangements, particularly for women with dependent children (Allan & Crow, 2001).

activity21 case studies

Item A Sarah

Sarah, 39, runs a public relations consultancy. During her marriage she was largely responsible for caring for the children – two girls – and running the home – 'all the washing, the cleaning and the cooking' – as well as working full time. She found that, as the children grew older, 'I started to resent what I saw as the inequality in our lives'. Her husband Adam 'could not see what I thought was glaringly obvious'. She felt that she couldn't be herself because 'he used to put me down and was so controlling'.

She decided to divorce Adam. She notes, 'Economic independence played a big part. I knew I could afford to run my own life because I had a successful business, and it made it possible for me to initiate the breakup. I feel so much more myself, being in control of my life. I think it's hard for women to stay married today. We have high expectations, but men and women are still not equal and so many women are resentful about being expected to do it all.'

Source: Appleyard, 2002

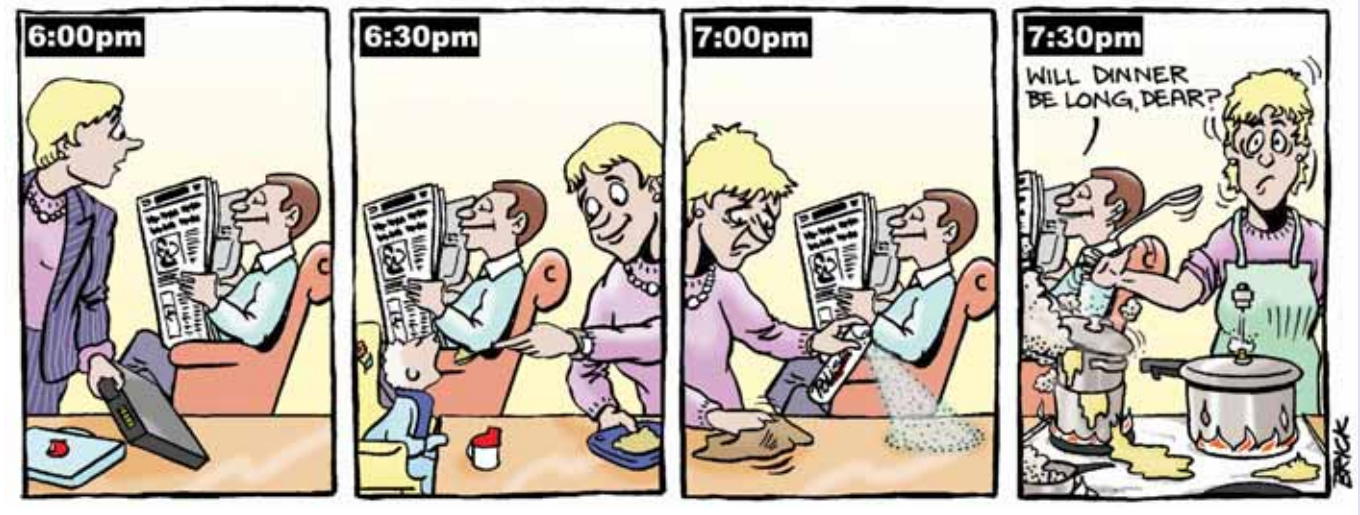
Item B Jan

Jan, 43, is a writer. She has four children, three with her former husband and one with her new partner Mike. 'I met Mike four years ago, and happy as we are, I have no desire to marry. I want to be in control of my life – and the majority of women today feel the same.'

'The reason so many are initiating divorce is because we don't have to be dependent on – or controlled by – a man. We want to lead our lives in a way that makes us happy, without being answerable to men. When I was married, I was expected not only to bring money into the house, but to do all the domestic chores as well. The big issue between us was always money. He was earning £30,000 a year, which was a big salary, but I wasn't allowed to buy as much as a magazine without asking him first.'

Source: Appleyard, 2002

Item C Domestic labour



question

To what extent do Items A, B and C support the explanations given for divorce?

key terms

Confluent love A term used by Giddens to describe a form of intimate relationship which is dependent on both partners finding fulfilment and satisfaction in the relationship.

Individualisation A process which increasingly releases people from society's norms and allows them to develop greater independence and self-expression.

Who divorces?

So far, this section has been concerned with the rise in divorce rates. The focus now is on the social distribution of divorce – on the variation in divorce rates between different social groups. This variation is particularly apparent for age and social class groups.

Age In general, the earlier the age of marriage, the more likely it is to end in divorce. For women who were under 20 when they married in the late 1980s, 24% had separated within 5 years compared with 8% who married between the ages of 25 and 29. Reasons suggested for the high divorce rate of young marrieds include:

- The bride is more likely to be pregnant which places a strain on the marriage.
- Money problems – young people are more likely to be low paid or unemployed.

- Lack of experience in choosing a suitable partner.
- Lack of awareness of the demands of marriage.
- More likely to 'grow apart' as their attitudes and beliefs are still developing.

Social class In general, the lower the class position of the husband, the more likely the couple are to divorce. Financial problems appear to be the main cause. Unemployment, reliance on state benefits and low income are all associated with high divorce rates (Kiernan & Mueller, 1999).

Other factors A number of other factors are associated with high divorce rates. They include:

- Experience of parents' divorce – this may cause psychological problems which are carried forward to the child's marriage. Or, it may simply make divorce more acceptable.
- Remarriages are more likely to end in divorce than first marriages. Maybe the problems which caused the first divorce are carried through into the second marriage.
- Differences in class, ethnicity and religion between the couple are associated with higher divorce rates. They will have less in common, they may have different expectations about marriage, and these differences may result in conflict.

The consequences of divorce

Divorce has a variety of consequences – for the couple involved, for their children, their relatives and friends, and for the wider society. This section looks at the effects of divorce on children and on the wider society.

Divorce and children Opinions about the effects of divorce on children abound. Some see it as uniformly harmful and argue that parents should go to great lengths to stay together for the sake of the children. Others argue that if divorce frees children from a bitter and hostile family environment then, on balance, it is beneficial. In these circumstances parents should divorce for the sake of the children.

In a study entitled *Divorce and Separation: The Outcomes for Children*, Rodgers and Pryor (1998) reviewed some 200 studies. They attempted to find out whether claims about the harmful effects of divorce on children were supported by research evidence.

The review confirmed that children of divorced or separated parents have a higher probability of experiencing a range of problems such as poverty, poor housing, behavioural problems (eg, bedwetting and anti-social behaviour), teenage pregnancy and educational under-achievement. Although children of divorced and separated parents have around twice the chance of experiencing these sorts of problems, only a minority actually do so. A key question is why a minority of children appear to suffer from divorce while most do not.

Rodgers and Pryor suggest that it is not divorce alone which causes these problems, but the association of divorce with other factors. These include:

- Financial hardship – which may have an effect on educational achievement.
- Family conflict – which may create behavioural problems for children.
- Parental ability to cope with the changes that divorce brings – if parents cannot cope, then children are less likely to do so.
- Multiple changes in family structure – if divorce is accompanied by other changes, such as moving in with a step-family, children are more likely to experience problems.
- Quality and degree of contact with the parent who has left – children who have regular contact appear to cope better.

According to Rodgers and Pryor, these findings help to explain why some children experience problems with divorce, while the majority, at least in the long term, do not.

A large-scale research project conducted by Mavis Hetherington (2002) in the USA reached similar conclusions. Her findings are based on a longitudinal study over 25 years of 2500 people from childhood in 1400 families. Her evidence includes tens of thousands of hours of videotapes of families at dinner, at play, relaxing and having rows. Hetherington concludes that three out of four children experience little long-term damage from divorce. She admits that 25% have serious emotional or social problems which compares with 10% from families that stay together. In her view, the negative effects on children have been exaggerated and we must accept that 'divorce is a reasonable solution to an unhappy, acrimonious, destructive marital relationship' (Hetherington, 2002).

Divorce and society From a New Right perspective (see pages 68-70) high divorce rates, and the lone-parent families that often result from divorce, are a serious threat to society. Most lone-parent families are headed by women. They lack a father-figure – a male role model who can provide discipline and an example for the future. This can lead to inadequate socialisation, particularly for boys, which can result in anti-social behaviour. Some New Right thinkers see a direct relationship between rising divorce rates and rising crime rates. In Patricia Morgan's (1999) words, 'large numbers of fatherless youths represent a high risk factor for crime'. A return to 'traditional family values' is needed to strengthen marriage, and 'tougher' laws are required because divorce has become 'too easy'. These measures will lower the divorce rate and so reduce the threat to social stability.

In contrast, many feminists strongly object to any barriers to divorce. Compared to the past, the present divorce laws provide freedom and choice, particularly for women. Restrictions on divorce may force them to endure unhappy marriages, and in some cases, physical and sexual abuse of themselves and their children. Liberal divorce laws offer greater independence for women and represent a positive step towards gender equality.

summary

1. There has been a significant decline in first marriages and in the overall total of marriages since the early 1970s. Within this total, there has been an increase in the numbers and proportion of remarriages.
2. There has been an increase in singlehood – living without a partner.
3. There has been a large increase in cohabitation from the 1970s onwards. Cohabitation before marriage is now the norm. While most people see it as a prelude to marriage, some see it as an alternative to marriage.
4. The following reasons have been suggested for the increase in cohabitation.
   - Changing attitudes
   - Availability of reliable contraception
   - Reduction of parental control
   - Expansion of higher education
   - Increased availability of housing for non-married people
   - Increase in divorce rate.
5. Reasons for the rise in divorce include changes in:
   - the law, leading to cheaper and easier divorce
   - rising expectations of love and marriage
   - overloading marriage
   - individualisation
   - attitudes towards divorce
   - the economic position of women and their view of marriage.
6. Divorce is not spread evenly throughout the population – eg there are age and class variations in divorce rates.
7. Most children appear to experience no long-term harm from their parents' divorce.
8. While the New Right sees the rise in divorce as a threat to society, feminists tend to see it as an expression of women's right to choose.

Unit 5 Family diversity

keyissues

1. How diverse are families?
2. What are the main explanations for family diversity?

5.1 Introduction

Family diversity as a theme This unit is entitled *Family diversity*. Read any recent introductory textbook on the sociology of the family and one statement rings out loud and clear – families and households in today's society are more complex and diverse than ever before. Here is a typical statement by Susan McRae in her introduction to *Changing Britain: Families and Households in the 1990s* (McRae,1999). 'Britain today is a much more complex society than in past times, with great diversity in the types of household within which people live: one-person; cohabiting; families with children and families without; stepfamilies; lone parents – whether divorced or never-married; gay and lesbian couples; pensioners.'

Family diversity as a cause for concern Alongside this recognition of family and household diversity is concern. For some, particularly the New Right, increasing diversity means increasing breakdown. A picture is presented of the family in crisis. Alternatives to the 'traditional family' are poor substitutes for the real thing. So, the families formed by cohabiting couples, the reconstituted families created by remarriage, and families headed by lone parents or by gay or lesbian couples are at best, second best. For some, they represent a disintegration of traditional family values, a breakdown of the traditional family.

The ideology of the nuclear family What is this wonderful family compared to which all others fall short? It is the nuclear family of mum, dad and the kids. For some, it was found in its ideal form in the 1950s with mum as a full-time mother and housewife and dad as the breadwinner. The couple are male and female rather than same-sex, they are married rather than cohabiting, and married for the first rather than the second or third time.

This image of the nuclear family is fostered by advertisers. Called the *cereal packet image of the family* by Edmund Leach (1967), it portrays happy, smiling nuclear families consuming family products from Corn Flakes to Oxo.

This picture can be seen as ideological. An ideology is a misleading view, based on value judgements, which obscures reality. Diana Gittins (1993) argues that the idealised picture of the nuclear family acts as a powerful ideology, defining what is normal and desirable and labelling alternative family forms as abnormal and undesirable.

It creates the impression that the nuclear family headed by a married, heterosexual couple is the only family unit that can effectively raise the next generation.

