Family life

Introduction

It is often thought natural and normal in Western societies for the social organisation of residence and reproduction to be based on a particular form of family life—mum, dad and the two kids. This view has discouraged serious and detailed consideration of the very different forms taken by 'the family' in different cultures and historical periods, or of possible alternative forms of family life. A number of critical perspectives on the family have developed since the 1960s which have scrutinised many of the assumptions built into the idea that there has been, is and should be only one form of 'the family'. These approaches have questioned whether family life must inevitably be organised in any particular way, and considered the effects on family members of the form of family life as we have inherited it from our parents.

Over the past two decades family historians have challenged many of the sociological arguments about the development of family life over time, in particular its relationship to industrialisation. Many of the less fruitful lines of argument can be avoided altogether if we keep in mind Max Weber's distinction between 'the family' as a **household** or **domestic group**, sharing a roof and meals, and as a **kinship group**, an organisation of people according to prevailing rules of kinship.

It is also important to remember the distinction emphasised by William Goode (1963, p. 2) between *ideal* family patterns—'the family' as some would like it to be—and *real* family behaviour and values—the actual family relationships that people enter into. In any one society it is quite possible for a particular ideal to coexist with a very different reality, especially during periods of significant social change.

This chapter examines:

- the key sociological perspectives on family life, including functionalism, Marxism, and feminism, Weber's approach to the family along with other critical views;

KEY TERMS

Breadwinner system
Cohabitation
Cohort diversity
Cultural diversity
Deferential dialectic
Demographic transition
Dispersed extended family
Domestic group
Domestic labour
Extended family
Family wage
Household
Industrialisation
Interaction process
Internalisation of society's culture
Isolated nuclear family
Kinship group
Labour power
Modified extended family
Modified elementary family
Nuclear family
Organisational diversity
Patriarchal family
Patrimonial domination
Polygyny
Primary socialisation
Stabilisation of adult personalities
Stem family
Structuring of the personality
Symmetrical family
Unstable family

- the development of family life as part of industrialisation, especially the debates around the size of the family, fertility decline, changed relations within the family and women's workforce participation;
- the increasing diversity of family forms;
- the directions in which conjugal roles are changing.

Functionalism

Functionalist analyses of family life address three main questions:

1 *What are the functions of the family?* Answers to this question deal with the contributions made by the family to the maintenance of the social system. It is assumed that society has certain functional prerequisites or basic needs that must be met if it is to survive and operate efficiently. The family is examined in terms of the degree to which it meets these functional prerequisites.
2 *What are the functional relationships between the family and other parts of the social system?* It is assumed that there must be a certain degree of fit, integration and harmony between the parts of the social system if society is going to function efficiently. For example, the family must be integrated to some extent with the economic system. This question is examined in detail in a later section when the relationships between the family and industrialisation are considered.
3 *What are the functions performed by an institution or a part of society for the individual?* In the case of the family, this question considers the functions of the family for its individual members.

Talcott Parsons—the 'basic and irreducible' functions of the nuclear family

Parsons concentrated his analysis on the family in modern American society. However, his ideas had a more general application since he argued that the American family retained two 'basic and irreducible functions' which are common to the family in all societies. These are the 'primary socialization of children' and the 'stabilization of the adult personalities of the population of the society' (1955a, p. 16).

Primary socialisation

Primary socialisation refers to socialisation during the early years of childhood, which takes place mainly within the family. Secondary socialisation occurs during the later years when the family is less involved and other agencies (such as the peer group and the school) exert increasing influence. There are two basic processes involved in primary socialisation:

1 the **internalisation of society's culture**; and
2 the **structuring of the personality**.

Unless culture is internalised, society would cease to exist since, without shared norms and values, social life would not be possible. However, culture is not simply learned—it is 'internalized as part of the personality structure'. The child's personality is moulded in terms of the central values of the culture to the point where they become part of the child. In the case of American society, the child's personality is shaped in terms of independence and achievement motivation—two of the central values of American culture.

Parsons argued that families 'are "factories" which produce human personalities' (1955a, p. 16). He believed they were essential for this purpose since primary socialisation requires a context that provides warmth, security and mutual support. He could conceive of no other institution that could provide this context.

Stabilisation of adult personalities

Once produced, the personality must be kept stable. This is the second basic function of the family, the **stabilisation of adult personalities**. The emphasis here is on the marriage relationship and the emotional security the couple provide for each other. This acts as a counterweight to the stresses and strains of everyday life which tend to make the personality unstable. This function is particularly important in Western industrial society, since the nuclear family is relatively isolated from kin. With less support from a close-knit extended family, the married couple increasingly look to each other for emotional support.

Adult personalities are also stabilised by the parents'

role in the socialisation process. This allows them to act out 'childish' elements of their own personalities which they have retained from childhood but which cannot be indulged in adult society. For example, father is 'kept on the rails' by playing with his son's train set. The nuclear family therefore provides a context in which husband and wife can express their childish whims, give and receive emotional support, recharge their batteries and so stabilise their personalities.

Criticisms of Parsons

This is a brief summary of only some of Parsons's views on the family; other aspects will be considered later in Chapter 9 (pp. 384–5):

- Parsons has been accused of idealising the nuclear family with his picture of well-adjusted children and sympathetic spouses caring for each other's every need.
- His picture was based largely on the American middle-class family which he treats as representative of American families in general. As David Morgan stated, 'there are no classes, no regions, no religious, ethnic or status groups, no communities' (1975, p. 42) in Parsons's analysis of the family. For example, he failed to explore possible differences between middle- and working-class families.
- Parsons failed on the whole to explore functional alternatives to the nuclear family. He recognised that some functions are not necessarily tied to the nuclear family. For example, he noted that the family's economic function has largely been taken over by other agencies in modern industrial society. However, his belief that its remaining functions were 'basic and irreducible' prevented him from examining alternatives to the nuclear family.
- Parsons saw the socialisation process mainly as a one-way process, with children being pumped full of culture and their personalities moulded by powerful parents. He tended to ignore the two-way **interaction process** between children and parents. There is no place in his scheme for the impact children have on their parents, or for any power and control children may be able to exercise.

The changing functions of the family

Parsons believed that the family had lost a number of its functions in modern industrial society. Institutions such as businesses, political parties, schools and welfare organisations now specialise in functions formerly performed by the family. Parsons argued that the family:

> does not itself, except here and there, engage in much economic production; it is not a significant unit in the political power system; it is not a major direct agency of integration of the larger society. Its individual members participate in all these functions, but they do so as 'individuals', not in their roles as family members. (1955a, p. 16)

However, this does not mean that the family is declining in importance. It has simply become more specialised. By structuring the personalities of the young and stabilising the personalities of adults, the family provides its members with the psychological training and support necessary to meet the requirements of the social system. Parsons concluded:

> the family is more specialized than before, but not in any general sense less important, because society is dependent more exclusively on it for the performance of certain of its vital functions. (1955a, pp. 9–10)

The loss of certain functions by the family made its remaining functions more important.

Young and Willmott made a similar point by arguing that the emotional support provided by family relationships grows in importance as the family loses many of its functions. They suggested that the family:

> can provide some sense of wholeness and permanence to set against the more restricted and transitory roles imposed by the specialized institutions which have flourished outside the home. The upshot is that, as the disadvantages of the new industrial and impersonal society have become more pronounced, so the family has become more prized for its power to counteract them. (1973, p. 269)

The maintenance and improvement of functions

Not all functionalists agree that it is appropriate to see the family as having 'lost' functions in modern industrial society. Ronald Fletcher (1966) maintained that just the opposite has happened. Not only has the family retained its functions, but those functions have 'increased in detail and importance' (p. 197). Specialised institutions such as schools and hospitals have added to and improved the family's functions rather than superseded them.

Fletcher maintained that the family's responsibility for socialising the young is as important as it ever was. State education has added to, rather than removed,

this responsibility, since 'Parents are expected to do their best to guide, encourage and support their children in their educational and occupational choices and careers' (p. 190).

In the same way, the state has not removed the family's responsibility for the physical welfare of its members. Fletcher argued that: 'The family is still centrally concerned with maintaining the health of its members, but it is now aided by wider provisions which have been added to the family's situation since pre-industrial times' (p. 191). Rather than removing this function from the family, state provision of health services has served to expand and improve it, and made family members more aware of the importance of health and hygiene in the home. Compared with the past, parents are preoccupied with their children's health.

Even though he admitted that the family has largely lost its function as a unit of production, Fletcher argued that it still maintains a vital economic function as a unit of consumption. Particularly in the case of the modern home-centred family, money is spent on the family and in its name, rather than the individual. The modern family demands wall-to-wall carpet, three-piece lounge suites, washing machines, television sets, 'family' cars, computers and Reeboks.

In summary, most sociologists who adopt a functionalist perspective see the family at least as having to compete with other social institutions in fulfilling several of its functions in modern industrial society, but they maintain that the importance of the family has not declined. Rather, the nuclear family is adapting, successfully, to a developing industrial society.

Marxism

Marx himself did not give any systematic attention to the family, although there are a few passing comments on the effect of industrial capitalism on pre-industrial family patterns which anticipated later analyses, such as the following passage from *Capital*:

> However terrible and disgusting the dissolution, under the capitalist system, of the old family ties may appear, nevertheless modern industry, by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production, outside the domestic sphere, to women, to young children of both sexes, creates a new economical foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relations between the sexes. (1954, pp. 459–60)

This was the beginning of an argument concerning the impact on the family of the separation of production from the domestic sphere, of the power relations between women and men that were built into pre-industrial family life, and of the possibility of changed gender relations emerging from industrial society. However, the first extensive Marxist discussion of family life appeared in Friedrich Engels's 'The origin of the family, private property and the state', published in 1884.

Friedrich Engels—the origin of the family

Like many 19th-century scholars, Engels took an evolutionary view of the family, attempting to trace its origin and evolution through time. His scheme of the evolution of the family was largely based on the work of the 19th-century American anthropologist, Lewis Morgan. Engels combined Morgan's evolutionary approach with Marxist theory, arguing that, as the mode of production changed, so did the family. During the early stages of human evolution, Engels believed that the means of production were communally owned and the family as such did not exist. This era of 'primitive communism' was characterised by promiscuity. There were no rules limiting sexual relationships and society was, in effect, the family.

Although Engels has been criticised for this type of speculation, Kathleen Gough argued that his picture may not be so far from the truth. She noted that among our nearest relatives, the chimpanzees, 'sexual relations are largely indiscriminate' and that 'the chances are our prehuman ancestors had a similar social life' (1975, p. 59).

The evolution of the family

Engels argued that, throughout human history, more and more restrictions were placed on sexual relationships and the production of children. He speculated that, from the promiscuous horde, marriage and the family evolved through a series of stages, including polygyny, to its present stage, the monogamous nuclear family. Each successive stage placed greater restrictions on the number of mates available to the individual.

The monogamous nuclear family developed with the emergence of private property, in particular the private ownership of the means of production, and the advent of the state. The state instituted laws to protect the system of private property and to enforce the rules of monogamous marriage. This form of marriage and

the family developed to solve the problem of the inheritance of private property. Property was owned by males and, in order for them to pass it on to their heirs, they must be certain of the legitimacy of those heirs. They therefore needed greater control over women so that there would be no doubt about the paternity of their offspring. The monogamous family provided the most efficient device for this purpose. In Engels's words:

> It is based on the supremacy of the man; its express aim is the begetting children of undisputed paternity; this paternity being required in order that these children may in due time inherit their father's wealth as his natural heirs. (1962, p. 221)

Evidence for Engels's views

Subsequent research has suggested that many of the details of Morgan's analysis are incorrect. For example, monogamous marriage and the nuclear family are often found in hunting and gathering bands. Since humanity has lived in hunting and gathering bands for the vast majority of its existence, the various forms of group marriage postulated by Engels (such as the promiscuous horde) may well be figments of his and Morgan's imaginations.

However, Gough argued that 'the general trend of Engels' argument still appears sound' (1972, p. 116). Although nuclear families and monogamous marriage exist in small-scale societies, they form part of a larger kinship group. When individuals marry they take on a series of duties and obligations to their spouse's kin. Communities are united by kinship ties and the result is like a large extended family. Gough argued:

> It is true that although it is not a group marriage in Engels' sense, marriage has a group character in many hunting bands and in most of the more complex tribal societies that have developed with the domestication of plants and animals . . . With the development of privately owned, heritable property, and especially with the rise of the state, this group character gradually disappears. (p. 117)

The importance of Engels's work on the family lies, as David Morgan (1975, pp. 137–40) has emphasised, less in the details of its evolutionary argument than its general orientation towards seeing the contemporary nuclear family as:

- a historically changing institution;
- closely related to the form taken by economic relations; and
- based on an unequal and exploitative relation between women and men.

(Further aspects of Engels's views on the family are examined in Chapter 9, pp. 395–7.)

Max Horkheimer—modern capitalism and the family

A more developed Marxist analysis of the family can be found in the work of a group of Marxist social scientists working in the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research between the 1920s and the 1950s. Collectively they have become known as the 'Frankfurt School', and their better known members include Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, although it was Horkheimer who wrote most extensively on the sociology of the family. They developed the following arguments. The structure of the family should be regarded as socially constructed, as the product of the society the family belongs to. This meant that it was not possible to see the family as something 'natural' or as having an existence prior to society. Rather, the family should be seen as 'socially mediated down to its innermost structure'. This view also meant that it was not possible to regard family life as a kind of 'haven in a heartless world', because the structures of the surrounding society would inevitably affect whatever went on within family life. It was, therefore, impossible to pursue emancipation or equality within the family if the surrounding society was characterised by oppressive and unequal social relations: 'There can be no emancipation of the family without the emancipation of the whole' (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research 1973, p. 145).

The relationship between family life and the surrounding society in modern capitalist societies was profoundly *contradictory*. On the one hand, the Frankfurt sociologists saw the family as an essential part of the social order in that it adapted every individual to conformity to authority. The family, wrote Horkheimer:

> as one of the most important formative agencies, sees to it that the kind of human character emerges which social life requires, and gives this human being in great measure the indispensable adaptability for a specific authority oriented conduct on which the existence of the bourgeois order largely depends. (1982, p. 98)

Like Engels, Horkheimer recognised the significance of the basic economic inequality between men on the

one hand, and women and children on the other. If men are the sole breadwinners, argued Horkheimer, this 'makes wife, sons and daughters, even in modern times "his", puts their lives in large measure into his hands, and forces them to submit to his order and guidance' (p. 105). However, he went on to point out the permanent socialising effect this had on children. The development of obedience to the authority of one's own father was a preparation for obedience to the authority of the state and one's employer. Horkheimer also saw family life as imposing conformity on men, in that the dependence of their wife and children made them more conservative about radical social change which might undermine their ability to support their families.

In this sense the nuclear family can be seen as an integral part of modern capitalist society, and Horkheimer's perspective was similar to that of the functionalist theorists, who also saw the family as performing an essential socialising function. On the other hand, however, Horkheimer and his colleagues also pointed out that there was a fundamental opposition between the logic of family life, the principles governing its operation, and that of a market-based capitalist society. Family life is not based on economic exchange or the rational pursuit of self-interested gain, but rather on relations of kinship and emotional bonds of love, altruism and care. This makes the family essentially a pre-capitalist, feudal institution because 'it has held fast to an irrational moment in the midst of an industrial society which aims at rationality, the exclusive domination of the principle that all relations must be calculable' (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research 1973, p. 134). In this sense, the 'bourgeois family' is an impossibility, because the logic of rationally self-interested individualism contradicts the apparent irrationality of family life.

This familial 'irrationality' has both positive and negative aspects. Its positive sense is that family life allows the expression of emotions that otherwise have little place in a rational, calculating capitalist society, where the measure of all things is economic gain and loss. Its negative aspect is that relations of domination and oppression continue to exist, especially of the father over the rest of the family, but also generally of males over females. In relation to the capitalist society beyond the family, the unpaid domestic labour of women is above all an irrational feature of family life, because it operates outside the rules of the market, where work is exchanged for money.

The separation of work and home has therefore led to an undermining of patriarchal power, because it was through control over the primary means of economic production—land—that fathers exercised their power. The spread of wage labour meant increased ability for younger family members to achieve economic independence, and the Frankfurt School theorists saw this as the beginning of the end for patriarchy, which would increasingly be 'presented with the reckoning . . . for the economic injustice in the exploitation of domestic labour within a society which in all other respects obeyed the laws of the market' (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research 1973, p. 137).

All the various crises in the family—the changing relations between men and women, increasing divorce, the focus on children's rights—are in fact permanent crises because they can be traced back to this fundamental opposition, in which the market is destined to be the winner. Marriage, they argued, will shrink into 'a relationship of exchange serving purely practical ends', women as a group 'exploit' their monopoly over child-bearing 'to gain a certain security . . . [in] the institution of divorce', and individuals 'become interchangeable here too as they do in business life, where one leaves a position as soon as a better one offers itself' (Frankfurt Institute for Social Research 1973, p. 139).

Eli Zaretsky—personal life and capitalism

Eli Zaretsky (1976) also analysed more recent developments in the family from a Marxist perspective. He argued that the family in modern capitalist society creates the illusion that the 'private life' of the family is quite separate from the economy. Before the early 19th century the family was the basic unit of production. For example, in the early capitalist textile industry, production of cloth took place in the home and involved all family members. Only with the development of factory-based production were work and family life separated.

In a society in which work was alienating, Zaretsky claimed the family was put on a pedestal because it 'became the major institution in society given over to the personal needs of its members' (p. 80). The private life of the family provided opportunities for satisfactions which were unavailable outside the walls of the home. Zaretsky welcomed the increased possibilities for a personal life for the proletariat that had been offered by the reduction in working hours since the 19th century. However, he believed that the family was

unable to provide for the psychological and personal needs of individuals. He said: 'It simply cannot meet the pressures of being the only refuge in a brutal society' (p. 141). The family artificially separates and isolates personal life from other aspects of life. It might cushion the effects of capitalism but it perpetuates the system and cannot compensate for the general alienation produced by such a society.

Furthermore, Zaretsky saw the family as a major prop to the capitalist economy. The capitalist system is based on the domestic labour of housewives who reproduce future generations of workers. He also believed the family had become a vital unit of consumption. The family consumed the products of capitalism and this allowed the bourgeoisie to continue producing surplus value. To Zaretsky, only socialism would end the artificial separation of family private life and public life, and produce the possibility of personal fulfilment.

Marxism/Feminism

Marxist writers on the family generally acknowledge that the subordinate position of women within family life is an important aspect of what they see as its harmful effects. However, the emphasis is on the relationship between the family and capitalism, and its effects on women tend to be seen as derived from the more primary economic inequality between capitalists and wage labourers. A number of feminist critics of the family have used Marxist concepts to explain and analyse the way in which they believe the family leads to the specific exploitation of women. For such writers it is the relationship between women and men within the family that requires specific attention, either as a system of oppression and exploitation in itself, or as a major prop to the capitalist system. This section discusses feminist critics of the family who retain a use of Marxist concepts. Radical and liberal feminists who have rejected Marxism as an adequate basis for understanding women's social position will be examined in Chapter 9.

The production of labour power and ideological conditioning

Margaret Benston (1972) stated:

> The amount of unpaid labor performed by women is very large and very profitable to those who own the means of production. To pay women for their work, even at minimum wage scales, would involve a massive redistribution of wealth. At present, the support of the family is a hidden tax on the wage earner—his wage buys the labor power of two people. (p. 127)

To give an Australian example, Duncan Ironmonger has estimated that the inclusion of the labour involved in household production in 1975–76 would have boosted Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 48 per cent, and that 'Australian households demanded and supplied more labour for their own purposes in production within the household than they supplied to the whole of the rest of the economy' (Ironmonger 1989, p. 8).

The fact that the husband must pay for the production and upkeep of future labour acts as a strong discipline on his behaviour at work. He cannot easily withdraw his labour with a wife and children to support. These responsibilities weaken his bargaining power and commit him to wage labour. Echoing the Frankfurt School's arguments, Benston suggested that, in economic terms:

> The nuclear family is a valuable stabilizing force in capitalist society. Since the production which is done in the home is paid for by the husband-father's earnings, his ability to withhold his labor from the market is much reduced. (p. 125)

The family not only produces and rears cheap labour, but also maintains it at no cost to the employer. In her role as housewife, the woman attends to her husband's needs, thus keeping him in good running order to perform his role as a wage labourer. Fran Ansley translated Parsons's view that the family functions to stabilise adult personalities into a Marxist framework. She saw the emotional support provided by the wife as a safety-valve for the frustration produced in the husband by working in a capitalist system. Rather than being turned against the system which produced it, this frustration is absorbed by the comforting wife. In this way the system is preserved. In Ansley's words:

> When wives play their traditional role as takers of shit, they often absorb their husbands' legitimate anger and frustration at their own powerlessness and oppression. With every worker provided with a sponge to soak up his possibly revolutionary ire, the bosses rest more secure. (quoted in Bernard 1972, p. 233)

The social reproduction of labour power does not just involve producing children and maintaining them in good health. It also involves the reproduction of the

attitudes essential for an efficient workforce under capitalism. For example, Diane Feeley (1972) argued that the structure of family relationships socialises the young to accept their place in a class-stratified society. She saw the family as an authoritarian unit dominated by the husband in particular and adults in general. Children learn to submit to parental authority and emerge from the family preconditioned to accept their place in the hierarchy of power and control in capitalist society. (See also the Marxist approach to education, Chapter 5, pp. 193–5.)

