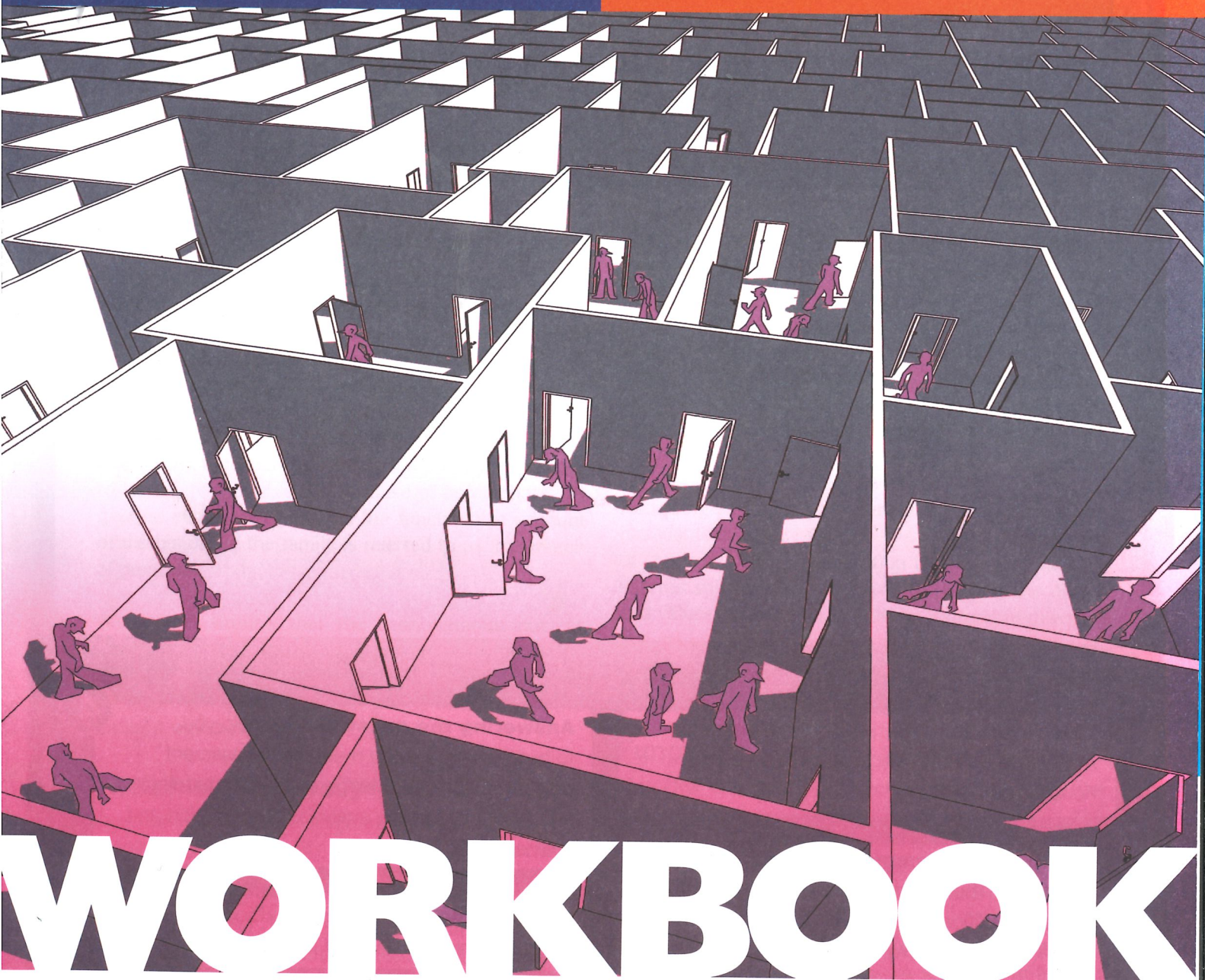


AQA

AS/A LEVEL



WORKBOOK

Sociology 2

Families and households

Jonathan Blundell



Section 1

Functionalist and New Right views of the family

Society evolves, the family evolves

Functionalist sociologists take a positive view of the nuclear family. They argue that the modern nuclear family evolved from earlier types of family as society evolved. An extended family suited the needs of pre-industrial, agricultural societies while the nuclear family is the most appropriate and beneficial form of family for advanced industrial societies. The theory that family type fits the needs of a society is referred to as 'the fit thesis', while because of its emphasis on gradual evolutionary change the functionalist account of the history of the family is referred to as 'the march of progress'.

Goode has argued that the monogamous nuclear family is spreading rapidly around the world as poorer parts of the world industrialise. The nuclear family is seen as the best, even the only, kind of family for the modern world.

The universal family

Functionalism was originally associated with anthropology, the study of cultures and societies around the world. George Peter Murdock gathered anthropological data from more than 200 societies around the world, both pre-industrial and industrial. He concluded that the family existed in all societies. He defined the family as:

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

This definition of the family is rather open, allowing for example polygamous families. However Murdock's work has often been taken to mean that it is the nuclear family that is universal.

Changing functions of the family

In the past, people had to rely on the family to meet many needs, for example, to care for them when they were sick or old, to lend or give money when they had

none, to teach them; a large family made it more likely that help would be available. Today these functions have been taken over to a large extent by institutions; we have hospitals, pensions, welfare benefits, schools and so on. It is no longer necessary to have a type of family that can fulfil these functions. Modern economies also need workers who are willing to move to where the jobs are; nuclear families can move more easily than extended ones.