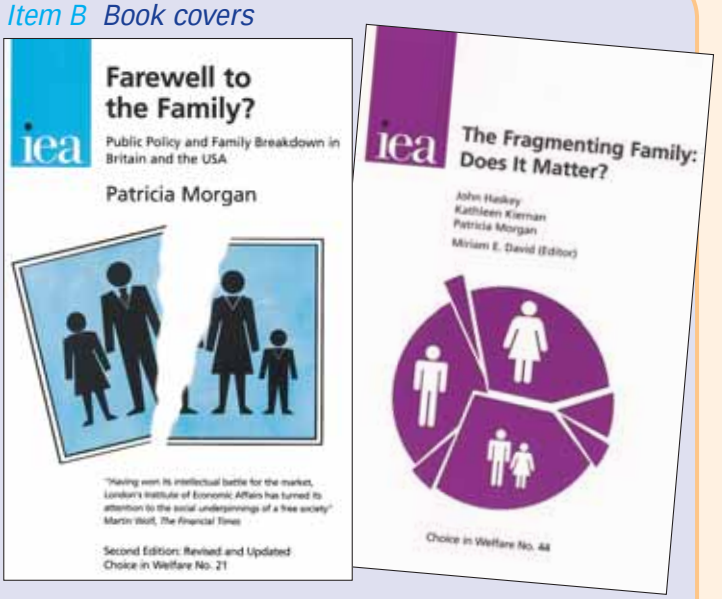
key term

Ideology A misleading view based on value judgements which obscures reality.

activity22 pictures of the family

Item A A TV ad

Item B Book covers



questions

1 How can ads portraying the nuclear family be seen as ideological?

2 How do the book covers in Item B picture the family today?

5.2 Changing households

This section looks at changes in household composition in Britain over the past 40 years. A *household* consists of people who occupy a dwelling unit, for example a house or a flat. Looking at household composition provides one way of assessing the extent of family diversity. And it gives an indication about what might be happening to the nuclear family.

Table 2 shows the changing proportions of each type of household from 1961 to 2006. During this period the proportion of households made up of a couple with dependent children has declined from 38% to 22%. During this same period, the proportion of lone-parent with dependent children households has risen from 2% to 7%. These figures have sometimes been used to indicate a decline in nuclear families. They have also been used to argue that the nuclear family is no longer the dominant family type.

Table 3 provides a somewhat different picture. It looks at the percentage of people living in each type of household. It shows that in 1961, 52% of people lived in households made up of a couple with dependent children. By 2006, this figure had dropped to 37%. Even so, this is still a lot of people living in nuclear family households.

Figures for one year are just a snapshot of one part of a family's life cycle. Many households contain people who have been, or will be, members of nuclear family households – for example, couples with no children and people living alone. And the majority of British children still live in couple-headed households – 76% in 2006,

Table 2 Households: by type of household and family

Great Britain *Percentages*

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2006
One Person						
Under state pension age	4	6	8	11	14	14
Over state pension age	7	12	14	16	15	14
Two or more unrelated adults	5	4	5	3	3	3
One family households						
Couple						
No children	26	27	26	28	29	28
1-2 dependent children	30	26	25	20	19	18
3 or more dependent children	8	9	6	5	4	4
Non-dependent children only	10	8	8	8	6	7
Lone parent						
Dependent children	2	3	5	6	7	7
Non-dependent children only	4	4	4	4	3	3
Multi-family households	3	1	1	1	1	1
All households (=100%) (millions)	16.3	18.6	20.2	22.4	24.1	24.2

Source: *Social Trends*, 2002, 2007, Office for National Statistics

Table 3 People in households: by type of household and family in which they live

Great Britain *Percentages*

	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2006
One person	4	6	8	11	12	12
One family households						
Couple						
No children	18	19	20	23	24	25
Dependent children	52	52	47	41	39	37
Non-dependent children only	12	10	10	11	9	8
Lone parent	3	4	6	10	12	12
Other households	12	9	9	4	5	5
Total population (millions)	51.4	54.4	54.8	56.2	57.2	57.1

Source: *Social Trends*, 2002, 2007, Office for National Statistics

compared to 92% in 1972 (*Social Trends*, 2007). This suggests that living in a nuclear family is a phase that most people, as children and adults, go through in the course of their life (O'Brien, 2000).

Family diversity assessed

The extent of family diversity should not be exaggerated. Most people, as children and adults, live parts of their lives in nuclear families. Even so, the trend is towards family diversity as the figures in Tables 2 and 3 indicate. There has been a significant decline in:

- the proportion of households made up of a couple with dependent children
- the proportion of people in such households and
- the proportion of dependent children living in couple families.

This decrease in nuclear families has been matched by an increase in lone-parent families. This indicates an increase in family diversity.

The terms nuclear family and couple family conceal further diversity. The couple may be:

- married for the first time
- remarried
- cohabiting
- opposite sex
- same sex.

Over the past 30 years there has been a significant increase in remarriage, cohabitation and same-sex couples. Again, this can be seen as indicating an increase in family diversity.

The rest of this unit looks at specific examples of family diversity, focusing on lone-parent families, reconstituted families, and gay and lesbian families.

5.3 Lone-parent families

Definition

The official definition of a lone-parent family goes as follows. A mother or father living without a partner, with their dependent child or children. The child must be never-married and aged either under 16 or 16 to under 19 and undertaking full-time education. Partner in this definition refers to either a marriage or cohabitation partner (Haskey, 2002).

The above definition is not as straightforward as it seems. What about a father who does not live with the mother and child but is in regular contact, takes part in 'family' decisions and provides for the family in various ways – from income support to helping the child with homework? Is he still a member of the family?

A number of separated and divorced couples attempt to share the responsibility for raising their children. This is known as *co-parenting* or *joint parenting*. It is difficult to see such arrangements as simply lone-parent families (Neale & Smart, 1997).

Faced with this kind of problem, some sociologists have argued that the term *lone-parent household* is more precise. It simply states that the 'absent parent' is not part of the household – ie, does not live under the same roof (Crow & Hardy, 1992).

Types of lone parents

Lone parents are a diverse group. This can be seen from the ways they became lone parents. The various routes into lone parenthood are summarised below.

- The ending of a marriage either by separation or divorce (separated and divorced lone parents)
- The ending of cohabitation where the partners separate (single lone parents)
- Birth to a never-married, non-cohabiting woman (single lone parents)
- Death of a partner – for example, a husband dies leaving his wife with dependent children (widowed lone parents).

Despite these diverse routes into lone parenthood, most lone-parent families have one thing in common, they are headed by women – over 90% in 2006.

Trends in lone-parenthood

In Britain, since the early 1970s, lone-parent families, as a proportion of all families with dependent children, have steadily increased – from 7% in 1972 to 24% in 2005 (*Social Trends*, 2007).

During the 1960s, divorce overtook death as the main source of lone-parent families. From then until the mid-1980s, a large part of the increase was due to marital breakup – the separation or divorce of a married couple. After 1986, the number of single lone mothers grew at a faster rate. This group is made up of 1) never-married cohabiting women whose partnership ended after their

child was born and 2) never-married women who were not cohabiting when their child was born. Each group accounts for around half of single lone mothers.

Table 4 illustrates these trends. It shows various types of lone parent families as a percentage of all families with dependent children.

The above statistics are snapshots at particular points in time. Families move in and out of lone parenthood. It is estimated that the average length of time spent as a lone parent is a little over 5 years (Allan & Crow, 2001). The routes in and out of lone parenthood are summarised in Activity 23.

Table 4 Lone-parent families

Great Britain *Percentages*

	1971	1981	1991	2001	2005
Lone mothers					
Single	1	2	6	9	11
Widowed	2	2	1	1	1
Divorced	2	4	6	6	8
Separated	2	2	4	4	4
All lone mothers	7	11	18	20	24
Lone fathers	1	2	1	2	2
All lone parents	8	13	19	22	26

Source: *General Household Survey*, 2005, Office for National Statistics

Explaining the trends

Why has lone parenthood increased so rapidly over the past 35 years?

Divorce As Table 4 shows, a large part of the increase from 1971 to 1991 was due to marital breakup. The divorce rate rose rapidly after the Divorce Reform Act came into force in 1971. Reasons for the rise in divorce are outlined on pages 89-92.

key terms

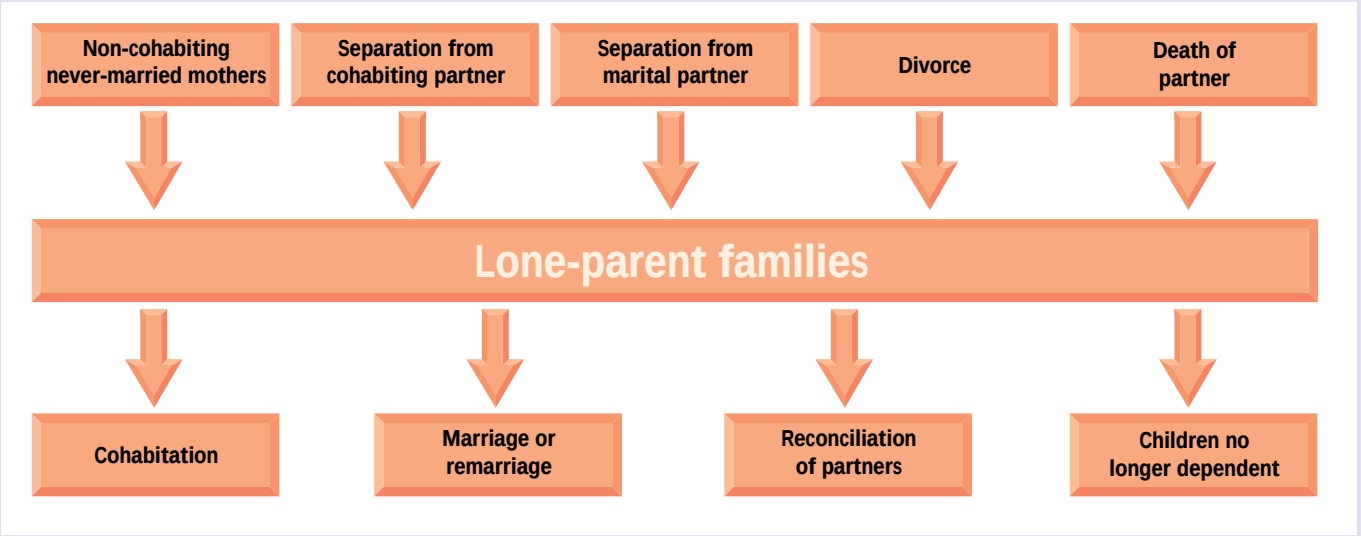
Cereal packet image of the family Stereotypical view of the family common in advertising. The family is presented as nuclear with a traditional division of labour.

Lone-parent family A parent without a partner living with their dependent children.

Dependent children Children either under 16 or 16-19 and undertaking full-time education.

Co-parenting/joint parenting Parents who continue to share responsibility for raising their children after they have separated or divorced.

activity23 moving in and out of lone parenthood



Adapted from Crow & Hardy, 1992

question

Lone parenthood is not a permanent status. Explain with reference to the above diagram.

Cohabitation breakup Over the same period, the number of marriages was steadily declining and the number of couples cohabiting increasing. Reasons for the increase in cohabitation are outlined on page 88.

Since 1986, the number of single lone mothers has grown at a faster rate than any other category of lone parent. By 2005, they accounted for over 45% of all lone mothers in Britain. Roughly half became lone mothers as a result of a breakup of their cohabitation. Cohabiting couples with children are twice as likely to end their relationship than married couples with children (Haskey, 2001).

Non-cohabiting never-married mothers This group form the other half of single lone mothers. Their children were born outside marriage and cohabitation. Their numbers have increased rapidly since the mid-1980s.

Choice Very few women give lone parenthood as their first option. In other words, the vast majority would prefer to raise their children with a partner. For example, in one study only one out of 44 lone mothers had deliberately decided to become a lone mother from the outset (Berthoud et al., 1999).