The domestic labour debate

Women continue to take primary responsibility for work in the home, or **domestic labour**; a later section (pp. 371–6) will discuss the most recent data on domestic labour. The significance of this division of labour and the broader social role of domestic labour have been examined by Marxist and feminist sociologists since the 1970s. Starting from a Marxist analysis of the economy, they discussed whether domestic labour can be seen as directly or indirectly productive, and whether or not it produces surplus value for the ruling class. Those involved in this debate agree that we live in a 'patriarchal capitalist' society: one dominated by men and the owners of the means of production. They are all sympathetic to calls for women's liberation, but disagree about the importance of changing domestic labour in order to achieve this objective.

Capitalism and domestic labour

Susan Himmelweit (1983) pointed out a number of clear differences between wage labour and domestic labour:

- Wage labour is paid and usually takes place over specified periods of time. Domestic labour is unpaid, and the time periods when work or non-work takes place are not clearly separated.
- For the waged worker, work and leisure, production and consumption, are separate, and wages and conditions of work are negotiable. By contrast, domestic labourers work in the home, which is also a centre of leisure and consumption; they cannot directly negotiate wages and conditions and have no contract of employment.
- Paid work, on the surface, appears to be a far more central part of the economic system. Paid workers are often involved in producing commodities which are sold in the market. It is this process which directly creates surplus value for the bourgeoisie, and the commodities produced are counted as part of the Gross National Product. The women (or men) engaged in domestic labour do not appear to have an economic role. They provide services for their spouse and/or children rather than commodities. The work is tied up with emotional bonds between spouses, not with impersonal economic relationships.

Domestic labour and the production of labour power

Despite these apparent differences, Maria Dalla Costa (1972) argued that women domestic labourers are as productive as men who earn wages outside the home. They produce not only use values—goods and services which are useful—but also the surplus value that allows the bourgeoisie to exploit the proletariat. Although she does not produce goods to sell, the housewife produces another type of commodity: **labour power**. The family is a 'social factory'. It produces humans who have the ability to sell their labour power to the employer, and it is labour power that produces value. Selma James (1972) outlined what is necessary before a human can labour:

> First it must be nine months in the womb, must be fed, clothed and trained; then when it works its bed must be made, its floors swept, its lunch box prepared, its sexuality if not gratified then quietened, its dinner ready when it gets home, even if this is eight in the morning from the graveyard shift . . . To describe its production and reproduction is to describe women's work. (p. 65)

In this way, the family creates and maintains labour power and is therefore vital to capitalism.

Capitalism exploits men who work, but the family ensures women are doubly exploited. Dalla Costa claimed that 'the woman is the slave of a wage slave' (p. 88). She argued that the interests of both women and the proletariat can be met by the abolition of capitalism and the family. She saw the family as part of the economic base rather than the superstructure. She believed there is no basic contradiction between Marxism and feminism and advocated the introduction of wages for housework, for at least that would ensure that women were no longer the 'slaves to wage slaves'. This would lead to the redistribution of wealth from the ruling class who would then be required to pay the full costs of producing and reproducing the labour power that they hire. Similar, though not

identical, conclusions were reached by Wally Seccombe (1975).

Domestic labour—a separate mode of production

Some sociologists argue that the current division of labour within the family should not be seen primarily as a response to the requirements of a capitalist economic system. Instead, they argue that it should be understood in terms of the relations between men and women, with men as the main beneficiaries. Christine Delphy (1984) agreed with Dalla Costa that housewives perform an important economic function, not for capitalists, but for their husbands.

To Delphy, housework is quite separate from capitalism; it forms a separate 'mode of production'. The exploitation of the oppressed is the exploitation of women by men. Women are exploited not by selling their labour to an employer who extracts surplus value, but by working only for the subsistence provided by their husbands. The relations of production are not based on a work contract, but on the marriage contract. Through marriage the wife's labour is stolen by her husband. Even if the wife takes paid labour outside the home, she usually continues to perform domestic labour free of charge. Where it proves impossible for the wife to take up paid employment and also carry out the domestic tasks, her wages are often used to pay for services such as child care and laundry. In this case, Delphy argued, the working woman is in effect paid nothing. She simply pays for her own subsistence and the family services she used to perform herself.

Delphy concluded that women's oppression cannot be tackled in alliance with the proletariat, for it is part of the proletariat, their husbands, who are exploiting them. She believed that women should organise independently to overthrow patriarchy. They should challenge the existing family relationships which produce their exploitation by men.

The 'antisocial' family

Feminist analyses of family life have not been immune from the tendency to overlook the great variety of family forms across cultures, classes and over time. However, there is an important strand in feminist thought on family life which takes greater account of variations in family life. Juliet Mitchell (1966), for example, argued that the family should not be understood as a unified entity, but in terms of the separate structures from which it is composed and which can be combined in various patterns in differing cultures or at different points in history. The underlying structures that she saw as manifesting themselves in a condensed fashion in particular forms of 'the family' are those of production, reproduction, sexuality, and the socialisation of children. Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh (1982) went on to argue that the very idea of 'the family' is misleading, given the wide variations that exist in life within families and the varieties of household types in which people live. (For a discussion of family and household diversity, see pp. 352–71.) If there is no one normal or typical family type, then it may be impossible to claim that the family always performs particular functions either for men or for capitalism.

Barrett and McIntosh believed there is a very strong ideology supporting a particular form of family life. To them 'the family' is 'antisocial' not just because it exploits women and benefits capitalists, but also because the ideology of the family destroys life outside the family. They said, 'The family ideal makes everything else seem pale and unsatisfactory' (p. 77). People outside families suffer as a consequence. Family members are so wrapped up in family life that they neglect social contact with others. 'Couples mix with other couples, finding it difficult to fit single people in' (p. 77).

Life in other institutions (such as children's homes, old people's homes and students' residences) comes to be seen as shallow and lacking in meaning. They argued that homes for the handicapped could be far more stimulating for, say, Down's syndrome sufferers, if it were not that life in institutions is devalued by the ideology of the family.

Like other critics of the nuclear family, they pointed out that the image of the family as involving love and mutual care tends to ignore the amount of violent and sexual crimes that take place within a family context. They noted that 25 per cent of reported violent crimes consist of assaults by husbands on their wives, and many rapes take place within marriage.

They do not deny that there can be caring relationships within families, but equally they do not think that families are the only places in which such relationships can develop. They said the ideology that idealises family life:

> has made the outside world cold and friendless, and made it harder to maintain relationships of security and trust except

> with kin. Caring, sharing and loving would all be more widespread if the family did not claim them for its own. (Barrett & McIntosh 1982, p. 80)

Weber's theory of the family

Max Weber is not usually known as a family sociologist, and there has never been a 'Weberian' approach to the family. However, he dealt with a number of important issues concerning family life which anticipated many later debates and are still to be improved upon. Perhaps the most important contribution that Weber (1978) made was his general conceptualisation of family life. Rather than treating 'the family' as a pre-existing entity which acts upon or is acted upon by surrounding social structures, Weber saw family structure itself as the product of prevailing social, economic and political conditions. He opposed Engels's evolutionary approach, preferring to identify the particular constellations of social circumstances which produced different types of family structure throughout history and in different cultures. Instead of being concerned about the relative size of 'the family' and whether it was extended or nuclear, Weber focused on the changing size and political position of the household and the kin group in relation to wider political structures such as the state. His analysis also established the centrality of family life to the development of other social institutions such as the state and the economy.

Structure of family life

Weber analysed family life in terms of two main structures: the *household* and the *kin group*, and saw what others term 'the family' as produced by interaction of these two structures. The household is the group sharing a roof and meals, but it need not coincide with 'the family'. Husbands and wives, for example, may eat and sleep in separate households, and households often contain members with no kinship relationship. The kin group is the larger network of those related by 'blood', either biological or fictitious (e.g. in-laws). Weber argued that, in addition to being an *economic* unit, this wider kin group has often been a *political* unit, serving to organise military protection, revenge and expansion. This control over the means of violence often gave the kin group a clear advantage over the household. In situations where military activity became the province of specialised elite groups of warriors, and eventually the state, this wresting of control over violence and military activity from kin groups had the effect of strengthening the household.

Neither the household nor the kin group arose prior to the other, and, unlike most family sociologists, Weber argued that there was a *power relation* between them. Rather than seeing the household or nuclear family as benignly nestled within a wider, more diffuse network of extended kin, Weber argued that the household and the kin group were different, often opposing, forms of organising marriage, sexuality and inheritance. The conflict between household and the wider kin group would then also interact in varying ways with surrounding economic and political structures, which may provide more or less support for the household head, kin group leaders or individuals within households. For Weber, an important aspect of this power relation was that the kinship group protected the interests of individuals within households in conflict with the interests of the household patriarch. Exactly how this operated depended on the given economic and political conditions.

Sex and marriage

For Weber marriage was essentially a way of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate sexual unions. This distinction reflected on the relationship itself between husband and wife, and on the social position of the children produced from that relationship. Marriage distinguishes between those relationships approved of by the wider kin group, and those requiring revenge or some form of atonement. It also identifies which children will be treated as equal members of the wider community—village, kin group, religious group, ethnic group—and which will not be granted the full benefits of legitimate community identity.

Weber saw marriage as a similar form of management of female sexuality to prostitution, differing in degree rather than in kind. Women's sexuality has often been exchanged by male household heads for other services, and marriage in general is a form of exchange of sexual for economic resources. Weber regarded prostitution itself as possibly the more liberal version of women's sexual exploitation, because the economic exchange is made explicit and put to some extent under the control and management of women themselves.

Historical development of kin group and household

Weber stressed that no one form of family life can be regarded as more 'primitive' than or prior to another. Rather than there being a 'basic' nuclear family with various 'extensions', he argued that households arose with the development of agriculture, and were not present in nomadic hunting societies. The relationship of the household to the kin group was dependent on the particular constellation of political conditions prevailing in the local community, village or region. Because the kin group was the only basis for the organisation of hunting and fighting, its position would rise and fall depending on the role played by those activities. Where a community was heavily dependent on collective hunting or engaged in constant feuding and warfare, the kin group's power would rise in relation to the household. When these functions were either taken over by a more specialised group—trained warriors or the state—or made redundant by the sudden outbreak of peace, this would weaken the kin group's position and correspondingly reinforce that of the patriarchal household and its male head. This was what happened in Western Europe, and less so in Eastern Europe, China and India.

Randall Collins (1986) pointed out that Weber saw two stages in the development of family life in Western Europe:

1 the decline of the kin group relative to the patriarchal household (patrimonial domination); and
2 a reduction in the significance of the patriarchal household in relation to the bureaucratic state and industrial capitalist production. (See also Weber's analysis of bureaucracy in Chapter 7.)

Because the household became the basis of social, economic and political organisation, the wealthier a household was the larger it would be, including apprentices, servants, slaves and soldiers. Weber referred to this type of society as being characterised by **patrimonial domination**. The members of households linked by kinship ties had shrunk to that of the nuclear family, but the size of a household would be as large as its wealth permitted. As Collins summed it up, Weber showed:

> that the dominant households of the societies immediately preceding our own were large precisely because the more remote links of kinship were now forgotten or at least supplemented by relationships that were not based on kinship. (1986, p. 289)

The accelerated development of the state and bureaucracy from about the 16th century onwards gradually broke down the power of patrimonial households. Western European states increasingly separated their own administration from that of the family-centred household, attempting to free bureaucracy from family ties and obligations. With the development of factory production, economic activity also came to be increasingly separated from family life. In addition, the state gradually monopolised the means of violence, making individuals less dependent on their households for security and protection, and this also weakened the authority of patriarchal household heads.

Family life and industrial society

A major theme in sociological studies of family life has been the relationship between family structure and the process of industrialisation. **Industrialisation** refers to the mass production of goods in a factory system that involves some degree of mechanised production technology. A particularly important change in family life was brought about by industrialisation: in pre-industrial societies, production was organised largely around the household, whereas with industrialisation production comes to take place far more outside the home or farm, resulting in what is often referred to as 'the separation of home and work'. This, in turn, is often seen as radically altering the relationships between the sexes—patriarchal power is greater in a household-based production system.

Several points need to be borne in mind when examining the relationship between family life and industrialisation:

- The process of industrialisation does not follow the same course in every society.
- Industrialisation is not a static event but a developing process. The industrial system in 19th-century Western Europe, for example, was different in important respects from that of today.
- All families go through their own 'cycle' as a result of children being born, growing up, leaving home, getting married, having children of their own, and

parents ageing and dying. At the time of being studied, therefore, a family's composition and dynamics will depend on the stage reached in its familial cycle.
- There was a great variety of forms of pre-industrial family, not just one.

Much of the sociological writing on family life and industrialisation, especially that which appeared before the 1970s, when historians began to develop an interest in the family, has been both theoretically and empirically weak, because it was based more on rather romantic preconceptions about pre-industrial families than on historical evidence. In addition, there are variations in family structure within industrial society. As a starting point, it is necessary to examine family life in pre-industrial societies in order to establish a standard for comparison.

Family life in pre-industrial societies

In most pre-industrial societies, the family and kinship relationships are the basic organising principles of social life. Societies are often divided into a number of kinship groups such as lineages, which are groups descended from a common ancestor. Kinship groups are responsible for the production of important goods and services. For example, a lineage may own agricultural land which is worked, and its produce shared, by members of the lineage.

Members of kinship groups are united by a network of mutual rights and obligations. In some cases, if an individual is insulted or injured by someone from outside the group, he/she has the right to call on the support of members of the group to seek reparation or revenge. Many areas of an individual's behaviour are shaped by his/her status as kin. For example, an uncle may have binding obligations to be involved with aspects of his nephew's socialisation, and be responsible for the welfare of his nieces and nephews should their father die.

Something of the importance of family and kinship relationships in many pre-industrial societies is illustrated by the following statement by a Pomo Indian of northern California:

> What is a man? A man is nothing. Without his family he is of less importance than that bug crossing the trail. In the white ways of doing things the family is not so important. The police and soldiers take care of protecting you, the courts give you justice, the post office carries messages for you, the school teaches you. Everything is taken care of, even your children, if you die; but with us the family must do all of that. (from 'A Pomo's soliloquy', Aginsky 1968)

There is, of course, a wide variety of ways in which kinship is organised in pre-industrial societies, both past and present. What they all have in common, however, and what distinguishes them from industrial societies, is that kinship and family ties are the principal basis of social organisation. In industrial societies, the role of kinship is more narrowly defined, and operates alongside other social institutions that make competing claims to authority and loyalty.

Frédéric Le Play and the 'extended' family

The French social scientist, social reformer and engineer Frédéric Le Play (1806–82) was among the first to argue that pre-industrial family structure was originally 'extended' and that nuclear families were a 'modern' creation. He argued that there had been three types of family structure:

1 The **patriarchal family**. All the sons in a family remain under the authority of the father, living and working either under the same roof or in the close vicinity. Property remains undivided and under the direction of the father until duly inherited by a single heir. All members of the family work cooperatively to maintain and improve the condition of the family as a whole. The family extended over three generations, including all members of each generation. This structure was typical of peasant families in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and Asia.
2 The **unstable** or **nuclear family**. The children all establish themselves independently of their parents and beyond their authority. Individuals work for their own benefit with no expectation to support family members beyond the nuclear family. The family extended over two generations: parents and their immature children. This structure was developing among urban manufacturing workers and among the wealthy.
3 The intermediate type, the **stem family** (*famille souche*). Only one son inherited the family property and co-resided with his parents after marriage. Celibate sons may also co-reside, but on marriage the other sons establish independent households, often with the support of the parents in the form of dowries or other assistance. This structure was said to be typical of Western and Northern European peasants.

For Le Play, the stem family structure was the ideal, because it 'harmonizes two equally imperative needs—the respect for tradition and the yearning for the new' (in Zimmerman & Frampton 1966, p. 16). It would typically include three generations: the older parents, their son and heir, his wife and any unmarried siblings, and the son's children, as well as servants and lodgers. By excluding all but one son from inheritance, it encouraged the settlement and cultivation of new land and 'territories that formerly remained subject to abandonment and barbarism' (in Zimmerman & Frampton 1966, p. 19)—that is, Australia, North and South America, and Africa.

The patriarchal family gave too much power to the father and stifled young people's initiative, while the nuclear family left young people too free of parental influence, and too much at the mercy of the market forces of industrial society. In the nuclear family, individuals could rise very rapidly, if they were capable, but if they were not, or were unlucky, they had no family to call on and would sink rapidly into poverty. Le Play saw the legislation allowing the division of inheritance as largely responsible for the proliferation of nuclear families, because it made it possible for young people's desire for novelty and independence to disperse carefully accumulated family properties.

Peter Laslett—household and family in past time

A number of historians have argued that Le Play's extended stem family was not typical of pre-industrial Western Europe and North America. Peter Laslett (1972) found that, between 1564 and 1821, only about 10 per cent of households contained kin beyond the nuclear family. This percentage is the same as for England in 1966. Evidence from America presents a similar picture (Hareven 1987). This low figure is due to a number of features of family life in pre-industrial Western Europe and North America: people married relatively late in life, partly in order to respond to the expectation that when married they would set up a household separate from that of their parents; and life expectancy was short. On average, there were only a few years between the marriage of a couple and the death of their parents. Contrary to the view that the **extended family** was widespread in pre-industrial England, Laslett stated: 'There is no sign of the large, extended co-residential family group of the traditional peasant world giving way to the small, nuclear conjugal household of modern industrial society' (p. 126). He therefore formulated what he called the 'null hypothesis in the history of the family'—that one should assume that family organisation was nuclear until there is evidence to the contrary.

In his examination of the historical data, Laslett also argued for more precise definitions of different types of household structure, distinguishing between:

- solitaries—individuals living on their own, single or widowed;
- no family—co-resident siblings or other relatives, persons not related;
- simple family—married couples with or without children, widows and widowers with children;
- extended family—simple families with kin other than children; and
- complex (or multiple) family—two or more conjugal units connected by kinship or marriage (also called joint family).

The 'Western family'

Laslett (1983; 1984) also drew together the results of research into pre-industrial household size in other countries. He reached the conclusion that the nuclear family household was not just typical of Britain. He uncovered evidence that there was a distinctive 'Western family' found also in Northern France, The Netherlands, Belgium, Scandinavia and parts of Italy and Germany. This type of family was typically nuclear in structure: children were born relatively late, there was little age gap between spouses, and when couples married they usually formed separate households. This family type contrasted with Eastern Europe and other parts of the world (e.g. Russia and Japan) where the extended family was more common. Laslett and his colleagues refined their approach by distinguishing four sets of areas in pre-industrial Europe:

1 West and Northwest—high proportion of simple family households, very low proportion of complex family households;
2 West-Central—high simple, low complex;
3 Mediterranean—low simple, high complex; and
4 Eastern—low simple, very high complex.

An important contrast with contemporary nuclear families, however, was that a large number of pre-industrial families contained servants, as well as boarders and lodgers. 'Servants' in pre-industrial Europe were something very different from what we

currently understand the word to mean—they were also, often primarily, workers in the household's system of production. It was considered an appropriate form of preparation for adult life to send children into service or apprenticeship in other people's households, making it, as John Hajnal (1982) argued, 'a stage for young people between leaving home and marriage, that is, a stage in the life-cycle' (p. 471). They would appear in households either as 'servants', living and working within the household, or as boarders, working outside the household.

Rather than Le Play's image of a static stem family with all its members staying in one place, there was in fact a constant circulation of young people between households from roughly the age of seven onwards, establishing them as independent workers and preparing them for the establishment of their own household, separate from their parents.

According to Laslett, it was possible that the predominance of the nuclear family was a factor that helped Western Europe to be the first area of the world to industrialise. He followed Hajnal in reversing the more common argument that industrialisation led to the nuclear family, arguing instead that the nuclear family had social, economic and political consequences which contributed to the process of industrialisation.

Brigitte Berger and Peter Berger (1983) provided additional suggestions as to how this type of family encouraged industrialisation. They believed the nuclear family helped to produce 'modernity': it led to ways of thinking that were conducive to industrial development. In particular, nuclear families encouraged individuals to develop a greater sense of self-reliance and independence—qualities often thought to be among those required by early entrepreneurs.

Jack Goody—the Christian Church and the European family

The extent to which Western European family life has been focused around relatively small domestic groups has been best indicated by Jack Goody (1983). He argued that the most formative period in the history of the European family was that of the Christian Church's dominance of social and cultural life between the 4th and 16th centuries. This is not to say that the Industrial Revolution had no impact at all, but that most of the definitive features of the 'Western' family were either in place during the Roman Empire, or were the product of the Church's impact on family life. So significant was this impact that John Goldthorpe (1987) referred to it as the 'Christian Revolution' in family life.

The Church, property and kinship

Many of the characteristics of contemporary Western family life appear to have very early, pre-Christian origins. Lorraine Lancaster (1958), for example, showed that Anglo-Saxon society between the 7th and 11th centuries calculated kinship bilaterally (through both male and female lineages), and that the nuclear family was a feature of Anglo-Saxon society. She argued that the absence of terms for kin beyond the nuclear family suggests that these kin did not play a major role in society.

However, after Christianity turned from a sect into a Church and became the official state religion of the Roman Empire and, later, of all Europe, the Church set about changing a number of common practices in European family life—marriage between close kin, remarriage with affinal kin (those of their former spouse), remarriage after divorce, concubinage (the practice of men taking a 'childbearing wife', often in addition to a childless first wife), adoption and fostering.

The Church also insisted that marriage should depend on the consent of the two partners, rather than on arrangements between their parents or other older kin. In addition, Goody mentioned the Church's influence on the way property was inherited. Land had been held in 'folkland', normally transmitted to the kin of the deceased, but the Church brought about the introduction of 'bookland', with land tenure held under a written title deed and disposed of through the use of wills, usually written by those rare people who could read and write, the clergy.