However, this does not rule out choice. Many women choose to end a marriage or cohabitation. They see this decision as a solution to a problem. It ends a relationship which is unhappy, which may be violent and abusive, and destructive for themselves and their children (Bernardes, 1997). In this sense, they are choosing to become a lone parent.

Similarly, many non-cohabiting never-married mothers choose lone parenthood from the options available to them. These options are:

- An abortion
- Give the baby up for adoption
- In some cases, the opportunity to cohabit with or marry the father.

Many women decide against these options and choose lone parenthood. To some extent, this choice reflects changing attitudes.

Finally, a growing number of women are actively choosing to become single mothers. They take steps to become pregnant with the intention of raisng the child themselves. In 1988, 28,000 women in England and Wales did not register the father's name on their child's birth certificate. This number rose to nearly 50,000 in 2006. Many of these women will have actively chosen to become single mothers (Hill, 2007).

Changing attitudes As outlined in the previous unit, there is greater tolerance of births outside marriage (see page 00). The stigma attached to children of unmarried mothers has reduced considerably. The term 'bastard' is rarely heard, and the less offensive 'illegitimate', which implies improper or immoral, is passing out of common usage.

There is far less pressure for single mothers to get married. The term 'shotgun wedding', frequently used in the 1950s and 60s, is not often heard today.

Lone-parent families are becoming increasingly acceptable. They are less likely to be described with negative phrases such as 'broken families' and 'incomplete families'.

Changing attitudes towards lone parenthood reflect a growing acceptance of the diversity of family life. This makes lone parenthood a more likely choice.

However, it is important not to exaggerate changing attitudes. As the following quotation shows, lone parents and their children are often still seen as second-class families. 'I think single parents have a lot to prove because we're constantly being told that we're not a correct family; that we can't look after our children the same as a two-parent family' (quoted in Beresford et al., 1999).

Economic independence Lone parenthood is only possible if individuals are able to support themselves and their children. However, for the majority, economic independence from a partner means barely making ends meet.

Most lone-mother families live in poverty – defined as living below 50% of average income after housing costs have been met. Often, the low pay levels of many 'women's jobs' plus the costs of childcare mean that lone mothers are better off on state benefit than in paid employment. However, there is some evidence that government New Deal schemes are helping some lone parents and their children out of poverty (see page 73).

Views of lone parenthood

The parents' views As noted earlier, becoming a lone parent was not usually the lone mother's or father's first choice option. The vast majority would rather raise their children with a partner in a happy relationship. Failing this, most choose to become lone parents. Many decide to separate from their partners, believing that it is better to become a lone parent rather than endure an unhappy and destructive relationship. Many decide to keep their child and raise it themselves, seeing this as preferable to abortion, to adoption, or to cohabiting with or marrying the child's other parent.

And, although being a lone parent is far from easy, many see benefits. In the words of one lone mother, 'I'm a bloody sight better off than many women who are married and have to run around after the husband as well as the kids' (Sharpe, 1984).

New Right views These views are outlined on pages 68-70. To recap, lone-parent families fail to provide adequate socialisation. In lone-mother families, there is no father present to discipline the children and provide a male role model. This can lead to underachievement at school, and anti-social behaviour ranging from rudeness to crime. Boys grow up with little awareness of the traditional responsibilities and duties of a father. Lone mothers become

dependent on state benefits. Their children lack examples of the disciplines and responsibilities of paid employment.

As noted earlier, if the children of lone parents do have more problems, this may have little to do with lone parenthood as such. It may well result from the poverty that most lone parents experience (Allan & Crow, 2001).

Feminist views Lone parenthood usually means lone mothers. From a feminist viewpoint, this indicates that women have the freedom to choose. Rather than seeing the lone-parent family as a malfunctioning unit, some see it as an alternative family form in which women are free from male domination. And there is evidence that many single mothers welcome this independence and the opportunity it provides to take control of their own lives (Graham, 1987).

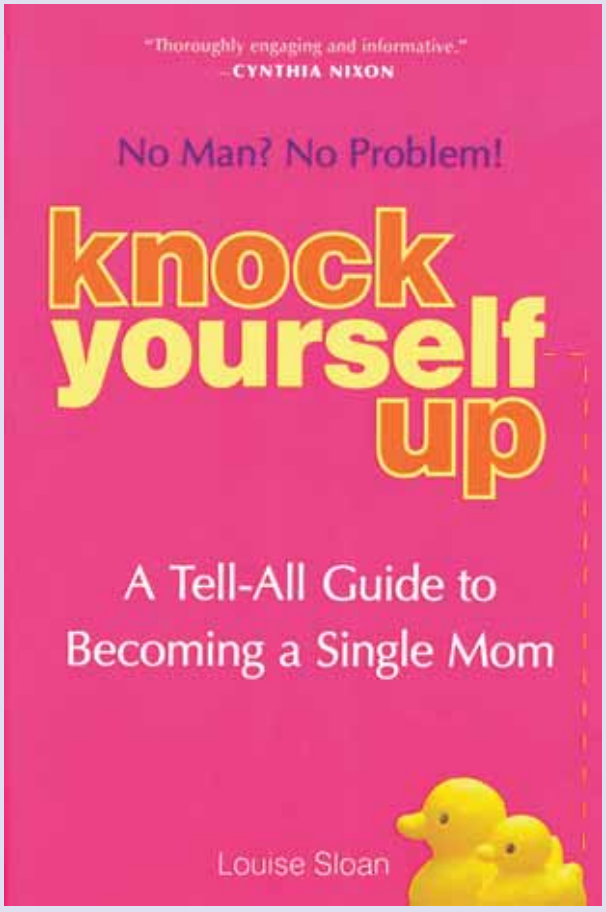
activity24 lone parents

Item A Household income

Families with dependent children
Great Britain: 2005

Family type		Gross weekly household income						
		£0.00-£100.00	£100.01-£200.00	£200.01-£300.00	£300.01-£400.00	£400.01-£500.00	£500.01-£700.00	£700.01- and over
Married couple	%	4	4	5	6	9	19	53
Cohabiting couple	%	5	6	6	12	10	27	35
Lone parent	%	11	30	19	13	10	11	6

Source: General Household Survey, 2005, Office for National Statistics



Item B DIY guide to single motherhood

This guide to becoming a single mother was published in the USA in 2007. It was met with praise and criticism. Cynthia Nixon, who plays Miranda in the TV series *Sex and the City*, praised the book as 'a thoroughly engaging and informative book about the decision to become a single mother'. Others were not so kind. The author, Louise Sloan, has been called 'the epitome of selfishness' and 'a woman screeching about the human rights of her own child, whom she is deliberately handicapping by condemning him to a fatherless life'.

Source: Hill, 2007

Item C Justifying single motherhood

Louise Sloan, author of *Knock Yourself Up* states that 'Independent women today are not prepared to sit dolefully on a shelf as their fertility runs out. Nor are they willing to settle for Mr You'll Have To Do or "accidentally" get pregnant by a lover reluctant to commit'.

Source: Hill, 2007

questions

1 What does item A indicate about the economic situation of many lone parents?

2 Look at Items B and C. Argue the case for and against choosing to become a single mother.

5.4 Reconstituted families

Many lone parents find new partners and form new families. These r*econstituted families* or *stepfamilies* are defined as a married or cohabiting couple with dependent children, at least one of whom is not the biological offspring of both partners (Haskey, 1994).

Compared to lone-parent families, there has been little research, public debate or government policy directed towards reconstituted families. This may be because such families tend to present themselves as 'normal' family groupings. And it may be because they are sometimes seen as a 'solution' to the so-called 'problem' of lone parenthood (Allan & Crow, 2001).

There has been a rapid increase in the number of reconstituted families. In 1998–99, they accounted for around 6% of all families with dependent children in Britain. By 2005, the figure rose to 10% (*General Household Survey*, 2005).

Diversity and reconstituted families

Reconstituted families are a diverse group. Parentline Plus, formerly the National Stepfamily Association, has identified 72 different ways in which stepfamilies can be formed. For example, some are formed by first marriage, some by remarriage, some by cohabitation. And once formed, this diversity continues. For example, some children may have close and regular relationships with their absent biological parent, other children may hardly see them.

Children are likely to stay with their mother after the break-up of a partnership. This can be seen from Table 5 – 86% of stepfamilies contain at least one child from the female partner's previous relationship.

Table 5 Stepfamilies

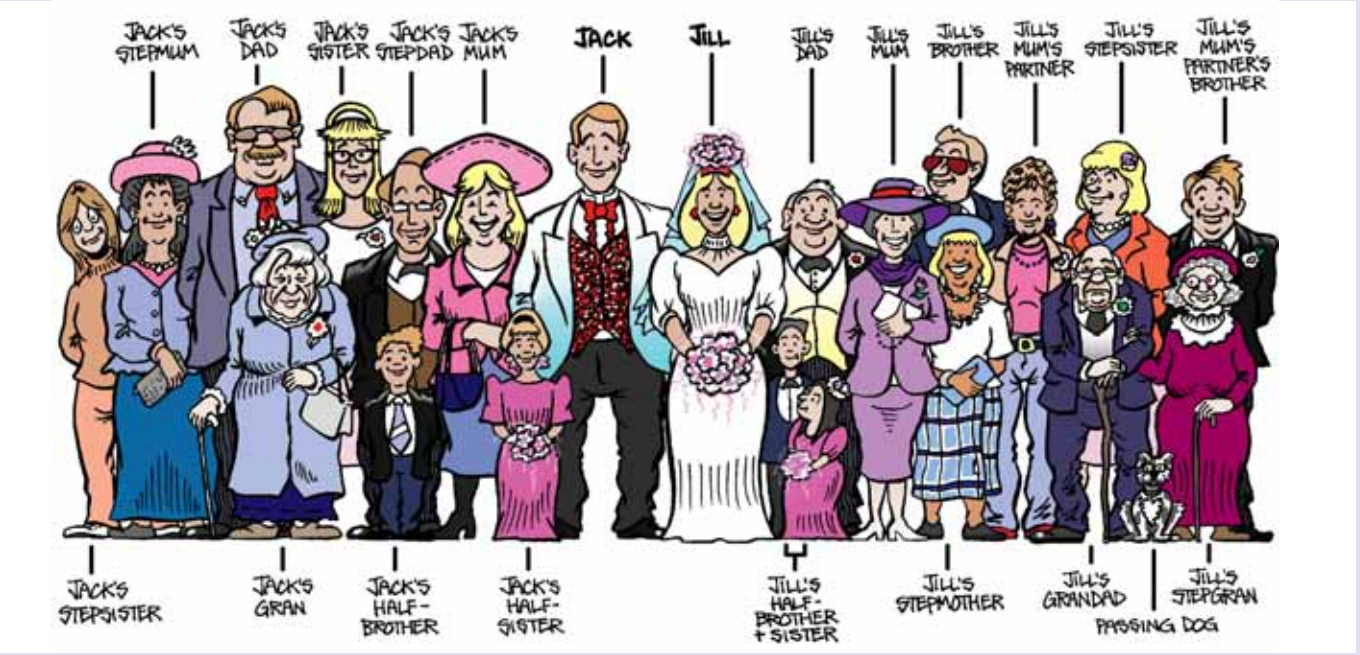
Type of stepfamily	*Great Britain: 2005*
	%
Couple with child(ren) from the woman's previous marriage/cohabitation	86
Couple with child(ren) from the man's previous marriage/cohabitation	11
Couple with child(ren) from both partners' previous marriage/cohabitation	3

Source: *General Household Survey*, 2005, Office for National Statistics

Tensions within reconstituted families

Reconstituted families tend to present themselves as 'normal', 'ordinary' families. And, if estimates are correct, they may well become 'the norm'. Many reject labels such

activity25 the 'new extended families'



questions

Reconstituted families have been described as the new extended families.

a) What does this mean?

b) What advantages does it suggest?

as stepfamilies, step-parents and stepchildren. Despite this desire to present themselves simply as a family, reconstituted families experience particular problems.

Families are social groups with boundaries. These boundaries include some people (these are my family members) and exclude others (these are not). Clear boundaries give families a definite sense of identity and unity. Sometimes the boundaries of reconstituted families are not clearly drawn. They may become fuzzy when partners from the couple's previous relationships become involved in the new family, especially if the children maintain a close relationship with the non-residential 'natural' parent. This may weaken the boundaries of the reconstituted family and threaten its unity (Allan & Crow, 2001).

Being a step-parent can be a difficult and delicate relationship. There are no clearly stated norms defining this role. For example, to what degree should a step-parent be involved in disciplining the child? Things are made more difficult if the child resents sharing their biological parent with a new partner and, in some cases, with other children. The role of the stepfather is often shifting and uncertain – a sort of uncle, father, big brother, friend or companion depending on the time and place (Bedell, 2002).

The additional strains of reconstituted families may help to explain their high level of breakup. A quarter of stepfamilies break up during their first year. And half of all remarriages which form a stepfamily end in divorce. But, as Peter Eldrid of Parentline Plus warns, 'It's important not to assume that every difficulty you face is to do with being a stepfamily. All families have upheavals' (quoted in Bedell, 2002). And, as reconstituted families become increasingly common, norms will probably develop to clarify the roles of those involved, so reducing the tension that lack of clarity brings.

New opportunities

Research has tended to focus on the problems of reconstituted families. There is another side to the coin. For the adults, they offer the chance of a successful partnership after an earlier one has failed. And, if the parents are happy and committed to making the new family work, then the children are likely to be happy too (Bedell, 2002).

Reconstituted families can provide new and rewarding relationships for all concerned. The family expands overnight with step-brothers and sisters, step-cousins, step-parents and uncles, and step-grandparents. An expanded family network can lead to arguments, jealousy and conflict. But, it can also lead to a wider support network and enriched relationships.

5.5 Gay and lesbian families

Until recently, there was little research on gay and lesbian families. This began to change in the 1990s.

Families of choice Judging from a series of in-depth interviews conducted in the mid-1990s, many gays and lesbians are developing new ways of understanding the idea of family (Weeks et al., 1999a). Many believe they are *choosing* their own family members and creating their own families.

These *families of choice* are based on partnerships, close friends and members of their family of origin. This network provides mutual support, loving relationships and a sense of identity. It feels like a family. As one interviewee put it, 'I think the friendships I have are family' (Weeks et al., 1999b).

Same-sex partnerships In recent years, increasing numbers of gays and lesbians have formed households based on same-sex partnerships. And many are demanding the same rights as heterosexual partnerships – for example, the right to marry and adopt children. This does not mean they wish to copy heterosexual relationships, they simply want the same rights as everybody else.

In practice, same-sex partnerships tend to be more democratic than heterosexual partnerships. Many gay and lesbian couples strive for a relationship based on negotiation and equality (Weeks et al., 1999a).

Same-sex parents A growing number of lesbians are choosing to have children and to raise them with a female partner. Many use artificial insemination with sperm donated by friends or anonymous donors. In the traditional sense of the word, they are choosing to have a 'family'.

Gay men have more limited options. Either they must find a surrogate mother to bear their children, or else adopt. In the UK, the adoption route was closed until 2002 when an Act of Parliament made it legal for gays and lesbians to adopt children.

Children Concerns about children's gender identity and sexual orientation have been the main focus of research on gay and lesbian parenting. Most studies show that children raised by gay and lesbian parents are no different from those raised by heterosexuals (Fitzgerald, 1999). The evidence suggests that what matters is the parent-child relationship rather than the sexual orientation of the parents.

key term

Family of choice A family whose members have been chosen, rather than given by birth and marriage.

5.6 Families and cultural diversity

This section looks at the effects of social class and ethnicity on family life.

Social class and family diversity

Many sociologists argue that social class has an important influence on family life. They make the following points.

Income inequality In general, the lower a person's class position, the lower their income. Income inequality leads to variations in living standards, housing quality and lifestyles. For example, low-income families are more likely

activity26 families of choice

Item A A 'legal' family

Noah and Mackenlie pose with their parents, Hazel, left and Donna, right. Hazel is the biological parent of Noah, and Donna is the biological parent of Mackenlie. The two lesbians cross-adopted each other's child to legally form their family.

Item B Our family

Amanda and her partner Ruth decided to have children – they each had a son. The father is a close friend. He is now seen as part of the family. Amanda writes:

'Our children love having two mummies. They know they are different. They are proud of being special. At this young age, mummies are still hot property, and to have two is twice as nice. They see their dad regularly, and ring him when they want. And having three parents, they get all the extra grandparents, aunties, uncles, and cousins too. All our families have been fantastic. Some of them had their doubts when we first told them that we were having children, but since our boys first came into the world they have been cherished by an extended family that goes beyond a basic biology.

I'm excited about our future. I know things will not always be easy. I know that as our children get older, and learn about sexuality and the pressures of conformity, they will have many questions. They may face prejudice themselves. I hate that thought, but I know that as a family we have the strength to help them deal with it.'

Source: *The Independent*, 4.2.2002

Item C A neighbour's response

'We (a lesbian couple) live together in a stable unit with a child. It sometimes feels like a marriage. But I only have to walk out into the street to know that it's not. There's one neighbour next door that just won't speak to us. She spoke to us before we had the baby, and now she won't speak to us.'

Source: Journal of Social Policy 1999, 28:689–709, Cambridge University Press

question

There's no particular problem with gay or lesbian families – apart from some heterosexuals! Discuss.

to live in overcrowded and substandard housing, and less likely to own a car or afford a family holiday.

Life chances These refer to a person's chances of obtaining things defined as desirable – eg, good health – and avoiding things defined as undesirable – eg, unemployment. Often, there is a fairly close relationship between social class and life chances. For example, the higher the class position of a child's parents, the more likely the child is to attain high educational qualifications and a well paid, high status job.

Family breakup As noted earlier, the lower the class position of a married couple, the more likely they are to divorce. High divorce rates are related to poverty – to low income and reliance on state benefits (Kiernan & Mueller, 1999).

Ethnicity and family diversity

To some degree, ethnic groups have their own subcultures – norms and values which differ from those of mainstream culture. And to some degree, these subcultures influence family life. This section takes a brief look at ethnic minority groups and family diversity in the UK.

Diversity within ethnic groups There is a danger in talking about 'typical ethnic families'. Often there is as much family diversity within minority ethnic groups as there is within White society.

And there is a danger of ignoring cultural variation *within* ethnic groups. For example, within the South Asian community there are variations in religion – Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus – in countries of origin – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh – and in regions within those countries – for example, Goa and Bengal.

Finally, there is a danger of exaggerating differences between minority ethnic and White families and of creating stereotypes in the process – for example, Asians live in extended families and their marriages are arranged.

Asian families Most Asian households are based on nuclear families. However, around 20% are extended families, a higher proportion than other groups. Although there is a trend towards nuclear families, wider kinship ties remain strong (Westwood & Bhachu, 1988).

Asians are more likely to marry and to marry earlier than their White counterparts. Cohabitation and divorce are rare (Berthoud & Beishon, 1997). Marriages are sometimes

arranged, but there is little research on this subject. There is some evidence which suggests that the couple have more say in arranged marriages as Western ideas about love and romance become more influential (Allan & Crow, 2001).

African-Caribbean families In 2001, nearly 48% of African-Caribbean families with dependent children were lone-parent families compared to around 22% for Britain as a whole (*Social Trends*, 2007). African Caribbeans have the lowest marriage rate, the highest proportion of single (never-married) lone mothers, and the highest divorce rate (Berthoud et al., 1999).

Statistics such as these have led some researchers to talk about the 'problem' of the 'African-Caribbean family'. However, this ignores the strength of wider kinship networks – in particular, the support provided for lone mothers by female relatives. This support can cross national boundaries with family members in the UK and West Indies providing support for each other (Goulborne, 1999).

Multicultural families Recent statistics suggest an increase in the number of partnerships between people from different ethnic groups. Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002) uses the term *multicultural families* for families in which the partners come from different ethnic backgrounds. She recognises that such couples may face prejudice from their ethnic groups of origin, and conflict because they bring differing expectations of family life to the relationship. However, she is cautiously optimistic about the promise of multicultural families. They may help to break down barriers between ethnic groups. And they reflect a growing opportunity for individual choice – people are now choosing partners who fulfil their personal needs rather than being directed by the concerns of their parents or the norms of their ethnic group.

key terms

Life chances A person's chances of obtaining things defined as desirable and avoiding things defined as undesirable.
Multicultural families Families in which the partners are from different ethnic groups.

5.7 Family diversity and society

This section examines family diversity in the context of the wider society. It looks at views which see increasing family diversity as a reflection of broader changes in society as a whole.

Giddens and late modernity

According to the British sociologist Anthony Giddens, we live in an era known as *late modernity*. This era is characterised by choice and change. Opportunities to choose an identity and select a lifestyle are increasingly available. In the pre-modern era, tradition defined who people were and what they should do. Today, people have far more freedom to try on different identities and to try out different lifestyles (Giddens, 1991; 1992).

Where does the family fit into late modernity? If Giddens is correct, family diversity is a reflection of the opportunities and priorities of late modernity. People have greater freedom to construct their own domestic arrangements. They are not bound by existing family forms and family roles. There are more choices available and more opportunities to experiment, create and change.

Within limits, people can tailor their partnerships and their families to meet their individual needs and to reflect their own identities. They can choose to cohabit or to marry, to end one partnership and to begin another. The emphasis is on building and constructing family units, on creating and defining family relationships. People build reconstituted families. They enter uncharted territory constructing gay and lesbian families with no clear patterns to work from. They choose to become lone parents rather than accept an unsatisfactory relationship.

According to Giddens (1992), relationships in late modernity are increasingly based on *confluent love* – deep emotional intimacy in which partners reveal their needs and concerns to each other. Commitment to the relationship lasts as long as the individual receives sufficient satisfaction and pleasure from it. Failure to experience this is justification, in itself, for ending the relationship. If Giddens is correct, this helps to explain the fragility of partnerships in late modernity, as seen in the high rates of separation and divorce.

Evaluation Giddens's views of late modernity help to explain the trend towards family diversity. However, he may have exaggerated people's freedom to choose. Take lone-parent families. In one sense they are *not* based on choice – at least not first choice. Many single (never-married) mothers did *not* choose to become pregnant. However, they did choose to have the baby and raise it themselves (Allen & Dowling, 1999). Similarly, divorced lone mothers did not set out to become lone parents. This was a second-best choice after the failure of their marriage.

Even so, there is evidence to support Giddens' claim of increased choice in late modernity. People can choose between marriage and cohabitation, they can choose to remain married or to divorce, they can choose to become a lone parent or to maintain a partnership, they can choose to become a single mother, they can choose to remain a lone parent or to form a reconstituted family. There is far greater freedom to make these choices than there was 50 years ago.

Postmodernity

Some sociologists believe that the modern age has ended and that we now live in the *postmodern* era. They describe this era as a time of change, of flux, of fluidity and uncertainty. Gone is the consensus or agreement about norms and values which characterised most of the modern age.

The American sociologist Judith Stacey (1996) sees family diversity as a reflection of postmodern society. There is no one family form to which everyone aspires. There are no generally agreed norms and values directing family life. In her words, 'Like postmodern culture, contemporary family arrangements are diverse, fluid and unresolved'.

Stacey welcomes this diversity, seeing it as an opportunity for people to develop family forms which suit their particular needs and situations. She looks forward to

activity27 class, ethnicity and family diversity

Item A Class differences

Outside the family home

Outside the family home

Item B A multicultural couple

This couple have a business specialising in wedding accessories for multicultural couples

questions

1 With reference to Item A, suggest how class differences might affect family life.

2 Look at Item B.

a) What problems might this couple experience?

b) How can an increase in multicultural families be seen as a positive development?

activity28 choice and creativity

Item A Lesbian families

'With no script to follow, we are making up our own story and hoping that we'll live happily ever after.'