The significance of all these changes, argued Goody, was that they all weakened kinship ties beyond the immediate nuclear family and had the effect of vastly increasing the property that came into the Church's hands. All the practices it prohibited were what Goody called 'strategies of heirship', ways of ensuring that accumulated property and wealth stayed within the kinship network in the face of the usual barriers to the transmittal of inheritance from one generation to the next—childlessness, absence of male heirs, death of one parent and separation of parents. The arithmetic of the Church's strategy was simple: Goody calculated that roughly 20 per cent of any given

population will remain childless; another 20 per cent will have only girls. If one then prohibits the usual ways of providing 'fictional' heirs—children from a new marriage, a marriage to a widow's brother-in-law or a concubine, and a fostered or adopted child—then roughly 40 per cent of the population will be left with no male heirs. Women were generally more inclined to support the Church; often they left their inheritance to the Church on their death or took it with them when they entered the Church as nuns.

At the same time, the Church pursued a highly effective ideological strategy of promoting the provision of bequests to the Church as a means of saving one's soul; keeping accumulated familial wealth within the family was condemned as evading the wishes of God and encouraging the sin of 'avarice' among one's own family. From the early days of Christianity as a sect, the family had been regarded as a competitor for loyalty and devotion, and throughout the Middle Ages devotion of one's life (and property) to God was regarded as a higher moral state than the grubbier worldly condition of sex, marriage and procreation.

The change in the transmission of property from 'folkland' to 'bookland' served to overcome the resistance from the deceased's family and their appeal to the tradition that property should stay in the family and, together with the Church's monopoly over literacy, vastly improved its ability to get across its message about the moral virtue of adding to the Church's rather than one's family's wealth.

Marriage and parental control

In addition, the insistence that marriage be based on the mutual consent of the bride and groom weakened the control of parents over familial wealth and inheritance, and possibly resulted in some children being disinherited. This further increased the Church's acquisitions. The Church's doctrine of consensual marriage was, argued David Herlihy (1985), 'a damaging blow to paternal authority within the medieval household, and by itself assured that the medieval family could never develop into a true patriarchy' (p. 81). This does not mean that fathers lost control over their children's marriage patterns altogether; on the contrary, their command over familial resources meant that they continued to exert considerable effective influence. But the Church's marriage doctrine did mean that they could neither force a daughter or son into a marriage nor prevent one.

The Church as landowner

The Church had, in the meantime, become an institution—an organisation with members and staff to be fed, housed and supported, monasteries, convents and churches to be built and maintained, and welfare services to be financed. All this required worldly as well as spiritual wealth, and Goody saw this institutional need as lying behind the Church's interventions into family affairs. Whether or not this was the intention motivating the Church's policies on marriage and the family, certainly, wrote Goody:

> one of the most profound changes that accompanied the introduction of Christianity was the enormous shift of property from private ownership to the hands of the Church, which rapidly became the largest landowner in England (as in most other European countries), a position it has retained to this day. (1983, pp. 45–6)

In France the rapid build-up of Church wealth took place between the 4th and 6th centuries, so that by the 7th century one-third of the productive land in France was in ecclesiastical hands; in England the same process took place between 600 and 1100. Most of the key features of the 'Western' family—the relative independence of the married couple from their parents and older kin, greater equality (relatively) between the sexes within marriage, a focus on the immediate nuclear family with no real authority exercised by the extended family—are thus seen by Goody as:

> intrinsic to the whole process whereby the Church established its position as a power in the land, a spiritual power certainly, but also a worldly one, the owner of property, the largest landowner, a position it obtained by gaining control of the system of marriage, gifts and inheritance. (1983, p. 154)

The reduction in the influence of wider kinship networks and patriarchal authority, or the transition, in Le Play's terms, from a 'patriarchal' to an 'unstable nuclear' family had thus taken place much earlier than Le Play suggested, during the entire course of Christianity's influence on European society throughout the Middle Ages.

Australian colonial family life

The broad outlines of the development of family life among European settlers in Australia are similar to those of the European history, but with a few important differences, especially in the convict and colonial periods.

First, in the early years of the 19th century men greatly outnumbered women, and Australian popular culture was correspondingly male-dominated. It gained an element of hostility to family life and domesticity which has persisted well into the 20th century.

Second, the settlers who came to Australia were removed from their normal networks of extended kin, although they would often do their best to encourage other members of their family to join them later. As Patricia Grimshaw and Graham Willett summarised it, the usual pattern was that 'a single individual or a small family of parents and one or two young children would face colonial life in isolation for a period of years, and if they found the environment a hopeful one, would encourage other family members or groups to join them' (1981, pp. 137–8). They concluded that if one defines the 'modern' family as restricted to a narrow range of kin, 'the Australian family was "born modern" in that respect' (p. 146). Some did develop relatively dense extended family networks quite quickly, but those who did not turned for social support to those they might have known from home, those they shared the voyage with or neighbours.

A third, related feature of Australian family life, said Grimshaw and Willett, was the strength of emotional and instrumental ties within the nuclear family. The lack of an extended family network made members of the nuclear family more dependent on each other than they might have been in Europe, as well as more independent and self-sufficient as a unit. For most of the colonial period, said Grimshaw and Willett, 'the dominant family patterns closely resembled the traditional family of pre-industrial Europe, if analysed in terms of instrumental bonds . . . Nearly all women were involved in production for exchange, in production for domestic use, as well as in their roles in reproduction and child-socialization' (pp. 146–7). Children were also expected to work and contribute to the family economy, and this increased the importance of women's reproductive role, 'because of the vital unpaid labour the children could provide' (p. 148). Grimshaw and Willett also argued that the shortage of women and the importance of their work for their family's economic survival had the effect of enhancing their social status in comparison with their counterparts in Europe.

Fourth, Grimshaw and Willett suggested that this economic significance of women's work, combined with the relative independence from extended kin, 'had nurtured both a relatively democratic and affectionate family unit' (p. 153). Since children did not depend on their parents and family for the provision of land, they did not have to seek their approval for marriage and were generally more independent. The shortage of marriageable women, argued Grimshaw and Willett, also made young women less dependent on their family of origin. The overall consequence was a weakened patriarchal control and a more egalitarian style of family relationships.

By the end of the 19th century, family life among white Australians was becoming more clearly organised around the model of men as breadwinners, women as homemakers, and children as non-working dependants engaged in full-time schooling. The home became less a place of economically productive activity and more one of consumption, and the two spheres became more clearly separated, with the public world of work defined as a male sphere, and the home defined as the realm of women and young children. This became the family ideal among the working class as well as the middle class; as Grimshaw and Willett put it:

> In Australia, with its strong trade union movement and its fight for reasonable wages, working-class families also adopted this demarcation of roles, probably more widely than was possible in the more impoverished European proletariat of the time. (1981, pp. 149–50)

A central focus of labour movement activity was the attainment of a **family wage**—a wage sufficient for a man to support a wife and children—which in turn rested on the assumption that women would play only a marginal role in the workforce. (See also the discussion of women's workforce participation, pp. 350–2.)

Michael Young and Peter Willmott—*The Symmetrical Family*

Michael Young and Peter Willmott's (1973) studies of family life in London have often been used to counter Parsons's notion of the **isolated nuclear family**. Using a combination of historical research and social surveys—large-scale surveys based on random samples within a particular area—they suggested that family life has developed through four main stages. This section will concentrate on their analysis of the working-class family.

In Stage 1, prior to the Industrial Revolution, the family is a unit of production with the husband, wife and unmarried children working as a team, typically

in agriculture or textiles. Although generally supplanted by industrialisation, this form of family life continued well into the 19th century and is still represented in a small minority of families today.

The Stage 2 family began with the Industrial Revolution, developed throughout the 19th century and reached its peak in the early years of the 20th century. The household ceased to be a unit of production because individual members were employed as wage-earners. Young and Willmott argued that the family responded to low wages and high unemployment by extending its network to include relatives beyond the nuclear family. This provided an insurance policy against the insecurity and hardship of poverty.

The extension of the nuclear family was largely conducted by women who 'eventually built up an organization in their own defence and in the defence of their children' (p. 91). The conjugal bond (the husband–wife relationship) was relatively weak compared with the basic tie between mothers and their married daughters. Women created an 'informal trade union' which largely excluded men. The Stage 2 family was often headed by a female, resulting more from the high male death rate than from desertion.

Children usually remained in the same locality on marriage, and two out of three married people had parents living within two or three miles of their residence. There were close ties between female relatives, involving a constant exchange of services such as washing, shopping and babysitting. In many families, the households of mother and married daughter were 'to some extent merged' (1975, p. 31). As such, they can be termed 'extended families', defined by Young and Willmott as 'a combination of families who to some degree form one domestic unit' (p. 32).

In the course of the 20th century, the Stage 2 family gradually disappeared. It was replaced, particularly among the working class, by the Stage 3 family, the **symmetrical family**, which is characterised by 'the separation of the immediate, or nuclear family from the extended family' (p. 91).

The symmetrical family is largely home-centred, particularly when the children are young. Free time is spent doing chores and odd jobs around the house and leisure is mainly 'home-based' (e.g. watching television). The conjugal bond is strong and relationships between husband and wife are increasingly 'companionate'. In the home 'they shared their work; they shared their time' (1973, p. 94).

Young and Willmott used the term 'symmetry' because although conjugal roles are not identical—wives still have the main responsibility for raising the children (with some help from husbands)—they are similar in terms of the contribution made by each spouse to the running of the household. They share many of the chores, they share decisions and they work together, even though there is still a division between men's work and women's work.

Young and Willmott argued that the symmetrical family developed because of a reduction in the need for kinship-based mutual aid groups. Factors causing this reduction include an increase in the real wages of the male breadwinner, a decrease in unemployment and the male mortality rate, and increased employment opportunities for women. Various provisions of the welfare state, such as family allowances, sickness and unemployment benefits and old age pensions, have reduced the need for dependence on the kinship network. Increasing geographical mobility has also tended to sever kinship ties.

The general decline in fertility, combined with greater life expectancy, has provided greater opportunities for married women to work. This is said to have led to greater symmetry within the family, since both spouses are more likely to be wage-earners and to share financial responsibility for the household. Reduction in the number of children per family also reduced the financial burden on parents.

As living standards rose, husbands were drawn more closely into their family circle because the home had become a more attractive place. Better housing, less overcrowding, the provision of gas, electricity and improved plumbing facilities, fitted carpets and three-piece suites, household technology such as vacuum cleaners and washing machines, all produced a more comfortable environment. Home entertainment in the form of radio, television and record players provided further attractions for the former 'absentee husband'.

Young and Willmott found that the home-centred symmetrical family was more typical of the working class than the middle class. They argued that members of the working class are 'more fully home-centred because they are less fully work-centred' (1973, p. 173). Partly as compensation for boring and uninvolving work, and partly because relatively little interest and energy are expended at work, manual workers tend to focus their attention on family life. Young and Willmott argued that:

> The home-centred sort of Stage 3 family was predominant in 1970 because the great majority of people (in the sample) were manual workers or in equally routine non-manual jobs. They had no alternative object of allegiance as compelling. If that changes and the majority of people no longer have such emotionally and intellectually unrewarding work, the predominant kind of family will change also. (1973, p. 272)

(For a critique of the concept of the symmetrical family in relation to Australian family life, see pp. 371–6)

The 'extended family' in industrial society

Graham Allan (1985) proposed that kin outside the nuclear family continue to be important in industrial society. His research indicated that, although in normal circumstances non-nuclear kin do not rely on each other, most family members do feel an obligation to keep in touch. For example, very few married children break off relationships with their parents altogether, and brothers and sisters usually maintain contact. Although significant services are not usually exchanged as a matter of course, kin frequently recognise an obligation to help each other in times of difficulty or crisis.

Unlike Litwak, Allan believed that these kinds of relationships are confined to an inner or 'elementary' family consisting of wives and husbands, their parents, children, brothers and sisters. The obligations do not extend to uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins or more distant kin. Allan therefore preferred the term **modified elementary family** to **modified extended family**, since to him it more accurately describes the range of kin who are important to an individual.

The 'dispersed extended family'

Willmott (1988) reached broadly similar conclusions to Allan, claiming that the **dispersed extended family** is becoming dominant in Britain. It consists of two or more related families who cooperate with each other even though they live some distance apart. Contacts are fairly frequent, taking place on average perhaps once a week, but less frequent than they were among extended families who lived close together. Cars, public transport and telephones make it possible for dispersed extended families to keep in touch. Members of dispersed extended families do not rely on each other on a day-to-day basis.

Willmott saw each nuclear family unit as only partially dependent on extended kin. Much of the time the nuclear family is fairly self-sufficient but in times of emergency the existence of extended kin might prove invaluable. Thus Willmott argued that the extended kinship network was a central part of contemporary family life.

This picture of extended family relations is similar to that emerging from the evidence from Australia and the United States. Studies from a number of cities in the United States show that, for both middle and working classes, the degree of contact and exchange of services with kin beyond the nuclear family is similar to that found by Allan, and Young and Willmott, in Britain. In the 1960s, Jean Martin (1967) found significant networks of mutual support among relatives extending beyond the immediate nuclear family. Bettina Cass suggested that among some migrant groups the extended kin go beyond the provision of financial aid and companionship to operate as a moral community, which:

> is idealised as the pivotal unit in maintaining the subculture, the unit in which the young are inducted into their class, ethnic and religious world view, and particularly into the ideology of sex roles prescribed by their subculture. (Cass 1987, p. 200)

Peter McDonald (1992) has recently summarised the Australian studies as indicating that 'the extended family is the central core of the support networks of most Australians' (p. 8), and that the role of the extended family has probably increased in recent times as government support of families has declined.

Fertility and household size in Australia

Although family life can be regarded as having been 'nuclear', and relatively constant in size, through most of the history of Western Europe, there has been a dramatic change in the size and structure of families and households in all Western societies over the last century. These changes have had, and continue to have, profound and far-reaching social and economic consequences, both for family life itself and the place of the family within the broader society. John Caldwell and Lado Ruzicka argued that fertility decline was probably the major cause of 'the collapse of the domestic society in the modern era' (Caldwell & Ruzicka 1978, p. 95), by which they mean the demise of the conventional nuclear family with a clear division of labour between a male breadwinner and a female houseworker. The consequences of family size are felt in the short term through the immediate

economic and social impact of fewer children, but they also echo down through history as the reproductive choices made by one generation set the demographic, economic and social scene for the actions of the following generation.

The decline in household size

Graeme Snooks (1994) outlined the change in the overall size of Australian households since white settlement in 1788 (Figure 8.1). In the convict period and colonial period up to the 1850s convicts were housed in dormitories, in households and on farms as servants, and the unbalanced gender ratio meant that many males were living in hotels and boarding houses. These conditions led to large households of about ten people, roughly double the average British size. After the gold rushes in the 1850s, Australian household size remained relatively constant at around five persons until World War I. It then declined, first slowly and then more rapidly after the 1930s to around three persons in 1990. Snooks emphasised that this 'was part of the first major change in average household size in Western society in 1000 years', and that 'its importance cannot be exaggerated' (1994, p. 66). As Caldwell put it:

> The study of fertility transition is the study of the transformation of familial production into production through the labour market, of traditional society into modern society. (1982, p. 231)

This change in household size can be attributed not to a move from the extended to the nuclear family, but to a drastic reduction in the number of children borne by Australian women, producing what some observers see as the most significant impact on women's lives this century. In 1891, over 40 per cent of Australian families had six or more children, whereas today the most common size is two or three. This decline is reflected in the total fertility rate, which indicates approximately the total number of children born in any given year.

The fertility rate of Australian women, like their counterparts throughout the Western world, began to decline in the 1870s, recovered again in the post-World War II 'baby boom', declined significantly again in the 1970s, and is showing some signs of modest recovery in the early 1990s (Figure 8.2).

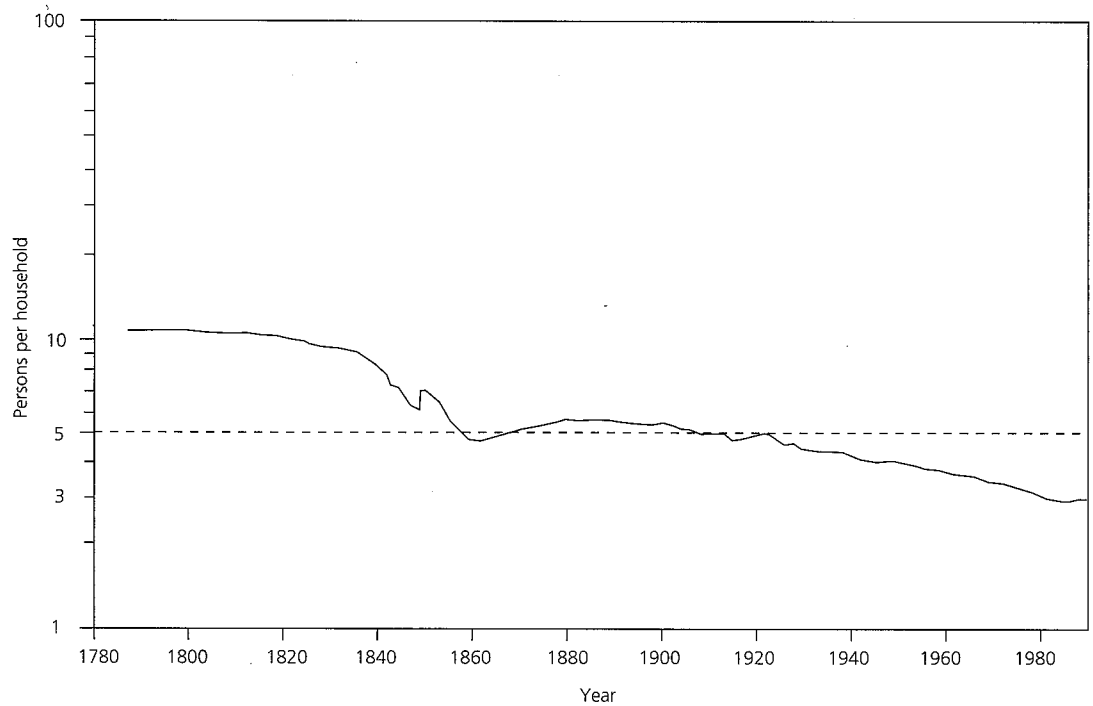


FIGURE 8.1 Household size, Australia 1788–1990

Source: G. D. Snooks 1994, p. 66. © G. D. Snooks. Reproduced by permission of the author

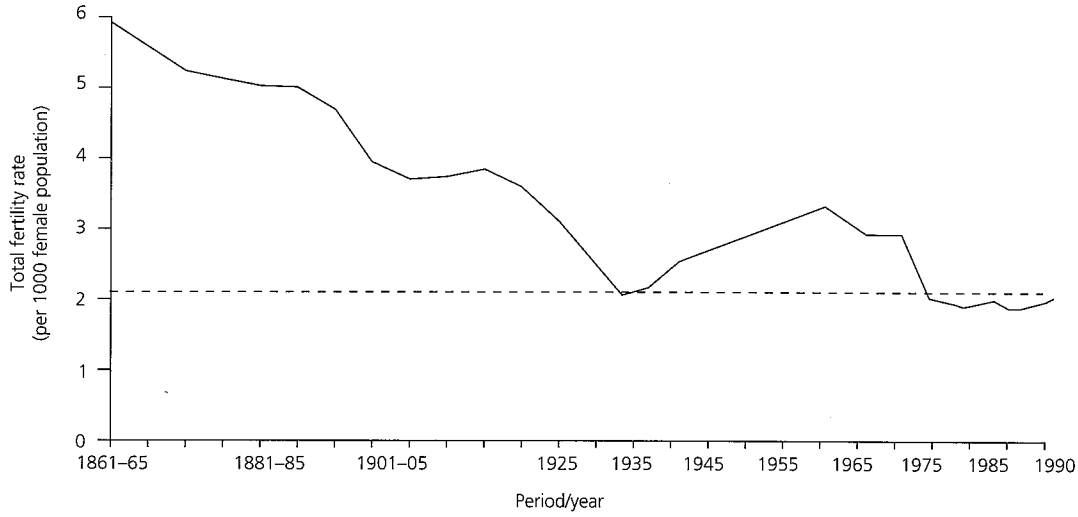


FIGURE 8.2 Australia: total fertility rate 1861–65 to 1990

Source: Hugo 1992, p. 7. Commonwealth of Australia ©. Reproduced by permission

There are three transitions to be explained—the dramatic fertility decline since the 1870s, which has remained the longer term trend, the 'baby boom' following World War II and the strong decline in the 1970s. These are discussed below.

John Caldwell and Lado Ruzicka—from the 'proper time to marry' to the 'proper time to reproduce'

The general framework most commonly used to analyse fertility changes is the model of **demographic transition**, which is summarised in the diagram developed by Graeme Hugo (Figure 8.3).

Caldwell and Ruzicka argued that the economics of child-bearing for most of the 19th century (Stage 2 in the model) were that children were economically beneficial at best, and cheap to raise at worst. Clothes were handmade, food was freely available on farms, a frugal life was regarded as good for children, and 'neither children not parents believed that the former should have parity with the latter in consumption or pleasures or even that such a comparison should be made' (1978, p. 85). Children were expected to work and contribute to the family income as soon as possible. Fertility was generally high within marriage, and although deferring marriage had the effect of reducing fertility, marriage was not deferred for this reason, but because of the costs involved in the establishment of a new household. There was a strong sense of the 'proper time to marry' but, once married, fertility was high, and little relationship was seen between family size and economic welfare.

Caldwell had also suggested that this familial ideology, 'teaching its less powerful members that it was good for them to live austerely and that there should be no resentment of differential treatment and privilege' (1982, p. 212), fitted well with an early capitalist economy which required considerable unskilled labour and little consumption, and where familial, household production still played an important economic role. This all changed, according to Caldwell and Ruzicka, with the dramatic change in parent–child relations brought about by mass compulsory schooling towards the end of the 19th century; and Australian family structure moved to Stage 3.