Amanda Boulter referring to her lesbian partner and their two boys. Quoted in *The Independent*, 4.2.2002.

'I don't necessarily think we should be wanting to mimic everything, kind of anything that heterosexual couples or heterosexual relationships have. I don't see that we need to be mimicking them. I think it's about having choice and about being able to be creative and decide what we want for ourselves.'

Source: Journal & Social Policy 1999, 28:689–709, Cambridge University Press

Item B Reconstituted families

questions

1 How does Item A reflect Giddens' picture of late modernity?

2 Look at Item B. To what extent are reconstituted families based on choice?

the possibility of more equal and democratic relationships which she sees in many gay and lesbian families.

Evaluation Stacey's research was conducted in Silicon Valley in California, home to many of the world's most advanced electronics companies. This is hardly typical of American society in general. She also studied research findings on gay and lesbian families. Again, these groups are hardly typical. Despite this, Stacey may well have identified those at the forefront of a trend which is spreading to the wider society.

key terms

Late modernity The term used by Giddens to describe the contemporary period, which is characterised by choice and change.

Postmodernity The era after modernity which is characterised by fluidity, uncertainty and a lack of consensus.

Confluent love Deep emotional intimacy which individuals expect from their partnerships.

summary

1. Many sociologists see families and households in today's society as more diverse than ever before.
2. In Britain, nuclear family households have declined as a proportion of all households. The proportion of people living in these households has also declined. Despite this, living in a nuclear family is a phase that most people go through.
3. There is diversity within nuclear families – eg, the couple may be married or cohabiting.
4. In Britain since the early 1970s, lone-parent families have increased from 8% to 26% of all families with dependent children.
5. Lone parents are a diverse group – eg, some were previously married, some cohabiting, some neither.
6. Although very few women choose lone parenthood as their first option, choices are involved – eg, whether to keep, abort, or give the baby up for adoption.
7. Lone parenthood has become increasingly acceptable.
8. There has been a rapid increase in reconstituted families. They are a diverse group – eg, some are formed by cohabitation, some by first marriage, others by remarriage.
9. There are particular tensions in reconstituted families, partly because the roles of family members often lack clear definition.
10. Reconstituted families offer new opportunities – they can lead to a wider support network and enriched relationships.
11. Gay and lesbian parents are adding further diversity to family life.
12. Most studies show that children raised by gay and lesbian parents are no different to those raised by heterosexuals.
13. Social class and ethnic differences add yet further diversity to family life.
14. According to Anthony Giddens, family diversity results from broader changes in late-modern society. In particular, family diversity reflects the growing freedom to choose identities and select lifestyles.
15. According to Judith Stacey, family diversity reflects the lack of consensus, the uncertainty and the fluidity of postmodern society.

Unit 6 Gender, power and domestic labour

keyissues

1. To what extent is the division of domestic labour linked to gender?
2. To what extent is this division unequal?
3. What does this indicate about the distribution of power?
4. What changes have taken place in these areas?

6.1 Introduction

This unit looks at *domestic labour* – work conducted by people as members of a household. It looks, for example, at housework and childcare and asks who does what.

Most of the research in this area focuses on the contribution of husband and wife to domestic tasks. It asks four main questions.

- First, to what extent is the division of domestic labour based on gender? For example, are certain household tasks done by men and others by women?
- Second, is the division of domestic labour equal – do partners pull their own weight, is the division of labour fair?
- Third, what does this indicate about the distribution of power within the family? Is power shared equally between husband and wife or do men dominate the domestic scene?
- Fourth, what changes have taken place in these areas? For example, is there a move towards a more equal distribution of power?

6.2 Gender and the domestic division of labour

In 1973, Michael Young and Peter Willmott announced the arrival of the *symmetrical family* (see pages 81-82). They claimed that *conjugal roles*, the roles of husband and wife, were becoming increasingly similar. In the home, the couple 'shared their work; they shared their time'. Husbands increasingly helped with domestic chores such as washing up and cleaning. They also helped more with raising children, though this still remained the main responsibility of the wife. Decisions about family life were largely shared. It appeared that the division of labour based on gender was breaking down.

In 1974, Ann Oakley dismissed this view of the sharing caring husband. Young and Willmott had claimed that 72% of husbands 'help in the house'. To be included in this figure, husbands only had to perform one household chore a week. In Oakley's words, this is hardly convincing evidence of 'male domestication' (Oakley, 1974). Oakley's own research conducted in the early 1970s shows a clear division of labour along gender lines. Based on interviews with 40 women with one or more children under 5, it shows clearly that wives saw housework and childcare as their responsibility and received little help from their husbands.

Since these early studies, there has been considerable research on gender and the division of domestic labour. This research shows that most women:

- still become mothers and housewives
- experience a period of full-time housework, though this is becoming shorter
- return to work part time when their youngest child is at school.

This early period of full-time housework sets the pattern for the future, as the following findings indicate.

- Housework and childcare remain the primary responsibility of women.
- As women enter the labour market in increasing numbers, there is some evidence of men making a greater contribution to domestic tasks.
- However, this increased contribution is not significant. As a result, most working wives have a *dual burden* or a *dual shift* – paid employment and domestic labour (Allan & Crow, 2001).

The findings summarised above are taken from small-scale studies often based on interviews, and large-scale surveys usually based on questionnaires. For example, Fiona Devine's small-scale study of car workers' families in Luton indicated that men's contribution to domestic labour increased when their wives re-entered paid employment. But the man's role is secondary – 'Above all women remain responsible for childcare and housework and their husbands help them' (Devine, 1992).

This picture is reflected in large-scale surveys such as the British Social Attitudes Survey and the British Household Panel Survey. These surveys show a clear gender division of labour in most household tasks. However, they do indicate a slight trend towards sharing tasks.

Evidence from the Time Use Surveys conducted by the government in 2000 and 2005 is shown in Activity 29, Item A, and in Table 6 (Layder et al., 2006). Item A compares the amount of time spent on housework in 2005 by women and men in full-time employment – a total of 151 minutes a day by women and 113 minutes a day by men. Table 6 compares the amount of time spent on housework and childcare by all women and men in 2000 and 2005. It shows a decrease in time spent on housework and an increase in time spent on childcare. It also shows that significant gender differences remain.

Table 6 Time Spent on housework and childcare Great Britain, 2000 and 2005

Activity	2000	2005
	Average minutes per person per day	
Housework		
Men	128	101
Women	215	180
Childcare (of own household members)		
Men	11	15
Women	28	32

Source: The Time Use Survey 2005, Office for National Statistics

Gender and domestic tasks – evaluation

Much of the research into gender divisions of domestic labour is based on *time-use studies*. This research asks who does what and how long does it take them. There are problems with this method.

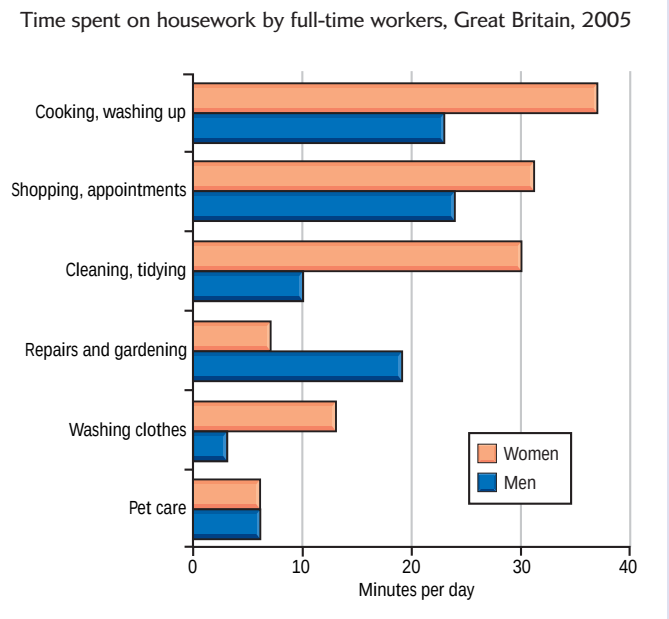
Time Women tend to underestimate time spent on domestic labour. This often happens when several tasks are performed at the same time. For example, women often combine childcare with tasks such as cleaning and preparing meals. As a result, they underestimate the amount of time spent on childcare (Leonard, 2000).

Men tend to overestimate time spent on domestic labour. For example, in one study, men estimated they spent an average of 11.3 hours a week on childcare. However, their diary entries showed only 1.7 hours a week (Pleck, 1985).

Urgency Time-use studies say little about the urgency of tasks. Women's domestic tasks, such as cooking and

activity29 gender and domestic labour

Item A Gender divisions



Source: The Time Use Survey 2005, Office for National Statistics

Item B Household tasks

questions

1 Look at Item A. To what extent are tasks allocated on the basis of gender?

2 Look at Item B. Judging from Item A, which of these pictures are untypical?

washing clothes, are more urgent than typical male tasks such as gardening and household maintenance (McMahon, 1999).

Responsibility vs help There is a big difference between being responsible for a task and helping with a task. For example, being responsible for cooking and cleaning is not the same as helping with those tasks. Being responsible requires more thought and effort, it can be more tiring and more stressful (McMahon, 1999). Again, this aspect of gender divisions and domestic tasks is not revealed by time-use studies.

Job satisfaction Time-use studies tell us little about the amount of satisfaction women and men derive from domestic labour. Typical female tasks are often experienced as tedious, boring and monotonous. Typical male tasks are more likely to be experienced as interesting and creative. For example, some men regard DIY and gardening as hobbies rather than chores (Allan, 1985).

key terms

Conjugal roles Marital roles, the roles of husband and wife.
Symmetrical family A family in which the roles of husband and wife are similar.
Dual burden/dual shift The double burden/shift of paid employment and domestic labour.
Time-use studies Studies which examine how people use their time – how long they spend on various activities.

6.3 Gender and the division of emotion work

So far domestic labour has been defined as household tasks such as ironing and cooking, and time spent looking after children. Little has been said about the emotional side of domestic labour. Partnerships and families are kept together as much if not more by *emotion work* than by the more practical household tasks. Emotion work refers to the love, sympathy, understanding, praise, reassurance and attention which are involved in maintaining relationships.

According to many women, it is they rather than their male partners who are responsible for most of the emotion work. In other words, emotion work is gendered. A study conducted by Jean Duncombe and Dennis Marsden (1993, 1995) based on interviews with 40 couples found that most women complained of men's 'emotional distance'. They felt they were the ones who provided reassurance, tenderness and sympathy, while their partners had problems expressing intimate emotions. Men showed little awareness or understanding of their 'shortcomings', seeing their main role as a breadwinner – providing money rather than emotional support.

These findings are reflected in other studies. For example, research into family meals shows that women give priority to their partner's and children's tastes, often at the expense of their own. They do their best to make mealtime a happy family occasion (Charles & Kerr, 1988).

activity30 emotion work

questions

1 How do the pictures illustrate emotion work?
2 Why do you think women are primarily responsible for emotion work in the family?

According to Duncombe and Marsden (1995), many women have to cope with a *triple shift* – 1) paid work 2) housework and childcare and 3) emotion work.

key terms

Emotion work The emotional support which members of a social group – in this case the family – provide for each other.
Triple shift The three areas of responsibility which many women have – 1) paid work, 2) housework and childcare, 3) emotion work.

6.4 Family finances

So far, this unit has outlined evidence which indicates that domestic tasks, childcare, and emotion work are divided along gender lines. This section looks at money management within families. It reaches a similar conclusion – access to and control over money are gendered. And this division of labour along gender lines tends to favour men.

Systems of money management Jan Pahl's *Money and Marriage* (1989) identified various systems of money management used by the 102 couples in her study. They ranged from a *housekeeping allowance system* whereby the husbands give their wives a fixed sum of money for housekeeping expenses and control the remaining money, to a *pooling system* where both partners see themselves as equally responsible for and jointly controlling money management. A later study by Carolyn Vogler and Jan Pahl (1994), based on interviews with over 1200 British couples, showed that whatever money management system was used, men tended to come out on top.

Inequalities in money management Vogler and Pahl report the following results. When asked who gets most personal spending money, 58% of couples said it was equally distributed, 12% said the husband, 4% the wife, and the rest disagreed amongst themselves. When asked who suffers cutbacks when money is tight, it was wives who reported most hardship. They were more likely to cut back on their own food and clothing, and shield their children and husband from hard times. And when asked who has the final say in important financial decisions, 70% say both, 23% the husband and 7% the wife.

Trends Vogler and Pahl see a trend towards greater equality in access to and control of family finances. They argue that greater equality depends in part on women's full-time participation in the labour market. There is a large body of research which indicates that the partner with the largest income has the biggest say in family decision-making.

6.5 Domestic labour, power and gender

Are families *patriarchal* or male dominated? Are women exploited by their male partners? Do men get the best deal in the home? Do they get their own way in domestic situations?

Are these questions still relevant today? Aren't partnerships rapidly moving towards equality? Haven't many already reached the stage where the domestic division of labour is equal?

These questions are about *power.* This section looks at various ways of defining and measuring power and applies them to family life.

Decision making

The decision-making model measures power in terms of who makes the decisions. For example, if wives made most of the decisions concerning the home then, in this context, they would have most power. However, this fails to take account of the importance of the decisions. For example, the wife may make more decisions but those decisions are minor and trivial. The really important decisions are made by her husband.

The following study uses the decision-making approach and takes the importance of decisions into account. Stephen Edgell (1980) interviewed 38 middle-class couples. He asked them who made the decisions and how important those decisions were. Wives dominated decision making in three areas – interior decoration, children's clothes, and spending on food and other household items. These decisions were frequent and seen as not very important. Men had the main say when it came to moving house, buying a car and other major financial decisions. These decisions were infrequent and seen as important. Other decisions, such as holidays and children's education were made by both husband and wife (see Item A, Activity 35).

Based on decision making and the importance of the areas of decision, it appears that husbands have more power than their wives.

Evaluation This study is over 20 years old and is based on a small, unrepresentative sample – 38 middle-class couples. It uses the decision-making approach. There are a number of problems with this approach. For example, it ignores agenda-setting – which issues should be placed on the agenda to be decided upon. The person who sets the agenda may use this power to their own advantage.

Non-decisions

The decision-making approach fails to take account of non-decisions. Many actions do not involve conscious decisions – as such, they can be seen as 'non-decisions'. They are based on taken-for-granted assumptions – for example, women should take primary responsibility for childcare. Often there is little or no discussion because those involved are simply following social norms which are largely unquestioned.

In terms of domestic labour, there are a number of non-decisions. The following are traditionally seen as women's work.

- Washing, cleaning, ironing
- Childcare
- Emotion work.

activity31 gender, power and domestic labour

Item A Making decisions

Decision area	Perceived importance	Frequency	Decision maker
Moving	Very important	Infrequent	Husband
Finance	Very important	Infrequent	Husband
Car	Important	Infrequent	Husband
House	Very important	Infrequent	Husband and wife
Children's education	Very important	Infrequent	Husband and wife
Holidays	Important	Infrequent	Husband and wife
Weekends	Not important	Frequent	Husband and wife
Other leisure activities	Not important	Frequent	Husband and wife
Furniture	Not important	Infrequent	Husband and wife
Interior decorations	Not important	Infrequent	Wife
Food and other domestic spending	Not important	Frequent	Wife
Children's clothes	Not important	Frequent	Wife

Source: Edgell, 1980

Item B Satisfaction

Many women appear to be satisfied with the domestic division of labour. They recognise that they do most of the work, but only 14% said they were dissatisfied with their partner's contribution.

Source: Baxter & Western, 1998

Item C Choice

In recent years, there has been a string of newspaper articles about successful and powerful career women who gave up highly-paid jobs in order to take care of their children. They include:

- Lisa Gordon, corporate affairs director of Chrysalis Records who earned £336,000 a year.
- Penny Hughes, formerly in charge of Coca-Cola UK, who gave up £250,000 a year.
- Tina Gaudoin, former editor of the glossy women's magazine *Frank*.

Source: Guardian, 02.12.02

Item D The triple shift

questions

1 Judging from Item A, who has most power – husbands or wives? Give reasons for your answer.

2 a) Use Items B, C and D to argue that men have more power than women.

b) Using the same information, criticise this view.

It is often taken for granted that the man's job is more important than his partner's, since she will probably give up paid employment when the couple have children.

Who benefits? Those who gain from non-decisions can be seen as more powerful than those who don't. Take the assumption that men's jobs are more important than their female partner's jobs. This assumption lies behind the following behaviour of newly-wed couples.

- Around 1/3 of men changed jobs at or near their wedding. Typically, this change advanced their careers.
- Over 2/3 of women changed jobs at or near their wedding. Typically, this resulted in lower pay and lower job status (Mansfield & Collard, 1988).

Judging by this study, men gain and women lose from the taken-for-granted assumption that men's jobs should take priority over women's jobs. In terms of the consequences of this non-decision, men have more power than women.

At some time in their lives, most women are full-time mothers and housewives. Who benefits from following these traditional social roles? According to many feminist writers, men are the beneficiaries. First, they gain from avoiding the negative aspects of these roles. Second, they directly benefit from much of their partner's domestic labour.

Full-time domestic labour means that the wife is economically dependent on the male breadwinner. This reduces her power in the household. There is a tendency to see housework as low status, as different from 'real' work (Oakley, 1974). Typical women's jobs – washing, ironing and cleaning – are often experienced as boring, monotonous and unfulfilling. And these are the very jobs which directly benefit their partner, providing him with clean clothes and a clean home. Similarly, women's responsibility for emotion work can be seen as an example of 'he gains, she loses'.

Allocating housework and emotion work to women is often based on a non-decision – it is 'normal' and 'natural' for women to perform such tasks therefore there is no decision to make. In terms of this view of power, men gain at the expense of women therefore men have more power than women.

Evaluation Choosing winners and losers is based on judgements. What's wrong with being a housewife and a mother? Housework might be boring and monotonous but so are many jobs outside the home. Today, many women have the freedom to choose between a career and becoming a full-time mother and housewife. This is hardly a non-decision. And many women who give up paid employment feel they've gained from the decision (see Activity 31).

There is, however, plenty of evidence to support the view that in general men gain and women lose. Take the triple shift – women combining paid work, domestic labour and emotion work. The clear winner here is the man.

Shaping desires

Power can be seen as the ability to shape the wishes and desires of others in order to further one's own interests. In this way, a dominant group can persuade others to accept, or actually desire, their subordinate position. In terms of this argument, men have power over women because many women accept and even desire their traditional roles as mothers and housewives, and accept their subordinate status. For example, women often put their partners and children's preferences first when shopping for food. And they usually put 'the family' first when spending on clothes and entertainment (Charles, 1990).

Women get satisfaction from self-sacrifice. Her loved ones gain pleasure from her actions. This confirms her identity as a good mother and wife (Allan & Crow, 2001). The fact that she wants to serve and sacrifice can be seen as an indication of male power.

Evaluation This view of power is based on the assumption that it is not in women's interests to accept or desire their traditional roles as housewife and mother. Any pleasure they experience from their 'subordination' is 'false pleasure' because it disguises their exploitation and makes it more bearable.

But who is to say that women in the family are exploited and oppressed? As noted earlier, it's a matter of weighing the evidence and making a judgement.

Power and same-sex households

So far, this section has looked at the distribution of power in heterosexual families – families in which the partners are male and female. The focus now moves to power in same-sex families where both partners are either male or female.

Equality as an ideal Most studies of gay and lesbian partnerships are based on interviews. Bearing in mind that people don't always do what they say, this is what the interviews reveal. Same-sex couples emphasise equality and strive to remove power differences from their relationship. They see issues like the division of domestic labour as a matter for discussion and negotiation. They feel that being lesbian or gay offers more opportunities for equality. As one woman put it, 'It's much easier to have equal relations if you're the same sex' (Weeks et al., 1999a).

Women focus on alternatives to the unequal division of domestic labour which they see in heterosexual relationships. Men focus on alternatives to the macho male and the passive female which they see in heterosexual relationships. In both cases the emphasis is on equality (Weeks et al., 1999a).

Lesbian households A study of 37 cohabiting lesbian couples by Gillian Dunne (1997) indicates how far these ideals are translated into reality. Some of the couples have children, and in most cases childcare was shared.

Similarly, time spent on housework tended to be shared equally. However, when one partner was in full-time employment, she did less housework than her partner in part-time work.

Explanations Why are same-sex relationships more equal than heterosexual relationships? Gillian Dunne (1997) suggests the following reasons.

- Gender inequalities in the labour market shape gender inequalities in partnerships. Men generally have jobs with higher status and pay than their partners and this tends to shape their relationships at home.
- Gay and lesbian partnerships are free from the social norms and conventions which surround and direct heterosexual relationships. They are not weighed down by this cultural baggage. As a result, they have more freedom to construct 'families of choice' (see pages 100-101).

key terms

Decision-making approach A method for measuring power in terms of who makes the decisions.
Agenda-setting Deciding which issues will be placed on the agenda to be decided upon.
Non-decisions Issues which never reach the point of decision making.

summary

1. The division of domestic labour is gendered – household tasks are divided along gender lines.
2. Housework and childcare remain the primary responsibility of women.
3. There is evidence of a gradual increase in men's contribution to domestic labour, especially where their partners are in full-time employment.
4. There are problems with time-use studies of domestic labour. For example, women tend to underestimate and men to overestimate time spent on household tasks.
5. Emotion work is mainly performed by women. As a result, many women have a triple shift – 1) paid work, 2) housework and childcare, 3) emotion work.
6. Research into money management within families indicates that control over money is gendered – men tend to have greater control.
7. There is evidence of a trend to greater equality in access to and control of family finances, especially where women are in full-time employment.
8. Research indicates that power is unequally distributed in families, with male partners having the largest share.
9. Decision-making studies indicate that in general husbands have more power than their wives.
10. Non-decisions – issues that do not reach the point of decision-making – tend to favour men. They are likely to gain at the expense of their partners.
11. There is a tendency for many women to accept their subordinate position. From this, it can be argued that men have power over women.
12. Studies of lesbian and gay households suggest that there is a more equal division of domestic labour between partners.

activity32 same-sex relationships

Item A Talking about relationships

'Everything has to be discussed, everything is negotiable.'

'There are no assumptions about how you will relate, what you will do, who does what.'

Source: Journal of Social Policy 1999, 28: 689–709 Cambridge University Press

Item B Partners and mothers

Lesbian couple sharing childcare

question

With some reference to Items A and B, suggest why the domestic division of labour in lesbian families may be more equal than in heterosexual families.

Unit 7 Childhood and children

keyissues

1 How have views of childhood changed?
2 How have children been affected by these changes?

The social construction of childhood

Childhood can be seen as a *social construction*. From this point of view, it is not a natural state or a biological stage. Instead, it is shaped and given meaning by culture and society. As a result, the idea of childhood, the types of behaviour considered appropriate for children, the way children should be treated, and the length of time that childhood should last, are socially constructed.

Cross-cultural evidence Evidence from different cultures provides support for the view that childhood is a social construction. If childhood were simply a 'natural' state, then it would be similar across all cultures. This is not the case.

Anthropological studies show that other cultures treat children in ways which might seem unusual or even unnatural in contemporary Britain. Raymond Firth (1963), in his study of the Pacific island of Tikopia, found that children carried out dangerous tasks such as using sharp

activity33 childhood across cultures

Item A Child soldier

A member of a local militia in Zaire

Item B Blackfoot boys

The Blackfoot Indians lived on the Plains of Western Canada. Children were taught the skills of horse riding at an early age. One of Long Lance's earliest recollections was falling off a horse. He was picked up by his eldest brother and planted firmly on the horse's back. His brother said, 'Now, you stay there! You are four years old, and if you cannot ride a horse, we will put girls' clothing on you and let you grow up a woman.'