Schooling and fertility decline

The expansion of the market for wage labour, the changing nature of work requiring workers with greater levels of skill, and the increasing orientation towards consumption turned children into different sorts of creatures and changed fundamentally their relations with their parents. Caldwell and Ruzicka summarised the change with the concept of a reversal of the 'net intergenerational flow of wealth'. Schooling

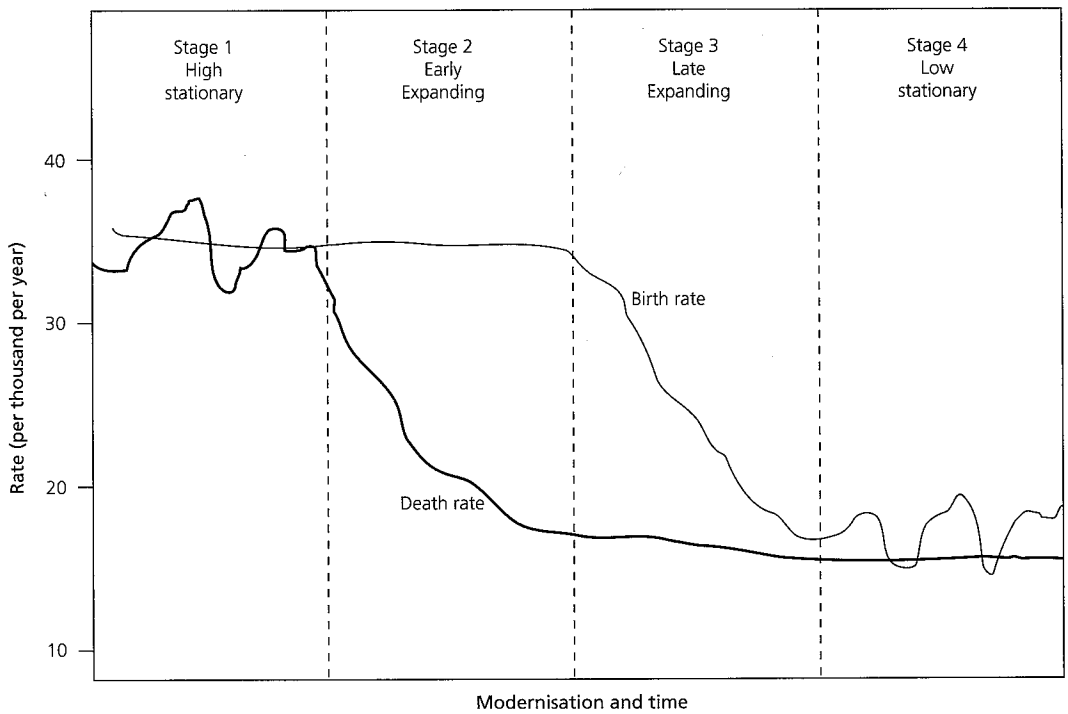


FIGURE 8.3 Traditional form of the demographic transition model

Source: Hugo 1986, p. 43

turned children into investments in the future, rather than resources to be drawn upon in the present. As Philippe Ariès (1980) put it, the 19th-century decline 'was unleashed by an enormous sentimental and financial investment in the child' (p. 649), an investment which required the planning of births and 'introduced foresight and organization where formerly there had been only automatic, unplanned behaviour and resigned surrender to impulses and destiny' (1980, p. 646). A central feature of investment is its uncertain, unbounded nature, so that a strong temptation arises to maximise the investment—one never knows what the return might be. The knowledge provided in schools expanded the range of consumer items a child would be interested in, as well as the pleasure adults would derive from introducing their children to the delights of, say, music, sewing machines or cameras, all of which became increasingly available from the 1880s onwards. Rather than being a source of economic input into the family economy, then, children became an ever-increasing cost, giving rise to an interest in fertility limitation.

The increasing 'cost' of children was not only economic, but also psychological and emotional. The school diminished the control parents had over their children, because of the additional authority figure of the teacher, and because of the network of peers it provided. This required greater effort on the part of parents to maintain their relationships with their children. Schooling and its effects made children more independent of their parents, providing them with greater labour market skills and greater potential income, thus reducing their likely future responsiveness to the priorities, emotional, cultural and economic, of their family of origin. The situation also made them more 'costly', in the sense that it reduced the length of time that a child could be expected to contribute to the family psychological and financial 'economy'.

The role of women

Caldwell also saw the changing role of women as a factor in the decline of fertility. Even in societies characterised by high fertility, women favour it less than

their husbands, not least because of the impact of frequent births on their health. With a gradual increase in standards of living in the course of the 20th century, first among the middle class and then spreading slowly among the working class, one of the first aims pursued by women was spending more time with their own children (Quiggan 1988). In the face of an almost non-existent market for female labour, the nuclear family became a source of women's individuality and their rights against their parents, parents-in-law and husbands. Wives forged 'a powerful weapon for weakening their husbands' bonds with their parents by arguing that the children must come first, that they are their children' (Caldwell 1982, p. 241).

Economic conditions and fertility

Once children are perceived as a cost rather than a resource, some part in a declining birth rate is also played by general economic conditions and the prospects for being able to support greater fertility. Pat Quiggan argued that women had a particular interest in fertility control, being more directly faced, as housekeepers, with the task of feeding and clothing their children, especially problematic if their husbands were unemployed. She pointed out that the role of economic conditions is reflected in the inter-state differences in fertility, which corresponded to the different onsets of depressed economic conditions in New South Wales and Victoria (1988, p. 119).

Baby boom or marriage boom?

The long-term trend towards fertility decline was interrupted dramatically and significantly by the post-World War II 'baby boom' in all Western countries, including Australia. The increase in the crude birth rate has been attributed to two main causes—a marriage boom, and a particular cultural and ideological climate, characterised by a 'youth revolt' against the prudence of the prewar years, and a corresponding optimism about the future of modern society.

Much of the rise in fertility was due to the increase in

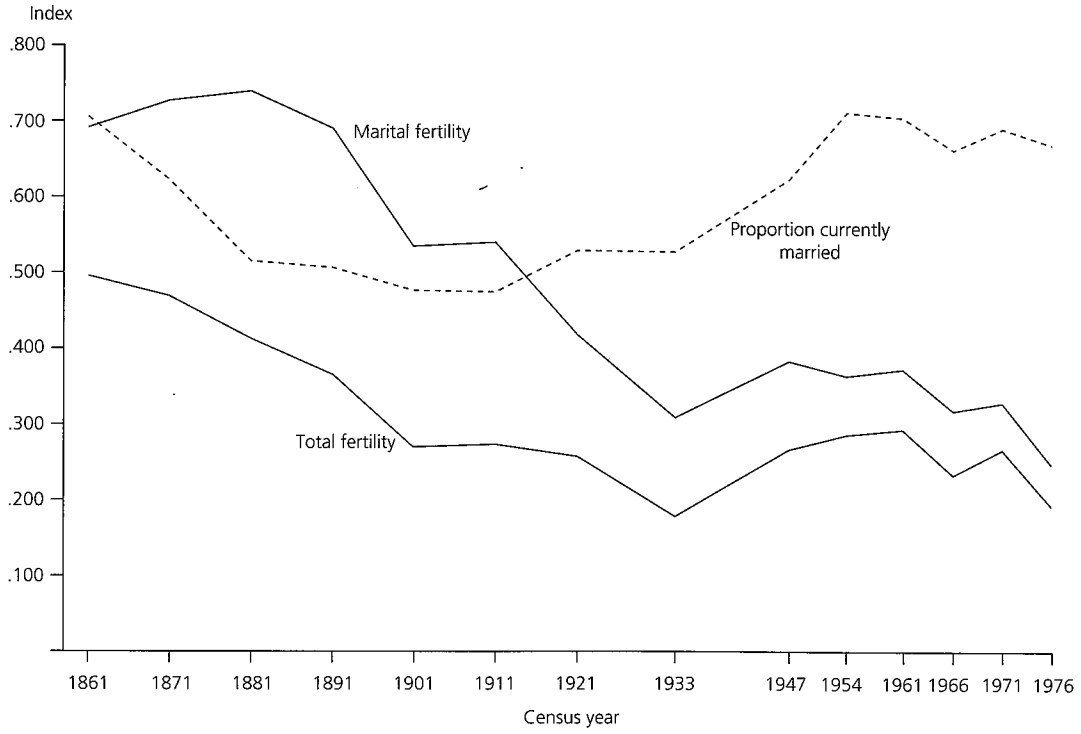


FIGURE 8.4 Indices of total fertility, marital fertility and proportion married 1861–1976

Source: ESCAP 1982, p. 204

marriages and the decline in the age at marriage after 1946. This had the effect of increasing the number of potential child-bearing women and also their potentially reproductive years. Figure 8.4 distinguishes total and marital fertility, and relates them to the proportion of women currently married. It shows that, although total fertility continued to rise between 1947 and 1961, marital fertility was actually stable or decreasing slightly. Together with other features of the period, such as a catch-up of postponed births, and overlapping cohorts of women bearing children at the same time, Caldwell estimated that this accounts for 30–50 per cent of the baby boom. The remainder, argued Caldwell, can be explained by an intergenerational battle, what he calls the 'youth revolt'. He sees the increase in child-bearing as part of a more general assertion of independence from parents and grandparents. Marriage and the establishment of a household was experienced as a manifestation of maturity and autonomy, especially for young women. Also:

> A lesser care about the containment of fertility was necessary, defiantly so, to proclaim the absoluteness of their control over their relations with their spouses and the children who were the products of their union. (1982, p. 250)

The post-1970s fertility decline

The Australian decline in fertility after 1970 was 'one of the world's most dramatic' (Hugo 1992, p. 13)—a drop of 45 per cent in the 20 years between 1961 and 1981 (Figure 8.5). This decline has been the product of social and economic changes which Peter McDonald (1984) explained as follows:

- The depressed economic conditions of the 1970s made couples more cautious about child-bearing.
- Part of those economic conditions and the 1970s fertility decline were, in a sense, a result of the baby boom itself. By the 1970s, the children born in the baby boom era were competing with each other in the workforce and also entering their prime child-bearing years. They formed a generation who 'have, throughout their lives, faced relative deprivation and fierce competition, relative ... to the preceding generations born in the 1930s and early 1940s' (p. 19).

One of the long-term trends is the changing role played by children within overall family economies, particularly in competition with other ways of consuming disposable income. For Snooks, the historical evidence on the relationship between family income and number of children indicated that, when faced with the choice between procreation and increased consumption, families throughout the Western world opted for consumption:

> What has been substituted for family time is a bewildering array of consumer durables, fast foods, domestic service, cars, larger homes, restaurants, entertainment, exotic holidays, travel, holiday houses, hobby farms, motor launches, yachts, four-wheel drive vehicles, together with expensive clothing and a vast range of personal goods. (Snooks 1994, p. 145)

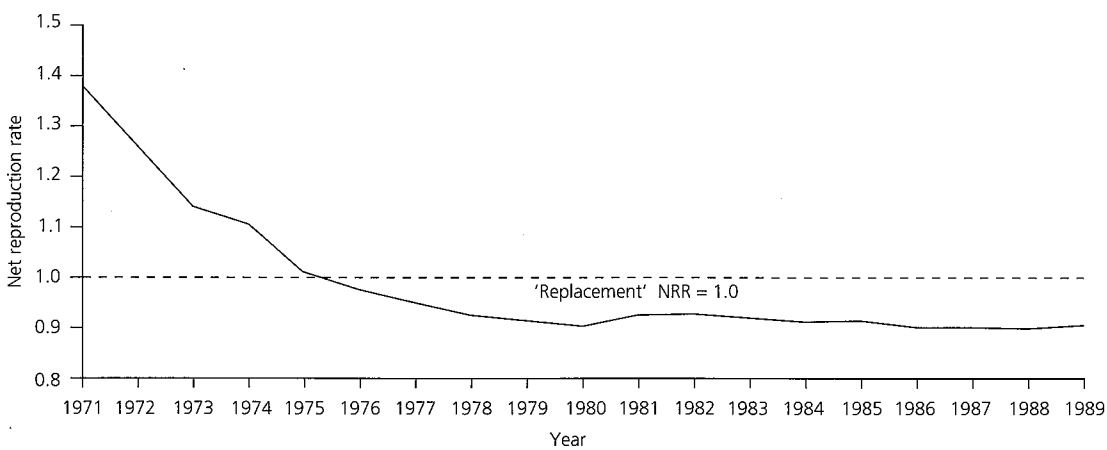


FIGURE 8.5 Australia: net reproduction rate 1971–89

Source: Hugo 1992, p. 13. Commonwealth of Australia ©. Reproduced by permission

This supports Ariès's argument that, while a greater investment in children produced the first decline in the birth rate around the turn of the century, the post-1970s decline was caused by exactly the opposite—a greater investment in alternative forms of consumption. 'The days of the child-king are over. The under-40s generation is leading us into a new epoch, one in which the child occupies a smaller place, to say the least' (1980, p. 649). Not that children have no place at all, but they now have to fit in 'as one of the various components that make it possible for adults to blossom as individuals' (1980, p. 649).

Women's workforce participation

Although the nature of the relationship is not clear, a related change is the dramatic increase in the workforce participation of women, and especially married women, since World War II. Before 1939, the division of labour in both the household and the paid workforce was organised along gender lines:

> with males specializing in the acquisition of market human capital and working full-time in the market sector, and with married females acquiring household skills and working full-time in the household. (Snooks 1994, p. 82)

However, Caldwell and Ruzicka argued that, because the baby boom took place within the framework of the preceding fertility decline, along with various other social changes such as suburbanisation, the spread of the motor car and the development of shopping centres, the basic infrastructure for such an expansion of domesticity and child rearing was disappearing from beneath the nuclear family's feet. Parents, especially mothers, had fewer siblings to call on for support, and the remote nature of the Australian suburbs made parenting an even more isolating task. The changing nature of work and the gradual increase in women's wages after 1946 made entering the workforce a more attractive option for women, one which they took up in increasing numbers. Once they started working outside the home, the process became self-sustaining, because 'it reinforced the isolation of wives who were not working and the downgrading of the domestic virtues' (1978, p. 95).

The employment available to women had changed significantly, with more jobs in offices, shops and light manufacturing. The increasing participation of girls in education after World War II also led to an interest in careers and self-development beyond the family, as well as opening up more work opportunities. Caldwell and Ruzicka pointed out that women's increased entry into the paid workforce preceded by almost ten years the reappearance of a women's movement in the 1970s. They argued that this change produced the women's movement, rather than the other way round. Once the process was in motion, the two phenomena became mutually reinforcing, so that the effects of feminism were to further facilitate and accelerate women's workforce participation.

The change in the proportion of women in the paid workforce since 1950 has been dramatic, more than doubling from 25 per cent in 1945 to 54 per cent in 1999 (Figure 8.6). The projection of the Australian Bureau of Statistics is that over 60 per cent of women will be in the paid workforce by 2005. All the increase can be attributed to married women, who went from 6.5 per cent in 1947 to 54 per cent in 1999, equalling the rate for all women. About 90 per cent of the increase has been in part-time work. The pattern of change becomes clearer when one looks at workforce participation for different age groups at each of the censuses (see Figures 8.7 and 8.8, pp. 352 and 353). Australian women have moved from a pattern of doing paid work between the ages of 15 and 19 and then working full-time in the home, to staying longer at school, entering the workforce, leaving again during their peak child-bearing years, and then returning to the workforce after increasingly brief intervals of full-time domestic labour and childrearing.

One important qualification is that these figures do not capture the distinction between part-time and full-time work; the proportion of women working part-time has increased in the years between 1982 and 1999 from 35 per cent of total female employment to 44 per cent (ABS 1999b). The issue simmering underneath these changes is how the predominance of part-time work among women is to be explained—whether it is a choice they make, enabling them to keep one foot in the domestic sphere; or whether it is a choice forced upon them by husbands who are either openly or furtively reluctant to increase their share of the domestic duties. (For a discussion of these issues, see the section on conjugal roles, pp. 371–6.)

Causes and effects of increased female workforce participation

A variety of explanations has been offered for the increase in female workforce participation, including declining family size, higher average education levels,

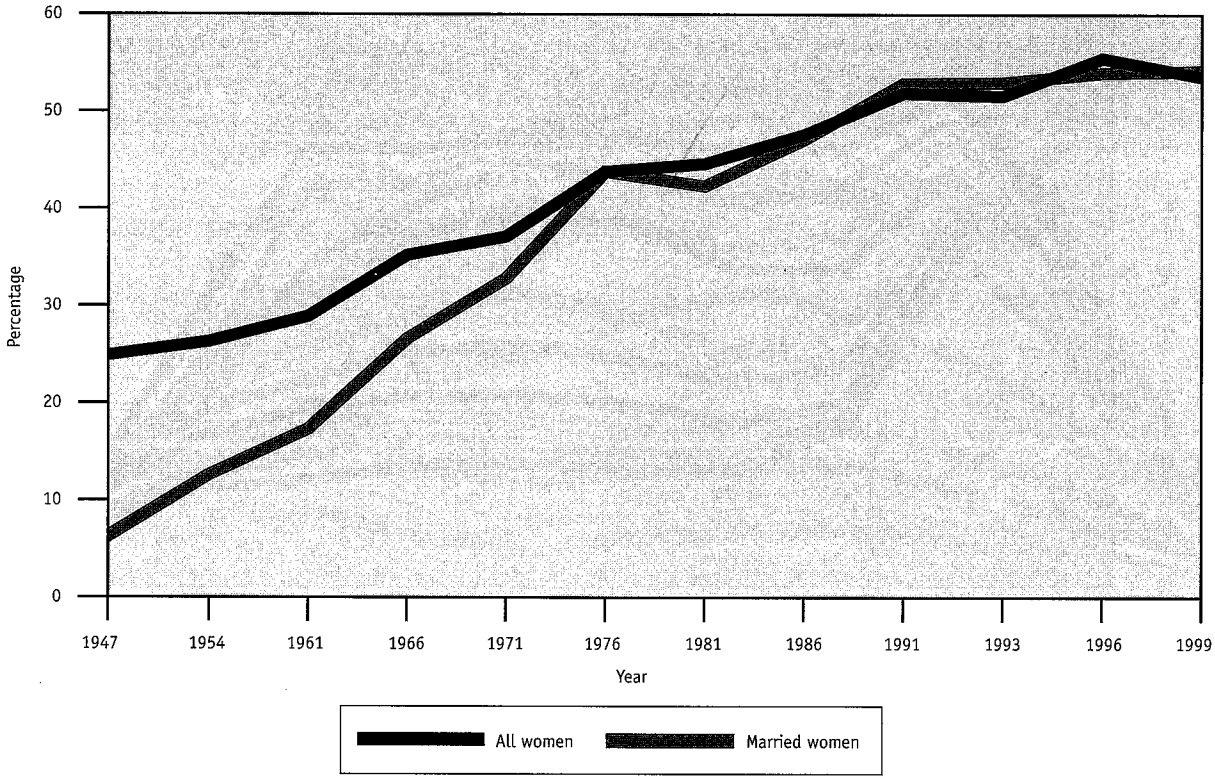


FIGURE 8.6 Workforce participation: women and married women 1947–99

Source: Young, C. 1990, p. 71; ABS 1999b

greater equality in personal relationships, easier divorce, increased numbers of single-mother families and greater life expectancy (Eccles 1984; Richmond 1974). Snooks believed that the most significant changes were those in the technological character of the economy—rises in the costs of labour relative to capital, the deskilling and 'de-physicalization' of large sectors of the labour market, improvements in women's wages relative to men's and the substitution of capital for labour in the household (1994, p. 83).

'No amount of political rhetoric, social rationalization, or sexual discrimination . . . no amount of male chauvinism' could resist these economic developments, argued Snooks, because 'social values are forged by economic change, not economic change by social values' (p. 83). Snooks saw increased female workforce participation as 'largely a function of the changing technological base, and the emerging post-industrial structure of the market economy, rather than of an exogenous change in institutional or "cultural" forces' (p. 104; see also Harris 1983, pp. 92–3). This type of perspective is often referred to as emphasising 'demand-side' factors, because it concentrates on the demands or requirements of the economy rather than on the characteristics of the 'supply' of workers.

Kingsley Davis (1984) pointed out how the separation of the spheres of economic production and familial reproduction that was characteristic of Western societies after the Industrial Revolution was historically unprecedented, rather than 'normal' or 'traditional'. He called the family structure based on the man as breadwinner and the woman as homemaker the **breadwinner system**, and saw it as associated with a very particular stage of development: the transitional period when agriculture gradually gave way to industrial production (around 1850–1920 in the United States). The separation of home and work took this particular form because of the existing levels of fertility; women were still having too many children to work outside the home as well.