Fathers were responsible for the physical training of the Blackfoot boys. They wanted to harden their bodies and make them brave and strong. Fathers used to whip their sons each morning with fir branches. Far from disliking this treatment, the youngsters proudly displayed the welts produced by whipping. Sometimes they were whipped in public and they competed to see who could stand the most pain.

Source: The autobiography of a Blackfoot Indian Chief, Long Lance 1956

question

How do Items A and B indicate that childhood is socially constructed?

tools and fishing in the open sea. They were allowed to carry out these tasks when they themselves felt ready rather than when adults decided they were competent or safe to do so.

A brief history of childhood

In *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), the French historian Philippe Ariès argued that the concept of childhood did not exist in medieval Europe. He based his argument on contemporary letters, diaries and other documents, plus the way children were depicted in paintings of the time. Ariès claimed that soon after children were weaned, they were regarded as little adults and treated as such. From an early age, they worked alongside adults in the fields or in cottage industries, they dressed like adults and in many ways behaved like adults.

The emergence of modern childhood Ariès sees the modern concept of childhood developing from the separation of children from the world of adults. This process began in the 16th century when the upper classes sent their children to schools to be educated. In the early years of the industrial revolution, child labour was widespread – children and adults worked side by side. Throughout the 19th century, a series of factory acts banned the employment of children in mines and factories. By the end of the 19th century, elementary state education was compulsory in most European countries. Children were now physically separated from adult settings and had a separate legal status.

This process was accompanied by the development of experts specialising in children – child psychologists, paediatricians (doctors who specialise in children), educationalists and parenting experts. According to Ariès, 'Our world is obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood'. Children are seen as different from adults. As a result, they have special needs. Because of this

activity34 little adults

Item A Medieval Europe

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist. This is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society, this awareness was lacking. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude (care) of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society.

Source: Ariès, 1962

Item B Paintings

Family saying grace before a meal (1585)

question

What evidence do the paintings in Item B provide to support Ariès' statement in Item A?

Group of doctors (right) and men, women and children (left), 15th century

they require treatment, training and guidance from an army of specially trained adults. This is very different from the Middle Ages when 'the child became the natural companion of the adult'.

Evaluation Ariès has been criticised for overstating his case. In certain respects, children in medieval Europe were seen as different from adults. For example, there were laws prohibiting the marriage of children under 12 (Bukatko & Daehler, 2001). However, many historians agree with the broad outline of Ariès's history of childhood in Western Europe.

key term

Social construction Something that is created by society, constructed from social meanings and definitions.

Images of childhood

Wendy Stainton Rogers (2001) looks at the social construction of childhood in 20th century Europe. She identifies two 'images' of childhood – 'the innocent and wholesome child' and 'the wicked and sinful child'. Both images coexist – they exist together. Both have a long history and continue to the present day. They can be seen in a variety of forms – for example, in novels such as Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* with its charming and wholesome children and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* where children descend to their 'natural' savage and barbaric selves.

Each image suggests a particular way of acting towards children. The image of the innocent and wholesome child suggests that children should be protected from everything that is nasty about the adult world, from violence and from the worries and concerns of adults. Childhood should be a happy, joyous and carefree time. By contrast, the idea of an essentially sinful child suggests that children should be restrained, regulated and disciplined.

Both these views of childhood imply that adults should be concerned about children and take responsibility for their upbringing.

The welfare view The first view suggests that children are vulnerable and need protection. This 'welfare view' forms the basis of social policy towards children in the UK today. For example, the Children Act of 1989 states that 'When a court determines any question with respect to the upbringing of a child … the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration'.

The control view The second view assumes that children are unable to control their anti-social tendencies. As a result, they need regulation and discipline. This 'control view' is reflected in education policy – children must submit to education and the form and content of their education must be strictly controlled from above.

According to Wendy Stainton Rogers, these images of childhood are social constructions. She argues that 'there is no *natural* distinction that marks off children as a certain category of person'. Seeing children as innocent and wholesome or wicked and sinful or a mixture of both is not right or wrong, it is simply a meaning given to childhood at a particular time and place (Stainton Rogers, 2001).

Childhood in an age of uncertainty

Nick Lee (2001) sees a change in the social construction of childhood towards the end of the 20th century. He claims that for most of the century adults and children were seen as 'fundamentally different kinds of humans'. Adults were stable and complete, children were unstable and incomplete. Adults had become, children were becoming. Adults were self-controlling, children were in need of control.

In the early 21st century, 'growing up' is no longer seen as a journey towards personal completion and stability. This is because adulthood is no longer complete and stable. Adult relationships are increasingly unstable as indicated by high divorce rates. The labour market is changing rapidly and 'jobs for life' are a thing of the past. With new partners and new jobs, adults are in a constant state of becoming. They are living in an 'age of uncertainty'.

Where does this leave children? For much of the 20th century, childhood was defined in relation to adulthood. Adults and children were very different. Children had yet to become full human beings. They were not fully rational, they were not seen as 'persons in their own right', they had to be guided along the path to adulthood by child experts and child trainers such as teachers and social workers.

By the 21st century, adults were becoming more like children. Both were in a continual state of becoming, both were defining and redefining their identities, both were unstable and incomplete.

This growing similarity between adults and children is leading to a new social construction of childhood. Children are seen increasingly as 'beings in their own right'. As such, they have their own concerns, their own interests, and should have their own rights, just like adult members of society. This is reflected in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Article 3 states:

> 'In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.'

Changes in the social construction of childhood result in changes in the way adults treat children. This can be seen from the 1989 Children Act which stated that in court proceedings, 'the child's welfare must be paramount'. In cases of divorce, the court used to decide which parent had custody of the children. Since 1989, the child's view is taken into account – children have a say in decisions about who they will live with. This is a long way from the traditional view that children should be seen and not heard.

The end of childhood?

Will the 21st century see the end of childhood? Will new social constructions end up abolishing the whole idea of childhood?

According to Neil Postman (1983) in *The Disappearance of Childhood*, this process is well underway. Postman argues that childhood is only possible if children can be separated, and therefore protected from, the adult world. In his words, 'Without secrets, of course, there can be no such thing as childhood'. The mass media, and television in particular, have brought the adult world into the lives of children. Secrecy has been wiped out by television. As a result, the boundaries between the worlds of children and adults are breaking down. Postman believes that in the long run, this means the end of childhood.

Dual status Postman has been criticised for overstating his case. Clearly television and the media in general have brought adult priorities and concerns into the lives of children. But childhood is a long way from disappearing. For example, children in late 20th century Western societies have become a major economic force. Their tastes and preferences, not just in toys and games, but also in information and communication technologies such as personal computers and mobile phones, have a major effect on what is produced and purchased (Buckingham, 2000).

According to Nick Lee (2001), childhood has not disappeared, it has become more complex and ambiguous. Children are dependent on their parents, but in another sense they are independent. There is a mass children's market which children influence – they make choices, they decide which products succeed and fail, though at the end of the day, they depend on their parents' purchasing power.

This is one of the ambiguities of childhood in the 21st century. Things are not clear-cut. Children are both dependent and independent.

summary

1. Many sociologists see childhood as a social construction rather than a natural state. Ideas about childhood vary between different societies and different times.
2. According to Philippe Ariès,
   - The concept of childhood did not exist in medieval Europe. Children were seen as little adults.
   - Modern ideas of childhood as a separate state began with the onset of formal education and the gradual withdrawal of children from the workplace.
3. Wendy Stainton Rogers identifies two images of childhood in modern Western society – 'the innocent and wholesome child' and 'the wicked and sinful child'. The first image suggests that children are vulnerable and need protection – the welfare view. The second image suggests children need regulation and discipline – the control view.
4. According to Nick Lee, adulthood has become less stable and more uncertain. In these respects, it has become more like childhood. This similarity has led to a change in the social construction of childhood in the 21st century. Children are increasingly seen as having their own rights and interests.
5. Neil Postman argues that the media is breaking down the boundaries between the worlds of children and adults, leading to the 'disappearance of childhood'.
6. Postman has been criticised for overstating his case. Childhood is a long way from disappearing. For example, children remain a distinct group – they are a major force in the market place. And they remain dependent on their parents.

activity35 ambiguities of childhood

Item A 'Pester-power'

Children can influence what adults buy through 'pester-power'. In the UK, the take-up of satellite and cable television, video, camcorders and home computers is much higher in households with children: 35% of households with children now subscribe to cable or satellite television, for example, as compared with 25% overall; while 90% of households with children have access to a video cassette recorder as compared with 75% overall.

Source: Buckingham, 2000

Item B Young and sophisticated

question

Why is childhood in the 21st century seen as 'ambiguous'? Make some reference to Items A and B in your answer.

Unit 8 Demographic trends

keyissues

1 What are the main demographic trends in the UK since 1900?
2 What explanations have been given for changes in births, deaths and family size?

7.1 Demographic changes

Demography is the study of populations. It includes the measurement of births, deaths and migration which can lead to changes in population size and structure. Demography also involves an examination of the reasons for changes in populations. For example, it attempts to explain why people in the UK are living longer.

This section presents a brief overview of the main demographic trends in the UK since 1900. The material is drawn from various issues of *Social Trends, Annual Abstract of Statistics* and from National Statistics Online.

A growing population

In 1901, the population of the UK was 38.2 million. By mid-2006, it had grown to 60.6 million. The rate of population growth has slowed during these years. Between 1901 and 1911, the growth rate averaged 1% per year. In the 21st century it is around 0.25% per year.

The main factor accounting for population growth has been *natural change* – the difference between births and deaths. Every year since 1901, apart from 1976, there have been more births than deaths. Since the late 1990s, migration into the UK has been an increasingly important factor in population growth. For example, between 2001 and 2005, migration resulted in an average annual increase of 182,000 people compared to an average annual increase of 92,000 people through natural change.

Births/fertility

Births are measured in three main ways.

Actual numbers This refers to the actual number of live births in a population over a given time period. Overall, there has been a decline in the actual number of live births in the UK. In 1901, there were nearly 1.1 million, in 2005 there were nearly 723,000.

Birth rate This measure refers to the number of live births per thousand of the population per year. For example, if the birth rate is 15, then 15 live babies were born for each thousand members of the population in that year. The UK birth rate has fallen steadily from an average of 28.6 in 1900-02 to 12.0 in 2005.

The total fertility rate (TFR) This is the measure most commonly used by demographers. The total fertility rate is the average number of children that a woman would have during her lifetime. It is calculated each year on the available evidence.

Overall the TFR in the UK has declined. It is estimated that the TFR in 1900 was 3.5 children per woman. Official TFR measurements began in 1940. Since then, TFR peaked at 2.95 in 1964 during the 1960s 'baby boom'. It reached a record low of 1.63 in 2001 and rose to 1.84 children per woman in 2006.

Deaths/mortality

Mortality means death. It is measured in two main ways.

Actual numbers This refers to the actual number of deaths in a population over a given time period – usually a year. Despite the large population growth in the UK between1901 and 2005, the annual number of deaths has remained fairly steady. In 1901 there were 632,000 deaths in the UK, in 2005 there were 582,000.

Death rate The death rate for the population as a whole is the number of deaths per thousand of the population per year. The death rate in the UK has fallen from an average of 18.4 in 1900-02 to 9.4 in 2005. When the population grows steadily and there is little change in the annual number of deaths the death rate will automatically fall.

Infant mortality rate This measure refers to the number of deaths of infants under one year per thousand live births. The infant mortality rate in the UK has fallen dramatically from 142 in 1901 to 5.1 in 2005. Infant mortality accounted for 25% of deaths in 1901 and for less than 1% in 2005.

Life expectancy

Life expectancy is the number of years a person can expect to live based on data from a particular year. Table 7 shows life expectancy at birth in the UK for males and females. For example, the average life expectancy for females born in 1901 was 49 years. By 2003-05, females could expect to live for 81 years.