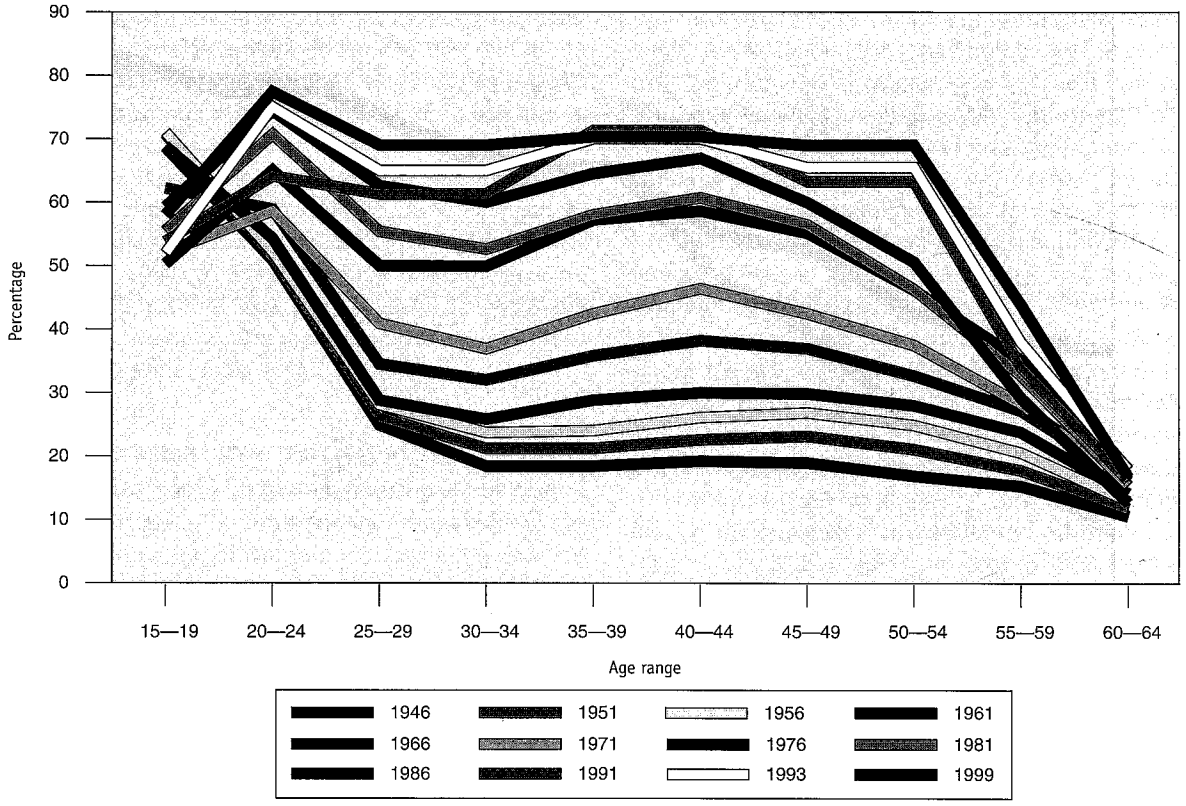


FIGURE 8.7 Workforce participation: all women 1946–99

Source: Young, C. 1990, p. 71; ABS 1999b

These fertility levels changed over the next half-century, partly because of the economic changes mentioned by Snooks, but also because the breadwinner system had 'internal contradictions that make its ultimate demise a foregone conclusion' (Davis 1984, p. 406). In most of human history, argued Davis, except during this relatively brief period, 'women have rivalled men in economic production and are now returning to that condition and will not give it up' (1984, p. 415).

In the breadwinner system, women's income lay beyond their control, yet they were expected to behave as fully mature managers and executors of familial finances (Zelizer 1994). Family income was funnelled through husbands who had minimal personal contact with the family it was supposed to support, or at the very least they struggled with a constant opposition between the spheres of home and work. The financial dependency that characterised women's position made choosing the 'right' partner a decision fraught with significance and consequences; it made marriage a heavy responsibility for men, and family life an extremely good recipe for conflict and a yearning by both parties for escape (Ehrenreich 1994). For Goode (1963), the increasing workforce participation of married women, increasing divorce rates and declining fertility were manifestations of this tension lodged at the heart of the breadwinner system.

Family diversity

The preceding section focused on the changes in household composition and kinship networks that have accompanied industrialisation in Western Europe and Australia. Although some historians, such as Michael Anderson (1980), have pointed to a variety of household types in pre-industrial times and during

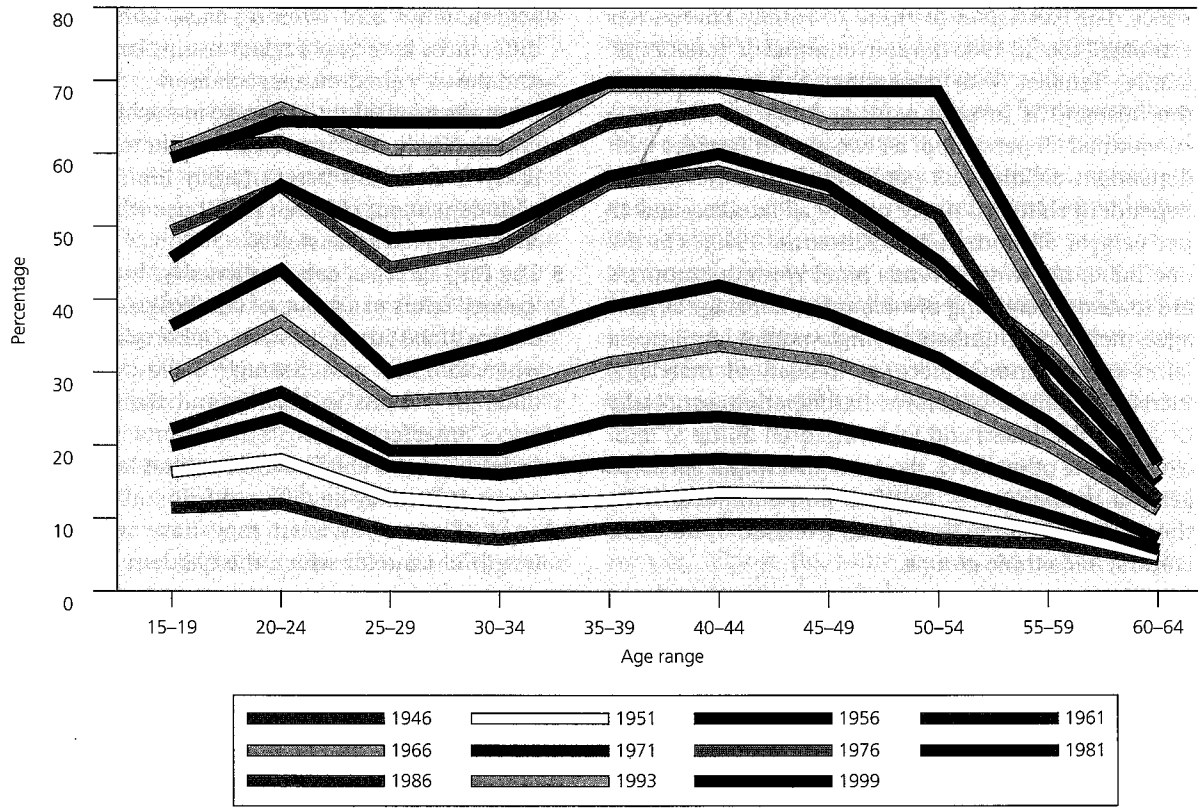


FIGURE 8.8 Workforce participation: married women 1946–99

Source: Young, C. 1990, p. 71; ABS 1999b

industrialisation, it has generally been assumed that a single type of family is the dominant one in any particular era. Whether the modern family is regarded as nuclear, modified extended, modified elementary or dispersed extended, the assumption has been that this type of family is central to people's experiences in modern industrial societies. However, recent research has suggested that such societies are characterised by a plurality of household and family types, and the idea of a typical family is misleading. In 1987, in a report entitled *What's Happening to the Australian Family?*, the National Population Council declared that 'Australian society has been passing through a transition from being dominated by one family type, parents and their offspring, to being one of diversity, where a wide range of different family and non-family types are common' (National Population Council 1987, p. 1).

Family or families?

The 'cereal packet image' of the family

Ann Oakley (1982) described the image of the typical or 'conventional' family. She said 'conventional families are nuclear families composed of legally married couples, voluntarily choosing the parenthood of one or more (but not too many) children' (p. 124). Leach (1968b) called this the 'cereal packet image of the family' (p. 8). The image of the happily married couple with two children is prominent in advertising and the 'family-sized' packets of cereals and other types of product are aimed at just this type of grouping. It tends also to be taken for granted that this type of family has its material needs met by the male breadwinner, while the wife has a predominantly domestic role.

The evidence against the view that this image corresponds to reality has been mounting steadily since the

1960s. The Australian Institute of Family Studies has estimated that in 1986 the conventional or 'traditional' family—families with dependent children in which the husband is in paid work and the wife is not—constituted 39 per cent of all two-parent families with dependent children, 33 per cent of all families with dependent children, 18 per cent of all families, and 13 per cent of all households (Kilmartin 1989). On the one hand, the overall trends in all Western countries are towards increasing divorce rates, marriage at later ages, increasing numbers of single-parent families, de facto cohabitation before or instead of marriage, increasing female workforce participation, especially by married women, and fewer children borne at later ages. On the other hand, the particular impact of these general tendencies is modified and complicated by the variety of family forms characteristic of different cultural and ethnic groups.

Types of diversity

The fact that the 'conventional family' no longer makes up a majority of households or families is only one aspect of family diversity. Robert Rapoport and Rhona Rapoport (1982) have identified five distinctive elements of family diversity:

1 By **organisational diversity** they meant variations in family structure, household type, patterns of kinship network, and differences in the division of labour within the home. For example, there are the differences between conventional families, one-parent families and 'dual-worker' families (in which husband and wife both work). There are also increasing numbers of 'reconstituted families', formed after divorce and remarriage. This situation can lead to a variety of family forms. The children from the marriages of the new spouses may live together in the newly reconstituted family, or may live with the original spouses of the new couple.
2 There is a **cultural diversity** in the lifestyles of families of different ethnic origins and religious beliefs. In Australia, there are differences between families of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Anglo-Saxon, Southern European, Middle-Eastern and Asian origin, not to mention other ethnic groups. (For further details on ethnic family diversity, see pp. 354–62.) Lifestyle differences related to religion may also be an important element of diversity.
3 Middle-class and working-class families exhibit differences in terms of relationships between adults and the way children are socialised.
4 Diversity results from the stage in the life cycle of the family. Newly married couples without children are likely to have a different family life from couples with dependent children and those whose children have achieved adult status.
5 The fifth factor is **cohort diversity**. In this context, 'cohort' refers to a group of families passing through a stage of the family life cycle. Cohort diversity arises when families pass through a life-cycle stage at different periods in history, and their life experiences are affected by external events. For example, families whose children entered the labour market in the 1980s may be different from others: the high rates of unemployment may have increased the length of time for which the children were dependent on their parents.

The significance of family diversity

According to the Rapoports, a fundamental change has been taking place in British family life, a change that is characteristic of all Western countries, including Australia. Although there has always been some degree of family diversity, the Rapoports believed that both the amount and its importance have increased. They claimed that diversity is no longer a result of economic misfortune and the failure to achieve what was traditionally regarded as a happy family life. The Rapoports argued that people are now choosing to have different types of family life, and that it is becoming more socially acceptable to avoid basing your life around the 'conventional' family. They said that a variety of family forms have come to be recognised as legitimate, if not desirable. The Rapoports welcomed these changes, seeing the tolerance of family diversity as an important element of human rights.

Before evaluating their claim that there is no longer a consensus on what type of family life is desirable, two particularly important types of the diversity they identified—cultural and organisational—will be examined in more detail.

Culture, ethnicity and family diversity

Culture and ethnicity are among the most important sources of family diversity in Australia. Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, together with a number of immigrant groups and their descendants,

form a range of types of family which differ significantly both from the 'cereal packet image' of the family and from the ways in which Western European Australians have moved away from that family form.

Australian family sociologists have paid increasing attention to the family patterns of different cultural and ethnic groups. They have been concerned to establish the extent to which Australian social institutions such as education and the law might assume a particular family structure, thus disadvantaging different family forms, as well as whether the family relationships typical of the societies of origin of immigrants have been modified within the Australian context. Thus sociologists have compared ethnic families in Australia with families in their country of origin and also with other Australian families.

Although some changes in the traditional family life of these groups might be expected, the degree to which they change could provide important evidence about the theory of increasing family diversity. If it is true that cultural diversity is becoming increasingly accepted in Australia, then these families could be expected to change little. If, however, the families of ethnic minorities are becoming more similar to those of other members of Australian society, family diversity might ultimately be based more on responses to general social and economic conditions than on ethnic differences. Apart from Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, there are many different ethnic groups in Australia; this chapter will examine two—the Greeks and the Lebanese Muslims—as examples of the impact of cultural diversity on family form.

First, however, we will look at the family life of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia.

Aboriginal family life

There is a variety of family forms among the Aboriginal people themselves, characterised primarily by the opposition between traditional family structure and the degree to which that has been modified through contact with Western culture and social institutions. The best way to understand Aboriginal family life is, first, to draw a picture of the family in traditional Aboriginal societies, and, second, to identify how that family form has changed since European invasion and settlement.

Traditional Aboriginal family life

In traditional Aboriginal society the extended family formed the basis for virtually all aspects of society. One was not considered an adult until married, it was expected that families would produce large numbers of children, and the extended family was the central form of social organisation. Extended families or clans were themselves organised into larger territorial and linguistic groups, called 'tribes'. All political, economic and religious activities were coordinated around what Hart et al. (1988) have termed the 'master system' of the household structure. In addition to a concern with marriage and raising children, the family and kinship system in traditional Aboriginal societies also regulated education, political relations, economic activity, and the legal–moral–religious system, all of which are differentiated into separate spheres of social life in modern Western societies. This also meant that Aboriginal households generally contained a larger number of extended family members, extended horizontally (across the same generation: aunts, uncles, cousins) as well as vertically.

Men were in a dominant position over women; they could reject their wives simply on inclination, whereas wives could leave only by eloping, leaving husbands free to take action against them and the new partner; the partnership was not regarded as valid until the husband relinquished his rights, often after receiving compensation. A man could also 'dispose of his wife's sexual favours as he pleases, with or without her consent' without losing his rights over her (Berndt & Berndt 1968, p. 207).

The system of marriage, around which family life was organised, had several characteristics. Victoria Burbank described the ideal marriage system as follows (1988, p. 51):

- All women are married.
- Females join their husbands before puberty.
- The arrangement of a marriage is not the sole concern of potential partners. A female's marriage is ideally arranged by her mother's kin.
- The selection of partners is governed by rules that define which partners are acceptable (i.e. 'straight').
- Females are exchanged in marriage—that is, the marriage of any female generates a reciprocal obligation on the part of the husband's family to bestow a female in marriage to a male in the wife's family.
- Marriages may be polygynous—that is, men may have multiple wives.

Burbank gave an example of how marriages were arranged, ideally, in the Aboriginal community she studied:

> In the past, or so say older people at Mangrove today, two women and their mothers and mothers' brothers might decide that they would make their respective children, a 'little boy' and a 'little girl' gajali, that is, mother-in-law and son-in-law together. In a brief ritual, one or another of these people would rub white clay into the children's hair. The clay ensured that the 'promise' the relationship entailed would not be forgotten. When the little girl grew, married and had children, she would give all of her daughters to this son-in-law as his wives. Ideally, this son-in-law was an eldest son and if, or when, he died, these women were to go to his surviving brothers. This act also entailed reciprocity. If the son-in-law had a sister, she was to give all her daughters as wives to her brother's mother-in-law's brother. (1988, pp. 51–2)

The relationships and obligations established in the marriage system between the families of those marrying were thus of greater social consequence than the relationships between the partners themselves, which was the basis of the pivotal role played by marriage and family life in Aboriginal society.

One of the central features of traditional Aboriginal marriage that distinguishes it from the European marriage pattern is the ability of men to acquire multiple wives, and considerable attention has been paid to developing an explanation for the male interest in more than one wife. Burbank distinguished four possible explanations:

1 *Economics.* The family is the primary site of economic activity, and multiple wives ensured that sufficient food would be gathered and that it would be well prepared. Hart et al. quoted the head of a large Tiwi household responding to a missionary preaching on the evils of **polygyny**: 'If I only had one or two wives I would starve, but with my present 10 or 12 wives I can send them out in all directions in the morning and at least two or three of them are likely to bring back something with them at the end of the day, and then we can all eat' (Hart et al. 1988, p. 38). The ideal combination included both energetic younger wives and experienced, knowledgeable and skilled wives to supervise their activities. Hart et al. stated that almost all households contained at least one experienced older woman, and that those rare 'uneconomic' households with only younger wives were most likely to go hungry. This was the basis for the inclination among the Tiwi of young men towards 'laying the foundation of their household by marrying an elderly widow usually long before there was any young wife in sight' (1988, p. 39).
2 *Reproduction.* A number of writers have suggested that Aboriginal men have an interest in accumulating as many wives as possible in order to produce the maximum number of children. Burbank found in her study that the desire for children was often the reason given for men wanting more than one wife, although she stopped short of embracing Hiatt's (1985) sociobiological argument that polygyny is integral to a broader biologically programmed concern for reproductive success.
3 *Exchange value.* Maddock (1972) has also argued, following Lévi-Strauss (1969), that polygyny maximises the political advantages of exchanging women within an increasing network of families and tribes, so that women exchanged in marriage are the basis for networks of reciprocal obligation. However, this approach has been heavily criticised, largely because 'its inherent assumptions about Aboriginal social organization are not supported by the evidence of Aboriginal ethnography' (Burbank 1988, p. 49). The central concern in traditional marriage was less to establish alliances than to maintain the correct kinship relationships and to avoid incestuous marriages between actual or classificatory kin (Healy et al. 1985, p. 306).
4 *Play.* Burbank herself also argued that polygyny can be more simply regarded as one of the 'games people play', so that 'men might value women for the status and prestige that accrues for simply doing well in a game where women are the stakes' (1988, p. 50). Once polygyny is established at all, perhaps to some extent the product of female concerns for co-wives to help with domestic labour, then men may simply want to maximise their efforts in the game to enhance their overall social status.

However, two qualifications need to be made concerning this 'ideal marriage pattern'. First, the extent of polygyny varied considerably in different parts of Aboriginal Australia. Among the Tiwi in the north of Australia it was well established, with younger men initially marrying older wives who had lost their husbands and gradually accumulating younger wives, totalling 20 in some cases. However, Berndt and Berndt (1968) pointed out that there are also disadvantages to having more than one wife, in the form of additional cares and responsibilities and a need for greater domestic political skill. It is usually, they argued, the 'forceful person with entrepreneurial leanings' who collects numerous wives, and today

in most desert regions of Australia two or three wives is the norm, up to a maximum of six. The majority of marriages among Aboriginal people throughout Australia are now monogamous.

Second, although marriages were usually arranged, this did not mean that girls and women had no influence on their marriage futures. Their preferences could exert pressure on their Elders' choice, and there were often 'incorrect' marriages; women could elope with or be captured by a more appealing suitor, and such practices modified and softened the socially approved marriage rules. The injured 'correct' husband and his family might inflict some form of punishment on the couple, or accept a payment of some kind to waive his rights in the matter (1968, pp. 200–1).

Rural and urban Aboriginal family life

Although family and kinship remain a central feature of Aboriginal social organisation, much of this traditional family system has been changed, sometimes dramatically, by contact with European culture and social institutions—often by the deliberate intervention of white Australian state agencies and religious bodies. Generally, Aboriginal families living in or near country towns will have retained more of the traditional ideal family structure than those living in larger cities.

Two of the most striking contrasts between the traditional Aboriginal marriage pattern and that of Western Europeans are:

1 the possibility of polygyny; and
2 the organisation and control of marriage by an extended kin group, particularly the betrothal of women at a young age, frequently to much older men.

Both of these features of the traditional marriage system have been radically transformed since European settlement, partly under the onslaught of Christian missionaries, and partly as a result of contact and integration with European culture and social institutions. Young Aboriginal women themselves, to the extent that they are influenced by Western ideologies of individualism, freedom and the notion of love as the basis for marriage, now tend to resist their family's attempts to keep them to the marriage rules. They marry the man of their choice, perhaps a non-Aboriginal man, or avoid marriage altogether. There is certainly little tolerance among Aboriginal women of polygyny, which now survives only in remote regions.

These changes are partly a response to contact with Western culture, and partly the consequence of changed social relations within the family resulting from social institutions such as the school. Much of the control that traditional Aboriginal families were able to exert over their daughters was based on a tight regulation of their physical movement and social contacts. Girls often spent time with their intended husband, and would usually be living with him before menarche. Ideally, by the time they struck adolescence, said Burbank, 'their sexual impulses had been directed toward men deemed appropriate husbands by their society' (1988, p. 115). However, participation in schooling radically transformed relations between young Aborigines and their families. It provided a forum for mixed-sex social interaction free from familial supervision, a peer group whose influence could outweigh that of the family, and the practical means for arranging liaisons, with peers carrying messages and helping to evade adult scrutiny (pp. 104–6).

The transition to a more Western marriage pattern has resulted in the greater freedom of Aboriginal women to choose their partners, but that has been only one of its effects. Bell and Ditton pointed out that women are no longer protected by the network of reciprocal obligations which characterised the traditional marriage system, and 'many women express horror at the incidence of rape and violent abuse of women which sometimes occurs today' (1980, p. 17). Polygynous marriage also enabled relations of mutual support among co-wives, whereas monogamous marriage makes a wife more dependent on her husband, although this dependence is often tempered by the presence of other female kin in the household.

Fay Gale—Aboriginal family change in Adelaide 1966–80

Many of the processes of change occurring in Aboriginal family life through increased contact with white Australian society have been well illustrated in a study of the migration of Aborigines in the city of Adelaide. Gale (1981) found that the movement from a rural to an urban context had a number of significant consequences for the structure and dynamics of Aboriginal family life:

- *Increased intermarriage.* Gale found that mixed marriages in Adelaide increased from 26.6 per cent of all Aboriginal marriages in 1966 to 43.6 per cent in 1973, and 57.9 per cent in 1980. Non-mixed marriages had correspondingly decreased from 73.4 per cent in 1966 to 42.1 per cent in 1980. Gale found that Aboriginal men and women perceive unions with white Australians as providing them with greater security and freedom from the restrictions of the strict Aboriginal kinship system. The rules governing Aboriginal marriage are so complex and extensive, argued Gale, that young people often cannot comprehend them and attempt to avoid them; so it appears that 'the extent and strength of the kinship bonds may in fact be militating against their continuance' (p. 295).

  Gale also identified the economic factors encouraging intermarriage: for the white partner, increased benefits including subsidised housing and special educational allowances for children during the marriage; for the Aboriginal partner, increased financial security in the case of marriage breakdown, when the house and other benefits automatically go to the Aboriginal partner.
- *Declining marriage rate.* At the same time overall marriage rates have declined considerably. On the Aboriginal reserves, marriage was the norm; in the city, Gale found that de facto, separated and single (never married) households were becoming increasingly widespread. Such households were too infrequent to be identified separately in 1966 but, by 1973, 26.4 per cent of dual-head households were de facto, increasing to 51.4 per cent in 1980. In 1973, single-parent households made up 8.4 per cent of the study population aged over 15 years, increasing to 12.4 per cent in 1980.

  The increase in de facto unions was also concentrated in non-mixed partnerships, so that by 1980 most mixed couples were married, while non-mixed couples were more likely to be de facto. Gale's explanation for this is that the welfare system positively discourages marriage by limiting the benefits available when married. The age pension is reduced, and unemployment, supporting mother's and invalid pensions are withdrawn from one partner upon marriage.
- *Household structure and mobility.* Three aspects of urban Aboriginal family organisation continued to distinguish it from white Australian families. The first was the strength of the multiple or extended family household. In 1976, households containing two or more families accounted for 20.4 per cent of Aboriginal households, as opposed to 4.9 per cent in the general population. The 1991 census found that, for the whole of Australia, 11.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households contained two or more families, and the figure was 1.5 per cent for the non-Aboriginal households, suggesting a decline between 1976 and 1991 among both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Aboriginal household size is also generally larger, 4.6 persons on average, compared to an average of 2.6 persons for non-Aboriginal households; the number living alone was 3 per cent, less than half the non-Aboriginal figure of 6.8 per cent (ABS 1993b, pp. 7–8).

  Second, Gale found that there was above-average mobility between Aboriginal households. Roughly one-third of her sample had relatives staying in the house, and 10 per cent had three or more visitors.

  Third, there was a high ratio of females to males in 1973, and 62.3 per cent females to 37.7 per cent males in 1980. Gale's interpretation of these figures was that Aboriginal males are more likely to be able to marry white women; and single-parent females have access to welfare and housing benefits unavailable to single men.

Aboriginal families and State intervention

Traditional Aboriginal family life, and their culture in general, were subjected to systematic attempts at eradication by the euphemistically named State 'Aborigines Protection Boards'. From the early 1900s onwards every State in Australia passed various Aborigines Protection Acts, giving authority to Aborigines Protection (or Welfare) Boards to 'care' for Aboriginal children. In practice, the legislation was used to remove as many children as possible from their families in order to facilitate their absorption into European culture and family values, with the aim of completely eliminating Aboriginal culture and society. 'In the course of a few years', hoped one welfare official in 1909, 'there will be no need for the camps and stations; the old people will have passed away, and their progeny will be absorbed in the industrial classes of the country' (cited in Edwards & Read 1989, p. xiv).

Simply being Aboriginal was regarded as sufficient reason to define children as 'neglected'. The definition of neglect automatically encompassed almost all

Aboriginal families, because it included central features of the social position of Aborigines in European Australian society—features such as having 'no visible means of support or fixed place of abode', a situation often forced upon Aboriginal families; and illegitimacy, which applied to all Aborigines retaining traditional marriage customs. In 1915 the New South Wales *Aborigines Protection Act* was amended to allow children to be removed without parental consent:

> if the Board considered it to be in the interests of the child's moral or physical welfare, placing the onus on the parents to show that their child was not neglected. (Read 1983, p. 6)

In Western Australia, in 1936, the West Australian Commissioner for Aboriginal Affairs was made the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children up to age 21, and the *Native Administration Act* empowered the State to take all Aboriginal children from their families by force and place them in government institutions to be trained in the ways of 'white civilization' and 'society' (Haebich 1988, p. 350). The flavour of State officials' attitudes towards Aboriginal family life is captured by this typical comment by a leading welfare reformer, Charles Mackellar, on 'the Aboriginal problem' in 1915:

> Paternity is casual and conjectural, and promiscuous association is the rule; sanitation is ignored. Dirt is the dominating element. In this mire of moral and physical abasement, tended by semi-imbecile mothers, children are allowed to wallow through the imitative stages of childhood. (cited in van Krieken 1991, p. 97)

Over 5000 Aboriginal children were removed from their families between 1909 and 1969 in New South Wales alone (Read 1983) and, unlike white children, great care was taken to ensure that they neither said goodbye nor ever saw their parents or family again. Often they were given new names and the isolation of Aboriginal settlements made it more difficult for parents and children to trace each other. Deceit was often used to remove children, on the pretext of a brief court hearing or hospital stay.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics found that one in ten Aboriginal people aged 25 or over in 1994 stated that they had been removed from their natural families (ABS 1996b, p. 115). Peter Read's overall estimate was slightly higher: about one in six Aboriginal children removed from their families during this century, compared with one in 300 white children. He saw this as the basis of much of the disintegration of Aboriginal culture and family life, especially the violence and alcohol dependency often encountered in Aboriginal communities. Read concluded: 'perhaps in time the whites will suffer in the knowledge of what they have done. But they cannot expect forgiveness' (1983, p. 20).

Migrant family structure and values

Peter McDonald (1991) argued that many of Australia's migrants come from societies where family life more closely approximates what in Western European cultures is regarded as the 'traditional' patriarchal family: an extended kinship network exerting a strong influence over marriage and family life, relatively high fertility, early marriage, infrequent divorce, women's work concentrated in and around the home, and strong paternal authority over women and children. The perception of a particular family structure as a defining feature of cultural identity seems to produce greater resistance to more general economic and social forces producing changes in family life both among Western European Australians and in the country of origin. The maintenance of the type of family life prevalent in the country of origin when the last family member migrated to Australia often 'represents centuries of valuable tradition, the source of rich and meaningful culture and a field that contains primary contacts and reference groups' (Bottomley 1979, p. 180). This pertains even though family life in the country of origin will in fact have changed in response to different social and economic conditions (Peristiany 1976, p. 2). The cultural isolation of migrant groups from mainstream Australian society accentuates this tendency by intensifying each individual's dependence on the family network for support, social interaction and a basis for social identity (McDonald 1991, p. 118).

There is general agreement among Australian sociologists that migrants retain what they perceive to be a 'core culture' (Bottomley 1979) (irrespective of whether it corresponds to the real family forms currently found in their country of origin), which provides a clear sense of cultural distinctiveness in their family life, and also adapt their family forms where necessary to Australian social and economic conditions. However, there is disagreement on where the emphasis should be placed. Gillian Bottomley argued, for example, that Greek family values and structure are generally resistant to change, because of

the centrality of Greek familialism to Greek culture, and the relative ease with which a separate cultural identity can be maintained in the private sphere of the family, in contrast to more public political and economic behaviour. On the other hand, McDonald argued that the overall tendency is towards a reduction of the influence of traditional family forms, listing the main forces of change as:

> counter-socialisation of children through peers, the media and school; involvement of migrant women in the workforce outside the family circle; direct intervention of Australian institutions in the daily life of migrants [e.g. schools and courts]; economic difficulties; urban lifestyles; and isolation from the wider kin group. (1991, p. 118)

Two ethnic groups will be examined to illustrate these arguments: the Greek and the Lebanese Muslim communities in Australia.

Gillian Bottomley—*After the Odyssey: A Study of Greek Australians*

Between 1969 and 1971, Gillian Bottomley studied the Sydney Greek community in order to identify the forms taken by Greek migrants' ethnic identity, the extent to which that identity had changed in response to Australian society, and the possible sociological explanations for both stability and change. Her description of traditional Greek family structure emphasised the role played by the extended kin network, especially fathers, in controlling adolescent sexual and social behaviour and in determining marriage partners. Greek marriage is a matter of honour for the whole family network, in contrast to the more individualist emphasis on romantic love as the primary basis for marriage among Western European Australian adolescents.

There was a strong emphasis on the authority of fathers and husbands, and on the relative subservience of wives and daughters. Greek women and children were thus more likely to be economically dependent on the male family head (1979, p. 88). Kin networks also played a substantial role in organising everyday life, and Bottomley cited one informant as speaking of Greek 'family bonds the strength of which the average Australian cannot conceive' (1979, p. 146). Greek family networks served economic and moral purposes that in Western European Australian families have come to belong to a separate, public sphere. One point of similarity was the orientation towards the family of procreation rather than the family of origin; obligations to their family did not disappear after the birth of children, stated Bottomley, but the emphasis was on responsibility for their own children (p. 82).

She found there was a general tendency among the Greek community to maintain a separate ethnic identity. The preservation of specifically patterned forms of social interaction and primary relationships such as marriage and family was central to that identity.

Australian Family Formation Project—Greek families in Melbourne

A study conducted in 1976 as part of the Australian Family Formation Project by Packer et al. among Greek women of various ages, educational levels and date of arrival in Australia found a range of changes in Greek family patterns, but also considerable stability. Although Greek mothers did admit a preference for their daughters marrying Greek men, they felt they had no real control over their daughters' choice of partner, and that marriages were arranged to a decreasing extent. However, university-educated girls especially felt that their parents still played a larger role in relationships and marriage than among their non-Greek Australian counterparts. They felt parents wanted to meet and know about prospective sons-in-law, and retained tight control over their social encounters with males until they were engaged. Parents still attempted to prohibit all unsupervised dates, assuming that boys had only one thing on their minds. The Greek girls took this for granted and explained that they would lie to their parents in order to meet with boyfriends. In fact, 'there would probably have been suspicion of parents who showed little concern about their daughters' doings' (1976, p. 128). Generally, there was still a strong linkage in the girls' minds between sexuality, or loss of virginity, and marriage. They believed that their non-Greek peers were far more likely to be sexually active while still single and that 'Australian girls have no hang-ups at all about remaining virgins' (p. 134).

Once married, however, the study found that Greek couples are as likely as non-Greeks to defer the birth of their first child, and all generations agreed that a couple should begin acquiring a house, establish careers, and have a few years going out and enjoying themselves—roughly two to four years after marriage, at least. Their ideal family size was at least two children, but no more than three.

Smyrnios and Tonge—Greek mothers in Greece and Australia

In 1981 Kosmas Smyrnios and Bruce Tonge conducted a survey which compared the attitudes of Greek mothers living in Australia with Greek mothers in Greece. They found that 73 per cent of the Australian sample reported that either a parent or relative had played a significant role in arranging their marriage, whereas only 25 per cent of the Greek sample said that their marriage was arranged. The researchers also found that no Australian Greek mother reported a pre-marital pregnancy, whereas 17.6 per cent of the Greek mothers had conceived their first child before marriage. The first child had been conceived within six months of marriage among 75 per cent of the Australian mothers, and 41.2 per cent of the Greek mothers.

Smyrnios and Tonge concluded that, in the attempt to retain a distinctive cultural identity, aspects of Greek family life had been 'frozen', especially the role played by parents in arranging marriages and restricting pre-marital sexuality, despite changes in those family patterns in Greece itself.

Lebanese Muslim families in Australia

Family life also plays a central role in both traditional and contemporary Lebanese society, serving economic, social and welfare purposes. Although contemporary Lebanese society is becoming more individualistic, Hassan et al. argued that individuals are 'still dependent on kinship structure for identity protection, economic advancement or security' (1985, p. 180). They described the role of the extended family in society as adaptable and 'elastic', since Lebanese society and family life have been changing for some time. Nonetheless, a source of stress in Lebanese family life is still the unity and honour of the family as a whole, centred on male dominance and authority and emphasising familial responsibility and reciprocity. Hassan et al. found that in Australia 'marriages were generally arranged, and "unsuitable" marriages rarely occurred. If such unions seemed likely, parental or familial counter-influence was said to be decisive' (1985, p. 189).

In Lebanese society there has never been any civil law concerning marriage and divorce. They come under the exclusive authority of Lebanon's 17 different Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious groupings (Humphrey 1984, p. 184). The pivotal role of religion in family life contrasts with Australian society, where the state is regarded as having almost complete jurisdiction over family matters. This has far-reaching consequences for the Lebanese Muslim community, because Islamic family law conflicts with Australian civil family law on a number of important points: permissible age at marriage, the authority of sheikhs to perform marriage, bridewealth provisions in marriage contracts, custody of children after divorce, as well as division of property and men's entitlement to declare divorce (Humphrey 1984, p. 183).

The most intense conflict between Islamic and Australian civil family law arises from divorce and subsequent custody and property settlement issues. In Islamic law, the concept of 'fault' and its impact on questions of family honour is central to the resolution of disputes, whereas Australian family law ignores such issues, focusing instead on the future welfare of all the individuals in the dispute, particularly that of the custodial parent and children. Australian family law can remove full custody and control from the male parent, whereas:

> in Islamic law husbands are entitled to the custody of boys at seven years and girls at nine years and to all property not brought to the marriage by the wife, or given to her as bridewealth. (Humphrey 1984, p. 192)

A husband can also refuse to grant his wife a divorce, or repudiate her (*talaq*), so that, while she may be divorced in the eyes of Australian courts, under Islamic law she remains married and unable to remarry. The husband may do so, as Islamic law allows him to have up to four wives (Hassan et al. 1985, p. 190).

The Australian Family Law Court thus provides an avenue for Lebanese Muslim women and their kin to challenge the claims and authority of their husbands and their kin under Islamic law. Michael Humphrey found that 75 per cent of the divorces he studied were initiated by the wife, and that such court action establishes the support of the wife's kin, since she would rarely go to a solicitor alone (1984, p. 193).

There are two important consequences emerging from migration to Australia:

1 The Islamic courts, which in the Middle East temper the power of husbands, are largely absent in the Australian Muslim community. This enhances men's ability to declare divorce unilaterally (p. 192), and increases the influence of the Lebanese sheikhs,

who are concerned to reinforce their authority in the Australian Lebanese community through regulation of marital disputes.

2 Their Muslim identity is experienced as being threatened in a predominantly non-Muslim, secular society. The drawing of most family members into education and work means that 'the relations which are governed by honour tend to contract to the members of the household, which increasingly become the focus of cultural and social continuity' (p. 194).

In the migrant context, then, the maintenance of family customs assumes the extra burden of ensuring cultural and ethnic continuity, and increases the resistance to any accommodation to the Australian civil legislation covering marriage and divorce. Lebanese Muslim husbands are inclined to regard the impact of the Australian Family Law Court on their family affairs as an illegitimate attack on their position within the traditional moral order of Lebanese family life, and as an assault on the very foundations of Lebanese ethnic identity. Their response most often ranges from being uncooperative with the court and their estranged wives and children, refusing to grant a religious divorce (making it impossible for their wives to remarry) to physical threats or assaults (p. 193).

Ethnicity and family diversity—conclusion

The general picture provided by these studies suggests that immigrants and their descendants have in many ways adapted their family life to fit Australian circumstances, yet maintain many of the relationships on which their traditional family life was based. Despite considerable changes since the 1970s, families originating in Mediterranean cultures maintain a relatively high rate of endogamy (marrying within the ethnic group). They also experience lower rates of divorce, and tend to marry earlier; they are less likely to live in households apart from their families, more likely to form multiple-family households, and less likely to enter into de facto relationships (McDonald 1991).

This would suggest that the existence of a variety of ethnic groups has indeed contributed to the diversity of family types to be found in Australia. These migrant groups have succeeded in retaining many of the culturally distinctive features of their family life. Nevertheless, there is also evidence of changes taking place in migrant families which may continue in future generations. As McDonald argued, 'their children are deeply exposed to the dominant Australian social environment' (p. 120). The sociological question here is whether migrant groups will sustain the diversity in family values in the face of the many economic, social and institutional forces that challenge the basis of their distinctive familial identities.

Single-parent families

As mentioned earlier, single parenthood became increasingly common in all Western countries in the 1970s and 1980s. In Australia, single-parent families constituted 14.7 per cent of all families in 1997, up from 12.9 per cent in 1992. However, 30 per cent of single-parent families contain only non-dependent children, and the majority of them (64 per cent) are aged 25 years and over, compared with 17 per cent of couple families with non-dependent children (ABS 1997a, p. 4). Of families with dependent children, single-parent families made up 7.1 per cent in 1969, rising to 13.2 per cent in 1981, 14.6 per cent in 1986, 17.5 per cent in 1992, and 18 per cent in 1997. Single-parent families generally result from the death of one spouse, marriage breakdown or births to unmarried women. The great majority (87 per cent) of single-parent families are headed by women (ABS 1997a, p. 29). However, it is important to note that the proportion of single-parent families was no less a century ago; Peter McDonald noted, for example, that in Victoria, in 1891, 16.7 per cent of families with dependent children had only one parent (1995, p. 22).

The causes and consequences of single parenthood

There are different perspectives on both the causes and effects of single-parent families. Alan Tapper (1990) argued that there are two dominant images of the single parent:

1 The first is 'the maltreated or deserted wife who fights to protect and preserve the integrity of her family against a violent or neglectful husband' (p. 189).
2 The second is 'the woman who breaks up her family for personal reasons, taking her children with her and leaving the father in the position of having access to them for brief periods every second weekend' (p. 189).

He saw both these images as 'somewhat melodramatic', and urged that the social response to single

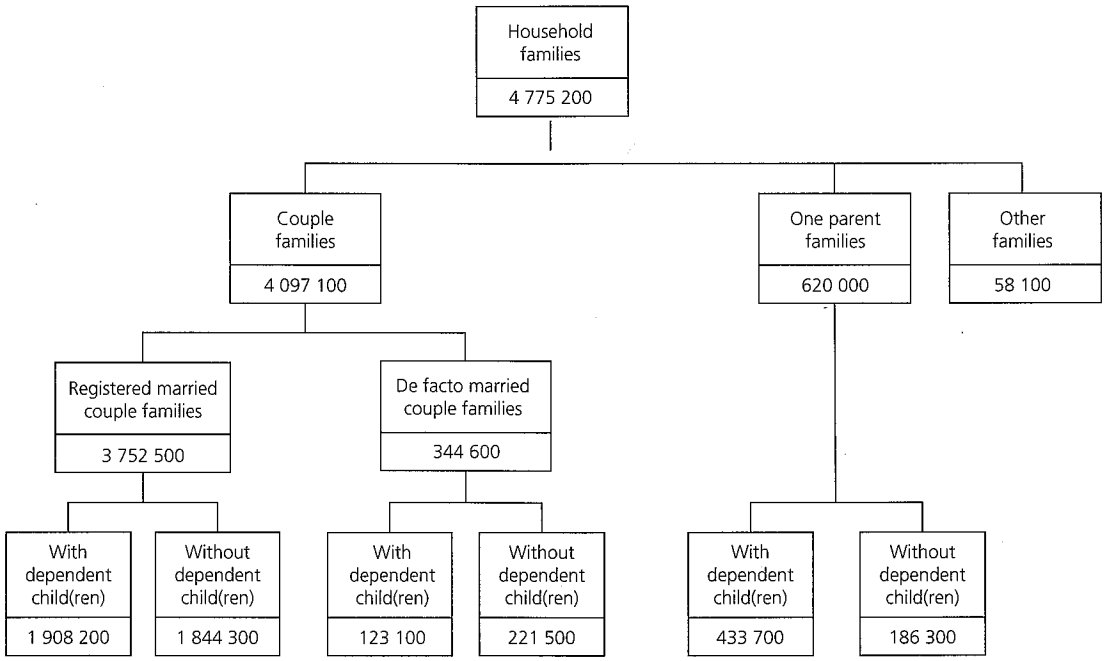


FIGURE 8.9 Australia's household families 1992

Source: ABS 1993c, p. 1

parents should simply be as neutral as possible about the causes of marital breakdown.

There is little doubt that many single-parent families suffer financial hardship. In 1986, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 63 per cent of single-parent families were in the lowest 20 per cent of family incomes, in contrast to 12 per cent of couple families with dependent children (ABS 1991a). Fourteen per cent of single-parent families, compared to 3 per cent of couple families with children, lived with another family, and 54 per cent of single-parent families rented their accommodation, compared with 20 per cent of couple families with children.

Marriage and marital breakdown

Important changes have been taking place in family life in all Western industrialised countries, including Australia, changes that are challenging the dominance of the 'conventional family' in society. Part of this change is that marriage appears to be decreasingly central to family life. Fewer people are getting married, they are marrying later, they are having fewer children or none at all, and more people are cohabiting and having children without getting married. The increase in marital breakdown is reflected in rises in the divorce rate.

In 1997, about 86 per cent of the Australian population lived in households consisting of some type of family (88 per cent in 1992), 85 per cent of family households consisted of one-couple families (12.7 per cent were single-parent families) and 91 per cent of all couples were married (ABS 1997a).

Marriage rates

Marriage rates among young adults have declined in all Western countries since World War II. Figure 8.10 shows the crude marriage rate (per 1000 mean population, including both remarriages and first marriages) in Australia between 1860 and 1998. These figures should not, however, be interpreted simply as indicating a decline in marriage as a social institution. Gordon Carmichael pointed out that in historical terms 'it is the carefree approach to marriage that peaked around 1970 that is aberrant; statistically, marriage patterns nowadays bear similarities to those of the 1940s' (Carmichael 1990, p. 53).