Table 7 Life expectancy at birth, UK

	1901	1951	1991	2003-05
Males	45.5	66.1	73.2	76.6
Females	49.0	70.9	78.8	81.0

Adapted from various issues of *Social Trends* and *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, Office for National Statistics

Ageing population

The UK has an ageing population. This means that the average age of the population is increasing. The proportion of older people is growing and the proportion of younger people is declining. For example, from 1971 to mid-2006, the population over 65 grew by 31% (from 7.4 to 9.7 million) whilst the population under 16 declined by 19% (from 14.2 to 11.5 million). People are living longer and women are having fewer children.

Family size

As the section on births has shown, fertility in the UK has fallen from 1900 to 2006. The total fertility rate (TFR) is used as a rough indicator of family size. It is estimated that the TFR in 1900 was 3.5 children per woman. The TFR in 2006 was 1.84.

Today the most common family size is two children. In England and Wales, 37% of women reaching age 45 in 2006 had a completed family size of two children. The proportion of women having three or more children has fallen from nearly 40% for women born in 1941 to 30% for women born in 1961. Childlessness has increased in recent years. One in ten women born in 1941 were childless compared to nearly one in five women born in 1961.

key terms

Demography The study of populations.
Natural change The difference in the size of a population resulting from the difference between births and deaths.
Birth rate The number of live births per thousand of the population per year.
Total fertility rate (TFR) The average number of children that a woman would have during her lifetime.
Death rate The number of deaths per thousand of the population per year.
Infant mortality rate The number of deaths of infants under one year per thousand live births.
Life expectancy The number of years that a person can expect to live.
Ageing population A population in which the average age is increasing.

7.2 Explaining demographic changes

Mortality

There has been a significant decline in mortality in the UK from around 1830 to the present day. Life expectancy has steadily increased. The death rate has steadily declined and there has been a dramatic fall in infant mortality. Various causes have been suggested for the decline in mortality. They include the following.

Advances in medicine Around 60% of the decline in mortality from 1850 to 1970 was due to a decrease in infectious diseases. How much of this was due to advances in medicine?

The first half of the 20th century saw the introduction of a range of vaccines (from the 1920s onwards) and antibiotics (from the mid-1930s). However, all the major diseases – tuberculosis, measles, scarlet fever, pneumonia and whooping cough – were steadily declining *before* the introduction of effective medical treatment (Hart, 1985). Around two-thirds of the fall in mortality comes from a decline in mortality during the first 15 years of life. The major reduction in infant and child death rates from 1900 to 2006 occurred during the early years of the 20th century, well before widespread immunisation which dates from the 1940s and 50s.

Advances in medicine have made a contribution to the decline in mortality. However, there are probably more important factors accounting for this decline.

Welfare measures

During the later years of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century, national governments and local authorities began to assume more responsibility for the health and welfare of their citizens. There were marked improvements in the disposal of sewage, the removal of refuse and the purification of water – all of which provided a healthier environment.

In 1902, Bradford started the first school meals service and in 1914 the government made free school meals 'for the needy' compulsory. In 1907, school medical examinations were introduced. The Liberal governments of 1905-1915 directed help towards the poorest groups in society. For example, the 1911 National Insurance Act provided sickness benefit for workers with low incomes.

Measures such as these raised living standards and reduced malnutrition amongst the poorest.

Nutrition and living standards

The first half of the 20th century saw a rapid decline in *absolute poverty* – the inability to obtain adequate food and shelter. A number of researchers argue that adequate nutrition is the most important factor accounting for the decline in mortality, particularly the decline in infant and child mortality. A healthy diet raises levels of resistance to infection and increases the chances of recovery from infection (Livi-Bacci, 2007).

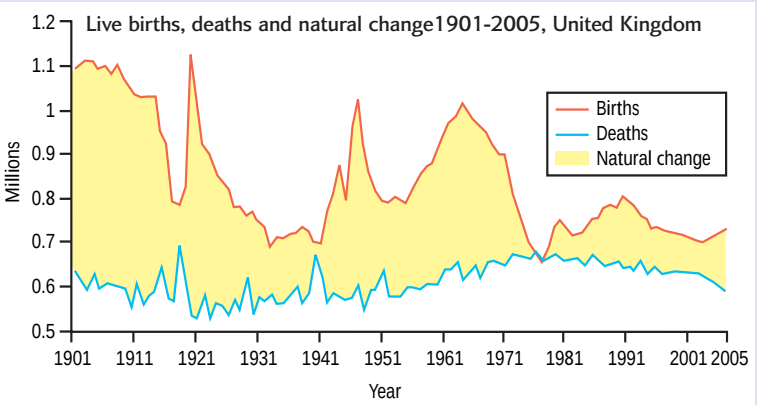
Fertility

Overall, there has been a decline in the birth rate and the total fertility rate in the UK from 1900 onwards. Women are having fewer children and families are becoming smaller. Various reasons have been suggested for this. They include the following.

Economic factors The cost of raising children has steadily risen from 1900 to the present. The minimum school leaving age rose from 14 in 1918, to 15 in 1947 and 16 in 1973. Growing numbers of young people are continuing to further and higher education. As a result, children are becoming increasingly expensive as their economic dependency on parents lasts longer and longer.

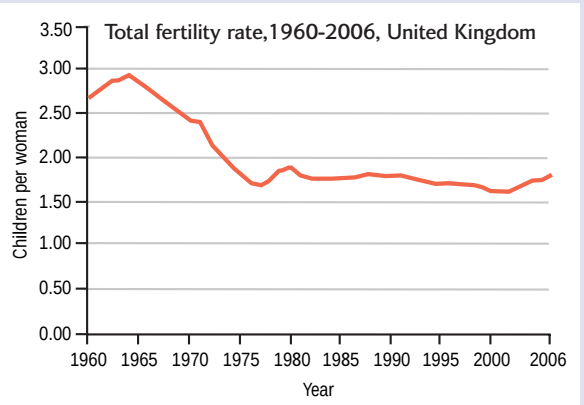
activity36 demographic trends in the UK

Item A Natural change



Adapted from various issues of *Social Trends*, Office for National Statistics

Item B Fertility



Source: Office for National Statistics

question

1. Briefly describe what is shown by Items A and B.

Surveys by building societies and insurance companies illustrate this. For example, research by LV (formerly Liverpool Victoria) estimated that the cost of raising a child and supporting them through university was £180,000 in 2006, a rise of 28% over the past four years. A survey by the Skipton Building Society in 2006 reported that 20% of respondents said they would remain childless because of the cost of a child, while another 20% who already had children said they would not have any more because they could not afford it (Womack, 2006).

Individualisation According to the German sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2001), we are now living in the second modernity which began around the mid-1970s. They see this era as characterised by individualisation and risk. Individualisation means that people are increasingly released from the norms, roles and belief systems of the wider society. To a greater extent, they are free to construct their own lives. And they increasingly demand a 'life of their own'.

Children can conflict with this demand – they impose and intrude, they place limits on parents' freedom, they restrict their options and make demands on their time, energy, emotions and finances. As a result, children are often postponed, their numbers are reduced and, in a growing number of cases, people choose not to have them.

Risk Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that risk, uncertainty and insecurity characterise societies in the second modernity. For example, relationships are increasingly seen as a source of risk and uncertainty with the high divorce rate and the even higher rate of cohabitation breakup. Having children is an added risk factor. It can put a strain on a couple's relationship. It is a financial risk. And, if mothers take time out of paid employment when their children are young, it increases the risk of not finding a job when they wish to re-enter the labour market. One way to reduce risk is to have fewer children or none at all.

Changing opportunities Researchers often point to expanding educational and occupational opportunities for women as reasons for the decline in fertility. There was a rapid increase in female undergraduates between 1970/71 and 2000/05. And during those same years, the proportion of women in paid employment increased from 56% to 70% (*Social Trends*, 2007) These changes provide alternatives to women's traditional role as mothers and child-raisers. One way of taking advantage of these growing options is to have fewer children or no children.

Changing attitudes Research indicates that women's concerns and priorities are changing. For example, Sue Sharpe's study of working-class girls in London schools in the early 1970s found that their main concerns for the future were 'love, marriage, husbands and children'. When she returned to the same schools in the 1990s, the girls' priorities had changed to 'job, career and being able to support themselves' (Sharpe, 1976 and 1994).

Attitudes to childlessness have changed. The word 'childless' suggests a loss. Now many women who choose not to have children see themselves as 'childfree' – they emphasise liberation from children rather than loss of children. From this point of view, the decision about whether or not to have children is a lifestyle option.

key terms

Childless women Women who, for whatever reason, do not produce children.

Childfree women Women who choose not to have children as a lifestyle option.

summary

1. The population of the UK has grown from 38.2 million in 1901 to 60.6 million in 2006.
2. Most of this growth is due to natural change.
3. Actual numbers of live births, the birth rate and the total fertility rate have all fallen since 1901.
4. The annual number of deaths has remained fairly steady since 1901. However, the death rate has almost halved from 1900 to 2005.
5. There has been a dramatic fall in infant mortality and a steady rise in life expectancy from 1901 to 2005.
6. The UK has an ageing population.
7. There has been a decline in family size and an increase in childlessness.
8. The following reasons have been suggested for the decline in mortality.
   - Advances in medicine
   - Welfare measures from local and national government
   - Improvements in nutrition and living standards.
9. The following reasons have been suggested for the decline in fertility.
   - Economic factors – the growing cost of children
   - Individualisation
   - The growing risk and uncertainty of societies in the second modernity
   - Changing opportunities for women
   - Changes in women's concerns and priorities.

activity37 mortality and fertility

Item A School Meals

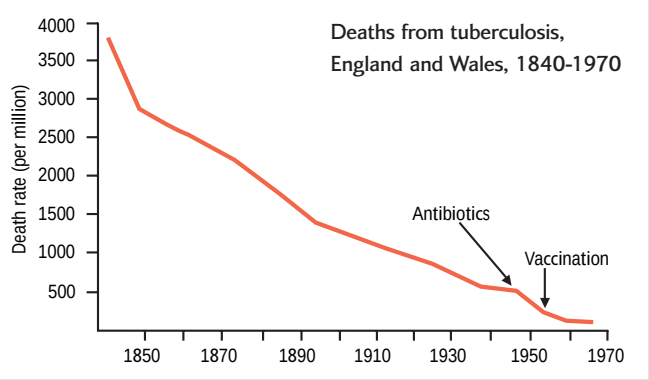
Green Lane School kitchen, Bradford

School meals, Bradford, 1908

Monday	Lentil and tomato soup. Currant roly-poly pudding.
Tuesday	Meat pudding (stewed beef and boiled suet pudding). Ground rice pudding.
Wednesday	Yorkshire pudding, gravy, peas. Rice and sultanas.
Thursday	Scotch barley broth. Currant pastry or fruit tart.
Friday	Stewed fish, parsley sauce, peas, mashed potatoes. Cornflour blancmange.

(All these meals included bread)

Item B Tuberculosis



Source: McKeown, 1976

Item C Generations apart

Grace, aged 71

'Having children wasn't something that even occurred to me to question. In those days, it was automatically accepted that motherhood was just what girls did.'

Source: *The Observer*, 18.03.07

Vicki, aged 17

'I used to be neutral about the idea of being a mother but as I've got older and seen the sacrifices I would have to make, I've become really against the idea. The first word that springs to mind when I think about being a mother is 'trapped'. I feel that if I want to be successful in my career, I don't have any choice except not to become a mother.'

'I'm not alone in this decision. A substantial number of my female friends are quite definite that we never will. I genuinely don't think I'll regret my decision when I'm an old woman. I want to be able to look back at a life of achievements, adventures, success and one packed full of friends.'

Source: *The Observer*, 18.03.07

questions

1 Look at Item A. How might school meals have made a contribution to the decline in the death rate?

2 What does Item B suggest about the contribution made by medical advances to the reduction of deaths from tuberculosis?

3 How might the comments in Item C help to explain the decline in fertility?