Australian couples are also marrying at a later age; in 1975 the median age at first marriage was 23.4 years

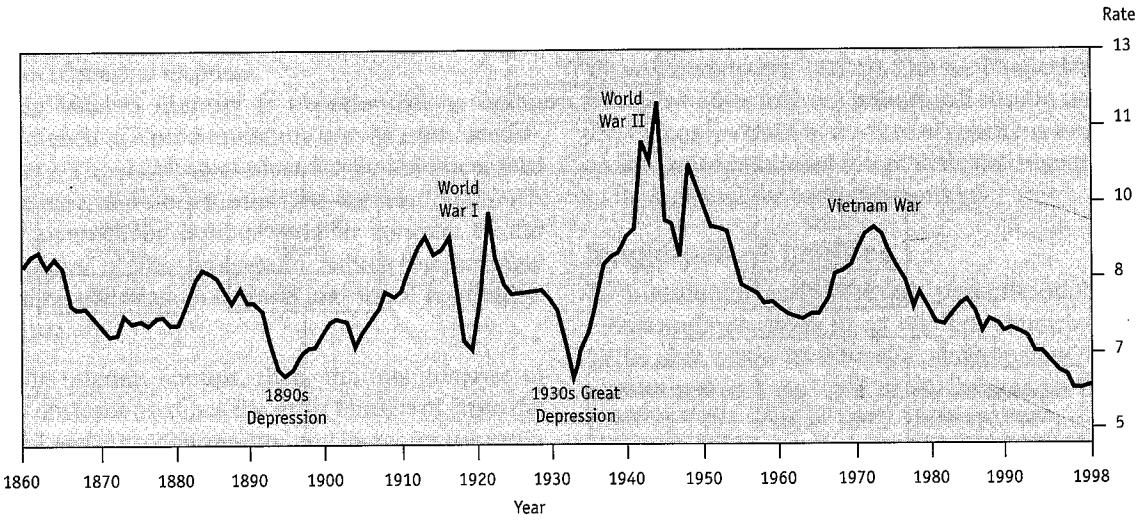


FIGURE 8.10 Crude marriage rate 1860–1998

Note: The crude marriage rate is the number of marriages in a year per 1000 of the mean estimate resident population in that year.

Source: ABS 1999e, p. 83; ABS 2000, p. 96

for males and 21.0 years for females; this had increased by 1997 to 27.8 years for males and 25.9 years for females (ABS 1999b; see also Figure 8.11). Apart from the age at which Australians marry, it is also possible to gauge the general popularity of marriage by looking at the percentage of women who never marry. Peter McDonald pointed out that the proportion of Australian women who never marry moved from a high point of around 15 per cent for those born in the late 1800s, dropped to a low of around 5 per cent for those born between 1920 and 1950, and has since increased towards the formerly high levels for those born since 1950 (Figures 8.12 and 8.13). McDonald quoted a prediction that by 2000 the

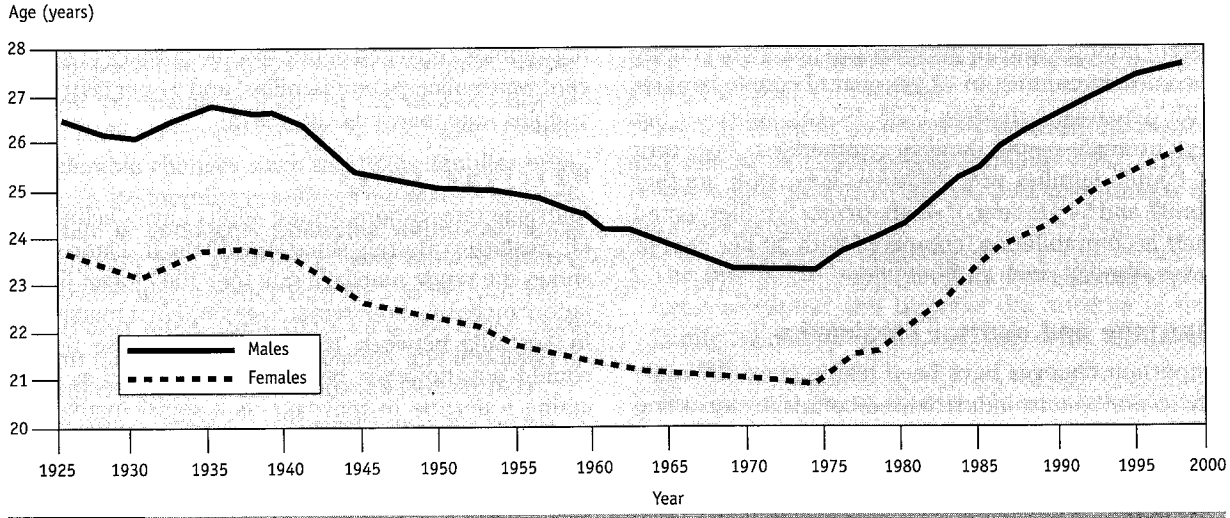


FIGURE 8.11 Median age at first marriage 1925–98

Source: ABS 1992a, p. 50; ABS 1999e, p. 84; ABS 2000, p. 97

FIGURE 8.12 Birth and marriage patterns of Australian women born from 1861 to 1966

Source: McDonald 1993b, p. 155

FIGURE 8.13 Lifetime average number of live births per never-married women

Note: Data for those born from 1951 to 1966 are projections based on experience up to 1991.

Source: McDonald 1993b, p. 155

percentage of Australian women not married by the time they reach 35 will have increased to more than 20 per cent (1995, p. 32).

Cohabitation

Cohabitation in 'consensual unions' by couples who are not legally married has increasingly become a form of preparation for marriage, and for a few an alternative to marriage itself (Carmichael 1990). With the greater tolerance of pre-marital sexuality from the 1960s onwards, marriage has lost its role in legitimising regular sexual activity, making cohabitation before marriage an acceptable course of action.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics found in 1991 that the proportion of marriages preceded by the couple living together had increased from around 15 per cent in 1975 to nearly 60 per cent in 1991 (ABS 1993c, pp. 4–5). However, in 1997 only 9 per cent of couples were de facto couples, and they tended to concentrate in the 25–34 age group (ABS 1997a, p. 6), which suggests that de facto cohabitation is more a stage preceding marriage rather than a real alternative to it . If there is any retreat from marriage, Carmichael (1990) estimated that around half of its incidence can be regarded as an alternative to marriage, and roughly half of it is into singlehood.

Divorce

Other evidence indicating a major change in the role of marriage in family life is the incidence of divorce. Despite occasional fluctuations, there has been a steady rise in divorce rates in Western industrial societies throughout the 20th century (Figure 8.14). The dramatic increase in divorce in Britain in 1971 and in Australia in 1976 was due in part to new family legislation, releasing a backlog of couples with divorces in train, separated couples deciding to proceed to divorce, and unstable marriages breaking down earlier than was usual under the previous divorce legislation. However, the divorce rate had already doubled in the ten years before the change in legislation, and the figures indicate a general trend towards increasing divorce. As Alan Tapper said, the divorce rate 'appears to represent a social trend operating relatively

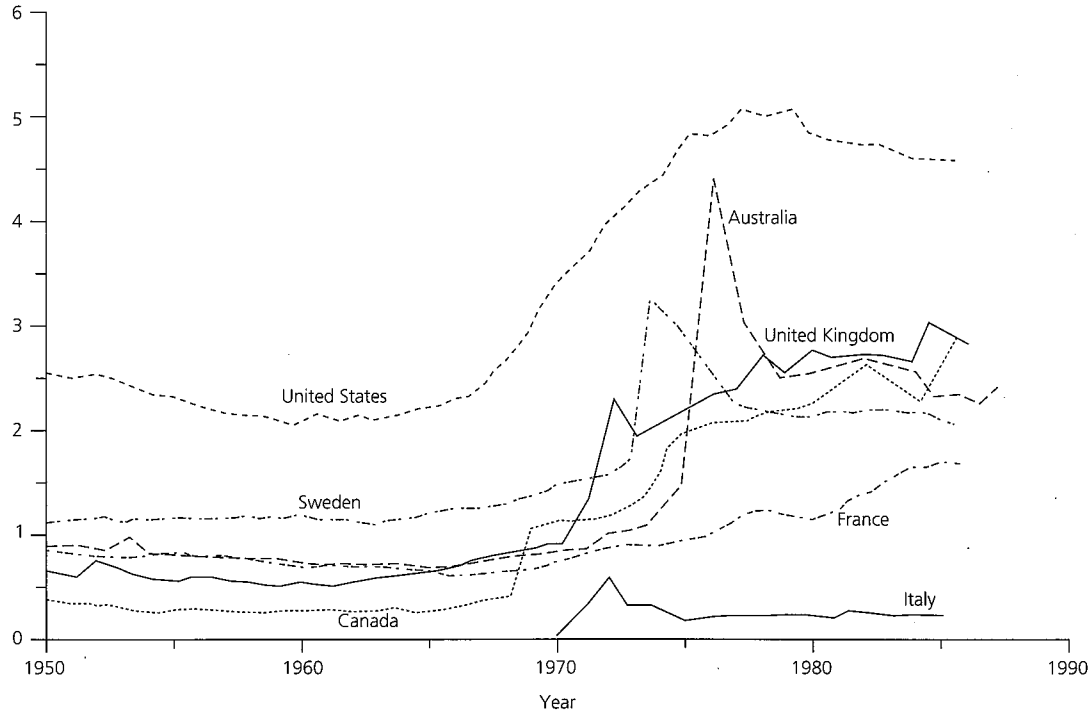


FIGURE 8.14 Annual divorces per 1000 population

Source: McNicoll 1991, p. 57

independently of the state of the law' (1990, p. 158). He suggested that 'the legal change was as much a response to a social change as it was a cause of social change' (p. 158).

The statistics mean that 1 per cent of children are likely to experience their parents' separation for each year of their life. In other words, 10 per cent of children aged 10 will have divorced parents and 15 per cent of children aged 15 will have divorced parents (McDonald 1995, p. 55).

It is important, however, to put the increase in divorce rates into historical perspective, especially if it leads to the conclusion that family life might be less stable than in the past. McDonald pointed out that two aspects of the history of divorce tend to be overlooked:

1 A century ago, the death of one spouse, usually the husband, frequently disrupted a marriage. This indicates that at least some of the current divorce rate can be attributed to greater life expectancy.
2 Although formal divorce rates were very low, marriages still broke down. Given that the divorce rate rose slowly to reach about 10 per cent in the mid-1960s, it is reasonable to estimate a separation rate of roughly 10 per cent, with the increasing divorce rate simply reflecting a formalisation of marriage breakdown.

Taking both widowhood and separation into account, McDonald calculated that, in 1991, 53 per cent of couples would be still together after 30 years, whereas, in 1891, 41 per cent of couples were still together after 30 years (1995, pp. 52–3). In this sense, marriage is in fact more stable now than it was a century ago.

Several writers have also pointed out that, although the Australian divorce rate was low compared with

Sweden and the United States, it did not capture the true extent of marital breakdown, particularly the large number of marriages which effectively ended in desertion and separation, and the often very lengthy period before a separation when one or both partners experienced the marriage as essentially at an end. In 1975, for example, Ailsa Burns (1980) found that only 40 per cent of the men and women in her sample of divorcees who felt that the marriage had broken down in the first five years actually separated in that period. Between 1947 and 1991 a relatively constant proportion of 3–4 per cent of married people regarded themselves as permanently separated (ESCAP 1982, p. 192; ABS 1989; ABS 1991a) (Figure 8.15). In 1947, this 'separated but not divorced' group made up 71 per cent of the total divorced and separated population, 64 per cent in 1961, 58 per cent in 1971, dropping below half to 41 per cent in 1981, and flattening to 35 per cent in 1986 and 1991 (ABS 1989; ABS 1991a; Burns 1980, p. 21). The enactment of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) and the rising divorce rate are thus partly manifestations of the increasing formalisation of marital breakdown, and insufficient as an indicator of the extent of marital stability. The divorce rate 'tells us more about the society's acceptance of divorce as a feasible solution to marital discord than about the level of discord prevailing in the society' (ESCAP 1982, p. 192).

Explanations for marital breakdown

Nicky Hart (1976) argued that any explanation of marital breakdown must consider the following factors: those which affect the value attached to marriage; those which affect the degree of conflict between the spouses; and those which affect the opportunities for individuals to escape from marriage. These factors will first be considered from a functionalist perspective, where behaviour is largely a response to shared norms and values. It follows that a change in the rate of marital breakdown is to some degree a reflection of changing norms and values in general and, in particular, those associated with marriage and divorce.

The value of marriage

Talcott Parsons and Ronald Fletcher saw the rise in marital breakdown as stemming largely from the fact that marriage was being valued more. People expect and demand more from marriage and consequently are more likely to end a relationship which may have been acceptable in the past. Fletcher argued that 'a

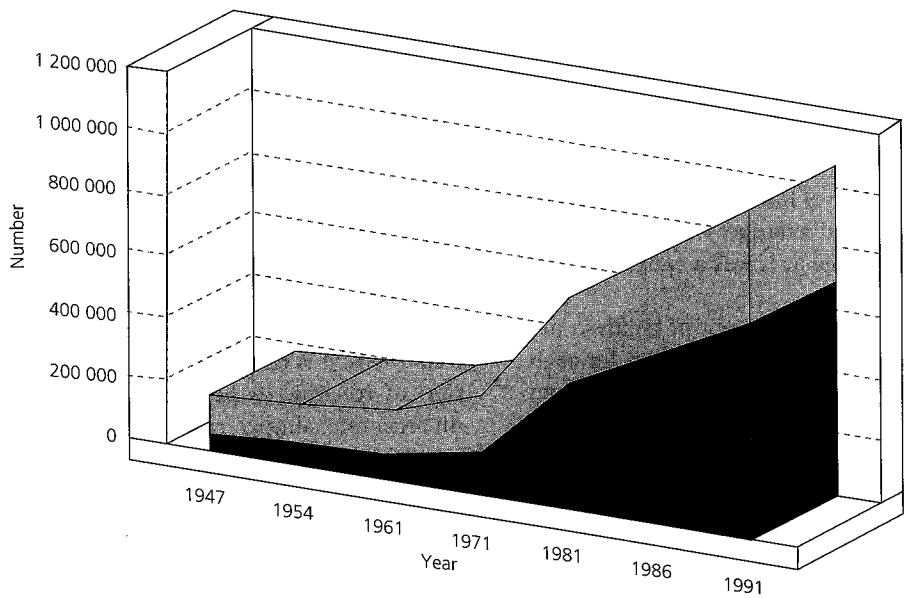


FIGURE 8.15 Divorces and separated, not divorced 1947–91

Source: ESCAP 1982; ABS 1989; ABS 1991a

relatively high divorce rate may be indicative not of lower but of higher standards of marriage in society' (1966, p. 213).

Industrial society

Hart's second set of factors to be considered in explaining marital breakdown are those affecting the degree of conflict between the spouses. From a functionalist perspective it can be argued that the adaptation of the family to the requirements of the economic system has placed a strain on the marital relationship. It has led to the relative isolation of the nuclear family from the wider kinship network. William Goode (1971) said that, as a result, the family 'carries a heavier emotional burden when it exists independently than when it is a small unit within a larger kin fabric. As a consequence, this unit is relatively fragile' (p. 306). Edmund Leach (1968a) made a similar point. He suggested that the nuclear family suffers from an emotional overload which increases the level of conflict between its members.

In industrial society, the family specialises in fewer functions. As a result, there are fewer bonds to unite its members. For example, the economic bond is considerably weakened when the family ceases to be a unit of production. Norman Dennis (1975) suggested that the specialisation of function which characterises the modern family would lead to increased marital breakdown. He said that since intimacy has become the primary basis of marriage, any failure in emotional relations between a couple places the whole marriage into question. Put simply, when love goes, there's nothing much left to hold the couple together.

In addition, argued Australian demographer Lincoln Day, not only are emotional bonds the primary basis for family life, but family life has become almost the only place where emotional needs can be met. And under present demographic, economic and social conditions—fewer siblings, fewer or no children, increased geographic mobility, greater workforce participation by women—the number of people in a position to respond to those needs has declined. Given this increasing emotional dependence on the family, Day said:

> especially upon the husband–wife relationship within it as a haven of refuge from the pressures and lack of emotional supports in the outside world—one is seriously tempted to ask not why, at current rates, about one-fifth of Australian marriages can be expected to end in divorce, but rather why it is that some four-fifths of them can be expected not to. (1979, pp. 30–1)

From a functionalist perspective, what is functional for one part of the social system can be dysfunctional for another part. The functional relationship between the family and the economic system, which involves the relative isolation of the nuclear family from extended kin, may have dysfunctional consequences for the family. The structural differentiation of society, which involves the establishment of institutions specialising in particular functions, may increase the efficiency of the social system but at the same time produce dysfunctional effects in family life. A high rate of marital breakdown, then, may be the price we have to pay for the changing nature of modern industrial societies.

Divorce as escape from marriage

The third set of factors that Hart considered essential to an explanation of marital breakdown are those affecting the opportunities for individuals to escape from marriage. If, as the functionalists argue, behaviour is directed by norms and values, a change in the norms and values associated with divorce would be expected. It is generally agreed that the stigma attached to divorce has been considerably reduced, making divorce easier.

The changing attitudes towards divorce have been institutionalised by various changes in the law which have made divorce much easier to obtain. Australian divorce law was based on the English Divorce Act of 1857, eventually codified in separate legislation for each colony, from South Australia in 1858 to New South Wales in 1873. Over time, each State modified its legislation without reference to the other States, producing a patchwork of legislation which was standardised by the *Matrimonial Causes Act 1959* (Cwlth). This legislation provided for divorce on a range of grounds of 'fault'—such as mental cruelty, adultery, drunkenness, desertion for more than three years—or a five-year separation (ESCAP 1982, p. 184). The *Family Law Act 1975* abolished the concept of fault and allowed for no-fault divorce on only one ground, 'irretrievable breakdown', established after a separation of 12 months. The *Family Law Act* is based on the idea that the sorts of conduct formerly regarded as indications of fault are symptoms rather than causes of marital breakdown, and that the breakdown of a marriage cannot be attributed to only one of the partners (Harrison 1989). Resolution of conflicts concerning custody of children and property are now based on considerations of the welfare of the children and custodial parent.

Goode (1971) argued that the change in attitude towards divorce has been part of the more general process of secularisation in Western societies. (For a detailed discussion of secularisation, see Chapter 11, pp. 493–7) During the 19th century, the Church strongly denounced divorce, insisting that the words 'till death do us part' be taken literally. During the 20th century the Church had to accommodate the rising divorce rate by taking a less rigid view. However, the official Church position is probably less important than the declining influence of religious beliefs and values in general in industrial society.

Many sociologists argue that secular (i.e. non-religious) beliefs and values increasingly direct behaviour. In terms of divorce, according to Goode, this means that 'Instead of asking, "Is this moral?" the individual is more likely to ask, "Is this a more useful or better procedure for my needs?" ' (p. 309). From this perspective, the increase in the divorce rate is part of a general process of undermining the authority of the family, and especially the father, in favour of a 'pursuit of individual autonomy' (McDonald 1988), which is itself a central part of Western culture since the Enlightenment. This concern with individual autonomy has filtered through to family life, so that marriage is no longer regarded as an institutionalised, non-negotiable lifelong commitment, but as only one way of meeting more fundamental emotional and psychological needs, and one that should be abandoned if those needs are not being met (McDonald 1988).

The sexual politics and economics of family life

Hart (1976) also argued from a more materialist perspective that the increasing divorce rate can be seen as a 'product of conflict between the changing economic system and its social and ideological superstructure (notably the family)' (p. 68).

In capitalist industrial societies, there has been an increasing demand for female wage labour since World War II. Wives have tended to take up paid employment not only because of the demand for their services, but also because aspirations for an ever-increasing range of consumer goods have risen steadily since World War II. These material aspirations can be satisfied only if both spouses work as wage-earners. However, conflict results from the contradiction between female workforce participation and the normative expectations that surround 'conventional' married life. 'Working wives' are still expected by their husbands to be primarily responsible for housework and raising children (see the section below on conjugal roles). In addition, they are still expected, to some degree, to play a subservient role to the male head of the household. These normative expectations contradict the wife's role as a wage-earner since she is now sharing the economic burden with her husband. Conflict between the spouses can result from this contradiction; conflict which is fertile ground for marital breakdown.

The economics of marriage and separation have also changed in a number of ways that make separation, at the same time, a less unattractive option for women but, in some senses, a desirable choice for both partners. Single parents are still highly likely to be destined for relative poverty or, at the very least, a significant decline in living standards. However, Carmichael and McDonald have argued that the increased workforce participation of women since World War II, accelerating after the 1960s, made it more possible for women, especially if they had not yet had children, to be economically independent. The introduction of the supporting mother's (now supporting parent's) benefit in 1973 also provided welfare support to women leaving a marriage, whereas previously they were only entitled to support as deserted wives if the divorce was initiated by the husband (1986, p. 23). The overall decline in fertility also made it easier to end marriages that were found to be unsatisfactory at an early stage, before children were born (p. 25).

The fact that both partners are likely to work, partly to cover the increasing cost of raising children—the Australian Institute of Family Studies estimates that a dependent child now costs the average-income family about $13 000 per year—and partly in response to an ever-increasing range of consumer desires, also makes the 'blending' of divorced families a rational way of organising family economics. In a recent, slightly satirical article, Barbara Ehrenreich highlighted the disproportionate attention paid to the disruptive and psychologically damaging effects of divorce, overlooking the possible advantages of the extended family network produced by blended families, and also the economic advantages, perhaps even the necessity, of divorce. In her words:

> There was really no choice. When the children were barely out of nappies, the first husband and I realised sadly that we would never be able to afford their college tuition, certainly

> not with the little darlings sabotaging our abilities to earn. So we shook hands fondly and set forth to recruit additional parents who might be persuaded to share the burdens of parenthood. (1994, p. 12)

There have been gender differences in relation to who takes the initiative in seeking divorce. The portrait painted in the recent book *Weddings and Wives* (Spender 1994) shows that women are more unhappy with married life than men, wanting to leave husbands who are unable or unwilling to adjust to a different division of domestic labour and changing gender roles. There is some basis to this picture. Ailsa Burns, for example, found in 1975, before the passage of the *Family Law Act*, that 37 per cent of wives said that their marriage had begun to break down in its first year, compared with 24 per cent of husbands, and 15 per cent of wives felt that the breakdown had begun in the first three months of the marriage (Burns 1980, p. 42).

However, this gender division has been changing since the early 1980s. Females filed 59 per cent of applications for divorce in 1984, 51 per cent in 1988, and 48 per cent in 1992; males filed 49 per cent in 1984, 38 per cent in 1988, and 36 per cent in 1992; 0.4 per cent of applications were filed jointly in 1984, increasing to 11 per cent in 1988 and 16 per cent in 1992 (ABS 1993d).

Conjugal roles

Much of the sociological research on conjugal roles has been concerned with determining the degree of inequality between husband and wife within marriage. Different researchers have measured different aspects of domestic inequality. Some concentrated on the division of labour in the home, examining the allocation of responsibility for domestic work between husband and wife and the amount of time spent by each spouse on particular tasks. Others have tried to measure the distribution of power within marriage.

Young and Willmott (see pp. 342–4) maintained that conjugal roles could increasingly be described as 'joint'. They suggested that family life was becoming more 'symmetrical' because of the degree to which spouses now share domestic work and leisure activities. They referred to relationships of this type as 'joint' as opposed to 'segregated' conjugal roles. In the symmetrical family, although the wife still has primary responsibility for housework and child rearing, husbands supposedly become more involved, washing clothes, ironing and sharing other domestic duties. Young and Willmott (1973) found that in 1970 between 64 per cent and 79 per cent of husbands in London did housework other than washing up during the course of a week, and that husbands and wives increasingly shared both leisure activities and decision making (p. 115). Spouses discussed matters such as household finances and their children's education to a greater degree than the Stage 2 family. Young and Willmott believed that the change from segregated to joint conjugal roles resulted mainly from the withdrawal of the wife from her relationships with female kin and the drawing of the husband into the family circle.

However, most sociologists working in this area have found little evidence for such a reduction of inequality within marriage, and Young and Willmott's research has been heavily criticised. Ann Oakley (1974b) argued that, although Young and Willmott's results sounded impressive, they were based on only one question in Young and Willmott's interview schedule: 'Do you/does your husband help at least once a week with any household jobs like washing up, making beds (helping with the children), ironing, cooking or cleaning?' This meant that men who made only a very small contribution to housework were included as 'helping with housework'. She said: 'A man who helps with the children once a week would be included in this percentage; so would (presumably) a man who ironed his own trousers on a Saturday afternoon' (p. 164). As Ailsa Burns suggested, 'even the most resourceful wife and best-intentioned husband find it difficult to avoid a slippage towards "traditional" roles' (1986, p. 227).

Ann Oakley—housework and child care

Oakley (1974a) collected information on 40 British married women who had one child or more under the age of five, who were British or Irish born and aged between 20 and 30. Half of her sample were working-class, half were middle-class and all lived in the London area. She found greater equality in the allocation of domestic tasks between spouses in the middle class. However, few men had a high level of participation in housework and child care in either class: few marriages could be defined as egalitarian. Only 15 per cent of marriages had a high level of participation by men in housework, and 25 per cent in child care.

Baxter, Gibson and Lynch-Blosse—*Double Take*

Bettina Cass suggested that Young and Willmott's notion of the symmetrical family is 'visionary' (1987, p. 204) rather than an accurate description of real family relationships. In analysing the aggregate survey data produced by the Class Structure of Australia Project, Janeen Baxter, Diane Gibson and Mark Lynch-Blosse (1990) found that in 1984 there was little evidence of increasing symmetry between males and females. The female respondents were far more likely to report that they spent the most time on routine child-care tasks: 63 per cent of females compared with less than 1 per cent of male respondents. Only 5 per cent of female respondents reported that their male partners spent more time on these tasks, compared with 87 per cent of male respondents. A similar pattern emerged in relation to housework: 72 per cent of women said they spent most time on housework compared with 2 per cent of men, and 4 per cent of women said their partners spent more time on housework, compared with 84 per cent of men.

Baxter et al. also examined the argument that men's contribution to household tasks might be 'different but equal', identifying the average amount of time spent by men and women on a range of tasks, including supposedly 'masculine' tasks such as mowing the lawn, home maintenance and improvement, and taking out the garbage. Their results for men and women in paid employment are summarised in Table 8.1.

Baxter et al. concluded that women remain responsible for the bulk of housework and child-care tasks. The total amount of time spent on housework by women in paid employment is considerably more than men: more than 31 hours compared with just under 14 hours. Women who are not in paid employment devote even more time to housework, up to 40 hours per week. Even when women enter paid employment, men tend to take on only a slightly larger share of domestic duties. Baxter et al. argued that a key determinant of the gendered division of labour remains the ideological conception of the 'appropriateness' of domestic activities to masculine and feminine identity. Child care and housework generally continue to be seen as 'naturally' women's work, and men take on those tasks only when they and their partners no longer hold to an ideology of what distinguishes women's and men's work.

TABLE 8.1 Mean hours per week spent on housework by men and women in paid employment 1984

	MEN	WOMEN
Preparing meals	2.03	9.13
Cleaning up after meals	2.39	4.87
Grocery shopping	1.16	2.08
Cleaning the house	1.37	5.85
Taking out garbage	0.91	0.45
Washing	0.80	3.94
Ironing	0.42	2.55
Mowing	1.11	0.42
Gardening	1.61	1.20
Home maintenance/improvement	1.82	0.56
Total hours	13.74	31.20

Source: Baxter, Gibson & Lynch-Blosse 1990. Commonwealth of Australia ©. Reproduced by permission

Michael Bittman—*Juggling Time*

In 1987 the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted a pilot survey of the Sydney–Gosford/Wyong area identifying the time spent by women and men on a range of unpaid work tasks. Michael Bittman (1991) analysed the resulting data and found that they agreed with the results of other studies in Australia and overseas, especially the fact that women did the majority of unpaid work. Eight main points emerged from Bittman's analysis of the 1987 data:

1 Women did 70 per cent of the unpaid work—on average, men spent 14 hours and 24 minutes per week on unpaid work; women spent 36 hours.
2 No matter how many hours of unpaid work a wife did, her husband's contribution remained constant.
3 Improved domestic technology had made no difference to time spent in the kitchen and laundry since 1974.
4 On average, women had one less hour of leisure time in 1987 than they did in 1974.
5 Two-thirds of men's unpaid work was outdoors.
6 When women got married, their unpaid work increased by almost 60 per cent.
7 With the birth of a child, women's unpaid work increased by 91 per cent, to nearly 56 hours per week. Men's unpaid work did not change, while their paid work increased to over 50 hours per week.
8 This pattern was well-established among children by age 15. On average, sons did two-thirds of the amount of unpaid work done by daughters, who

spent twice as much time on food and drink preparation, four times as much time on washing and ironing, and three times as much on child care.

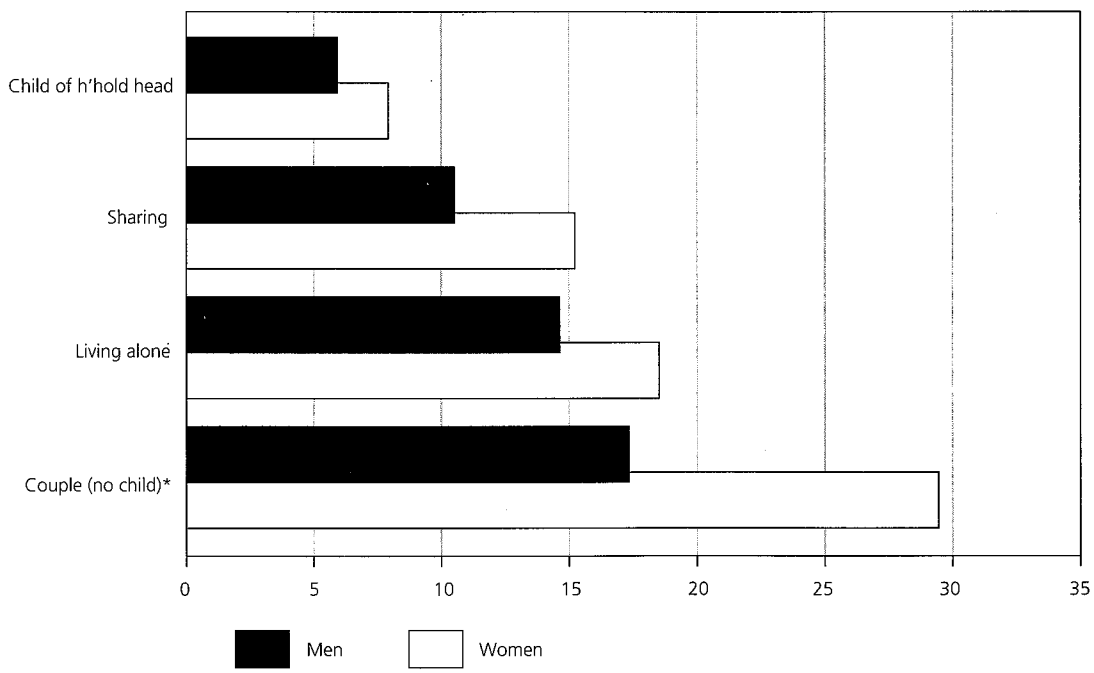
Bittman emphasised that marriage is the most powerful predictor of women's paid and unpaid work. 'Having a spouse,' wrote Bittman, 'increases women's unpaid work and decreases their paid work time whether or not they have dependent children' (1991, p. 3). His results are summarised in Figure 8.16.

The next most important predictor of women's unpaid work was children. Women with pre-school children had the highest levels of unpaid work and the lowest levels of paid work. Figure 8.17 summarises the average effect of having children on women's and men's unpaid work. The birth of a child, argued Bittman, 'signals a firm divergence of life opportunities by gender' (1991, p. 25). For men, it means more paid work but no increase in unpaid work, while for women it means an interruption to their paid career and a sharp increase in their unpaid domestic duties.

Ken Dempsey—gender inequality in rural Australia

In his studies of family relations in a small rural town in the north-west of Victoria, Ken Dempsey also found a marked division of labour between males and females which started in early adolescence. Dempsey and his colleagues conducted two surveys, one in 1974 and another in 1984. Both studies 'failed to produce any evidence whatsoever of the blurring of the old distinctions between "women's work" and "men's work"' (1992, p. 96). They showed that women 'have entire responsibility for household management and major responsibility for child care' (1988, p. 420).

Dempsey concentrated on the most time-consuming routine domestic tasks such as vacuuming and washing and ironing clothes, and found in 1984 that '75 per cent of the husbands never performed any of these three tasks, and over 90 per cent never ironed or washed clothes' (1992, p. 96). If men engaged in domestic tasks they usually did so as 'helpers', rather than taking responsibility for the initiation and



* below retirement age

FIGURE 8.16 Women's and men's total unpaid work time by life course stage (hours/week)

Source: Bittman 1991, p. 40

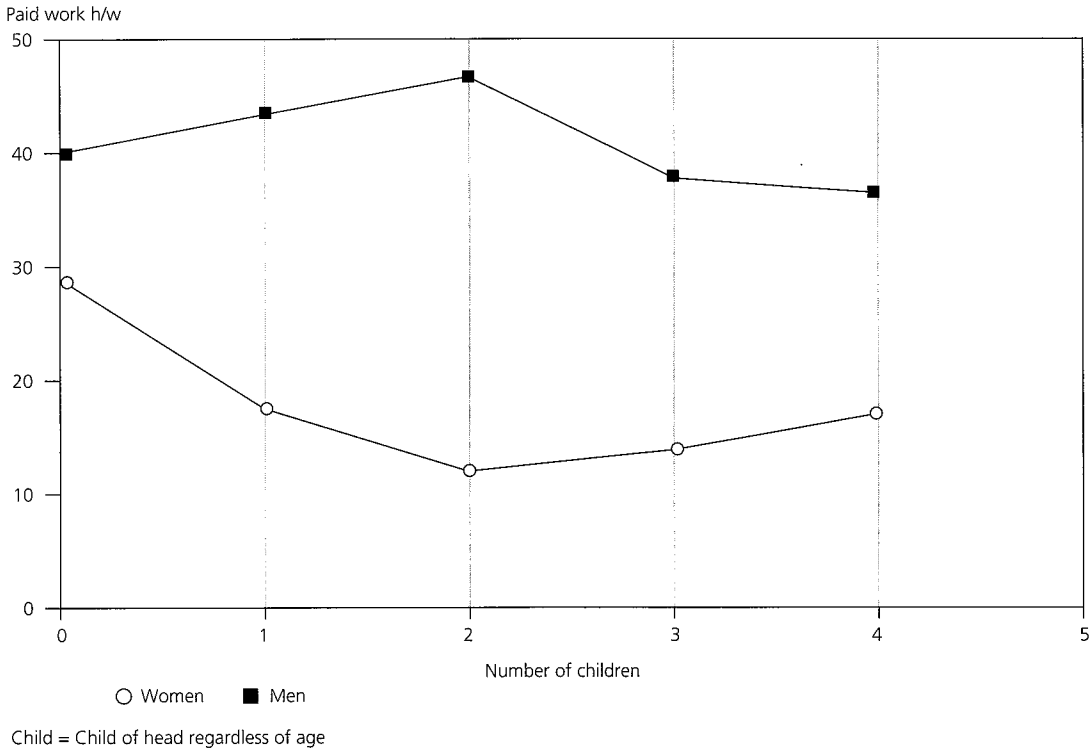


FIGURE 8.17 Hours of paid work by number of children in household

Source: Bittman 1991, p. 25

completion of the task. When their wives were absent from home for any reason, other female relatives would intervene to ensure that meals were cooked, and clothes washed and ironed. Cooking by men generally meant turning over the meat at a barbecue or heating up a tin of baked beans.

Men were more inclined to contribute to child care, but would ensure that it did not interfere with their own paid work or leisure activities. For example, children would be taken along to a football match which the father was attending in any case. Child care, wrote Dempsey, 'is yet another area in which men help or assist their wives rather than share responsibility and in which their participation has a voluntary character' (1992, p. 101). Children's wellbeing is still seen as primarily the mother's responsibility.

This gendered division of labour begins to be established in early adolescence, when girls 'begin preparing for their future subordinate and servant activities as wives by servicing brothers and fathers' (1988, p. 420). Young males then 'enter their own marriages committed to the view that women exist primarily to serve as carers and nurturers of men and their offspring' (1988, p. 420). Dempsey pointed out that, even if males undertake other tasks in and around the home, the nature of the tasks makes them easier to postpone or to fit around the men's leisure and paid work activities. The allocation of the most routine and time-consuming tasks to girls and women, on the other hand, interferes far more with their leisure and paid work, and places them in 'a subordinate and servant-like role' (1988, p. 422) in comparison with their brothers, husbands and sons.

Conjugal roles and power

Other approaches to studying conjugal roles examine power relations within marriage. Three main focuses have been:

1 the 'deferential dialectic' between men and women;
2 decision-making processes; and
3 agenda setting.

The deferential dialectic

Colin Bell and Howard Newby (1976) pointed out that a major problem with the notion of the symmetrical family is that it ignores the interpersonal relations between husband and wife within family life. They identified a patterning of relations between husband and wife which they called the **deferential dialectic**. Even when women are not clearly in a subordinate position within a marriage, they still often defer to their husband. Bell and Newby wanted to explain why women often not only recognise that their husband possesses greater power, but also feel that he ought to do so.

Deferential interaction, wrote Bell and Newby, consists of two opposing elements:

1 *Differentiation.* The two parties are clearly defined as distinct from each other: male/female, husband/wife, master/slave, manager/worker. The basis for differentiation is often seen as natural and unchangeable, based on the nature or essential character of the two parties.
2 *Identification.* In moral terms, however, the two parties identify with each other. They see each other as part of an organic whole, and not as part of an unequal, exploitative or oppressive relationship.

The 'deferential dialectic' refers to the processes by which these two contradictory features of a relation of deference combine and interrelate with each other.

The deferential relationship between husband and wife is always experienced as a particularistic and personal one. A wife's deference to her husband is to him as a particular person. His authority is not based on abstract traditional ideas concerning proper male/female relations, but on his ability to represent and embody those beliefs. Bell and Newby therefore argued that 'the wife is most likely to subscribe to the traditionally ascribed norms of behaviour where her personal ties of dependency are most ubiquitous' (1976, p. 158). As Ailsa Burns also observed, 'most women entering marriage make a distinction between their particular husband and marriage in general. (Other husbands may treat their wives badly; theirs will not.)' (1986, pp. 219–20).

The deferential dialectic is maintained, argued Bell and Newby, by a number of forces. First is its 'totality', the absence of alternative definitions or models of husband–wife interaction. To be attached to domesticity, the home and children is the foundation of one key element of the deferential dialectic—the wife's identification with her husband. Challenging his traditional authority within family life thus often entails a threat to domestic home life itself, which is something that many women are reluctant to surrender.

Second, both men and women are socialised so as to have internalised particular expectations of each other within family life.

Third, there are symbolic reinforcements, such as institutionalised gift giving. At birthdays, wedding anniversaries or after a quarrel, men are generally expected to be more generous in their gift giving, which, as Bell and Newby pointed out, they are more able to be, given their greater earning power in the labour force. At a more fundamental level, 'the husbands "give" their wives a home, security and a whole way of life'. Such gifts 'symbolise and reaffirm the deferential dialectic' (1976, pp. 162–3).

Decision making

Other writers have examined who makes the decisions within a marriage. To use a common sexist phrase, it is a question of who 'wears the trousers' in the family. In one British study of middle-class couples, Edgell (1980) interviewed both husbands and wives about who made the decisions, and also asked them which decisions they thought were the most important. Wives dominated in those areas of decision making that concerned interior decorations, domestic spending and children's clothes. All these areas, though, were considered unimportant. Men dominated three areas of decision making—those relating to moving house, finance and the car—all of which were regarded as important.

Decisions relating to money closely reflected the overall pattern that Edgell discovered. He found that, typically, the husband decided the overall allocation of financial resources and had most say in decisions that involved large sums of money, whereas the wife, in every family in the sample, tended to make the minor decisions.

Agenda setting and ideological power

As Chapter 3 indicates, power is a complex concept and may be measured in a number of ways. Power can be exercised through agenda setting, deciding what questions and issues are discussed (Steven Lukes's 'second face of power'), as well as through actually making decisions. Edgell's research indicated that

wives did not enjoy more of this type of power to compensate for their lack of influence over important decisions. Husbands usually set the agenda for marital debate. For example, the possibility of moving to another area was only raised when it became desirable in order to improve the husband's career prospects.

Wives also possessed no more ideological power, nor the ability to persuade people to do things that are against their interests (Lukes's 'third face of power'). Most wives in the study accepted that traditional gender roles should be maintained, and that the husband should be the dominant 'partner'. When asked about decision making, one wife said: 'Basically I feel I like to be dominated' (1980, p. 67) and another said that men 'have to be the main decision-makers to survive. Therefore in complete equality they would lose their masculinity. I would not want this' (1980, p. 68). Edgell found that about half the husbands regarded sexual equality as a bad thing, but, surprisingly, even more of the wives—about two-thirds—felt the same way.

Graham Allan (1985) neatly summarised how ideological factors limit women's power in many marriages when he referred to 'the taken-for-granted assumptions which emphasise the predominance of the male over the female in almost every sphere of domestic life' (p. 83). In any struggle for power within the family, wrote Allan, 'the female is chronically disadvantaged from the start by the socially constructed framework of values and norms which constrain her options' (p. 83).

Inequality within marriage

There appears to be little evidence that women in contemporary Western societies have achieved anything like equality within marriage or 'symmetry' in their relations with men. They are still primarily responsible for housework and child care, and within marriage they have less economic and interpersonal power than their husbands. The major change since World War II has been that the division between the public and private spheres is becoming less rigid with women's increased workforce participation. However, the effect of that within family life seems to have been to produce a 'double burden' for women (see p. 372), rather than dramatically changing either the domestic division of labour or the power relations between men and women within marriage.

Study questions

1. What role should the development of capitalism play in explaining the history of the family in Western societies?
2. Give an explanation of the social dynamics behind the falling rate of fertility in European societies since the late 19th century. Do you think that Australian family life has followed the same trends? Has this been for the same reasons?
3. What has been the impact on family life of women's increasing participation in the paid workforce?
4. Does it make any sense to see the family as a 'haven in a heartless world', given the degree of inequality, violence and abuse which characterises many family relationships?
5. Why do people get married, and why do they divorce?
6. How would you describe and explain the domestic division of labour between men and women?
7. Can we continue to speak of 'the family', given the enormous diversity of family types and forms?

Further reading

Anderson, M. (ed.) 1980, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500–1914*, Macmillan, London.

Gilding, M. 1991, *The Making and Breaking of the Australian Family*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

Morgan, D. J. H. 1985, *The Family, Politics and Social Theory*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Robertson, A. F. 1991, *Beyond the Family*, Polity, Cambridge.

Web sites

Australian Institute of Family Studies:
http://www.aifs.org.au/

WWW Virtual Library—Demography & Population Studies:
http://coombs.anu.edu.au/ResFacilities/DemographyPage.html

SOSIG's Sociology of the Family:
http://www.sosig.ac.uk/roads/subject-listing/World-cat/socfam.html