According to Parsons, the family in the modern world has just two major functions: the primary socialisation of children and the stabilisation of adult personalities. Parents still need to teach young children the norms and values of their society, how to tell right from wrong and so on. The family also needs to provide comfort and security to its members in a world of impersonal, bureaucratic institutions.

Functionalism and gender roles

This idea of comfort and security points towards the functionalist view of gender roles within the family. The role of the man is said to be instrumental, that is, going out into the world and bringing back what is needed to support the family. The role of the woman is expressive, staying at home and providing emotional support. This division of labour is seen as natural. It follows that it is the man coming home from work who is most in need of comfort and security. His wife's role is to provide a warm, loving environment where he can relax and forget the cares of the world outside. This has been called the 'warm bath theory'.

Functionalism in context

Functionalism was the most common kind of sociology in the mid-twentieth century, but was more prevalent in the USA than in Britain. Functionalism, which emphasises the common values in a society, was much weakened by changes in American society in the 1960s, which revealed deep divisions over values; it was the period of Black Power, of Women's Liberation, of the anti-Vietnam War movement and of student protests. Looking back, it seems that functionalism was based on how privileged white American men (because most sociologists were men) saw the world before that time.

The cosy assumption that the American nuclear family was what the whole world needed was based on myths that were soon to be shattered.

The New Right and the nuclear family

The New Right is the term given to a set of ideas that became prominent in Britain and the USA in the 1980s. It is found in the writings of some sociologists, such as Charles Murray, but is more noticeable in journalistic and political writing. New Right ideas have been behind many government policies on the family in recent years. Whereas functionalism could assume that the nuclear family was widely accepted and approved, New Right thinkers are concerned by what they see as a series of changes, which they regard as undermining the nuclear family.

Changes of which the New Right are critical:

- the easier availability of divorce
- the easier availability of abortion
- increase in cohabitation (living together without being married)
- increase in lone parent families
- increase in the number of children born to women who are not married to the father
- women both caring for children and working long hours
- feminism (seen as responsible for making women unhappy with their traditional role)
- availability of welfare benefits, seen as creating a dependency culture

The New Right and lone parent families

New Right thinkers have been particularly concerned about boys being brought up by lone mothers. Without a father figure, they argue, boys do not learn how men should behave — they will be unable as adults to take on the instrumental role. The titles of books such as *Rising Crime and the Dismembered Family* by Norman Dennis reflect these concerns.

Responding to the New Right

The New Right agenda on the family has been criticised on several grounds. Many sociologists and others argue that the case against lone parent and other non-conventional families is not proven; there is much evidence suggesting that type of family is only one factor, and perhaps not an important one, leading to social problems.

Feminists point to the situation of many women in traditional nuclear families — exploited, subjected to violence or the threat of violence and deprived of opportunities to develop skills and talent by working outside the home. New Right thinkers want to go back to a 'golden age' of nuclear families. Not only is this not possible, but that golden age had a dark side to it.

Exam-style questions

AS questions

1 Define the term 'organic analogy' in functionalist theory.

2 marks

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2 Define the term 'function'.

2 marks

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Use this space to plan your essay and then write your essay on a separate sheet of paper and keep it with your workbook for reference.

6 Read the item below and answer the question that follows.

For much of the twentieth century, the functionalist approach, based on asking what functions for individuals and families were carried out by social institutions such as the family, was dominant in sociology. It has since been heavily criticised by, for example, feminists and Marxists.

Evaluate the functionalist approach to the study of families.

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7 Read the item below and answer the question that follows.

Some sociologists argue that the nuclear family is more effective than other types of family in carrying out essential functions. This view has been challenged by other sociologists who argue that other types of family can be at least as effective and who criticise the nuclear family.

Evaluate the view that the nuclear family is essential in all societies.

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Section 2

Alternative views of family

Feminism: the nuclear family as a trap for women



Fotolia

'It begins when you sink into his arms and ends with your arms in his sink.'

'A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.'

Feminist slogans, 1970s

Early feminist work on families

Oakley's research on housework, published in 1974, was one of the first to treat it in the same way as paid work outside the home. The sociology of work had until then been about male sociologists studying men working in factories, coal mines and so on. Oakley used concepts from that tradition, such as alienation and job satisfaction, to study how women did housework and what they felt about it. This study, and subsequent ones by other sociologists, found that women spent long hours on housework (with very little 'time off', even at weekends) and had ambivalent feelings about it, finding it monotonous, tiring and unending while taking pride in the end result and in the idea of working for the love of their families.

Dobash and Dobash found that violence against women by their husbands was a major social problem, arising from the patriarchal nature of families. Many attacks were because the man did not feel his wife was doing her domestic duties properly. The police were reluctant to intervene, seeing such violence as a domestic dispute that they should not get involved in. Much violence went unreported; beaten wives might be too frightened to seek help and might feel the police could not help.

In Barrett and McIntosh's *The Anti-Social Family* — the anti-social family of the title is the conventional nuclear family — the authors argue that the nuclear family is anti-social not only because women are oppressed within it but also because it is promoted as the only right way to live; all alternatives are seen as inadequate or even deviant. The many people who find that nuclear families do not work for them are then made to feel that they have failed in some way. Barrett and McIntosh describe the effects of this promotion of a familial ideology as familialism, analogous to racism and sexism.

Three strands of feminism

- 1 Liberal feminists see the main obstacles to women's equality in attitudes, practices and laws that can be changed without any fundamental changes to the structure of society. To change families, for example, they would favour challenging gender role socialisation in childhood, persuading men to do an equal share of housework and childcare and encouraging women to compete with men in employment. To both Marxist and radical feminists, such efforts, while positive, would be seen as incapable of bringing about the fundamental changes needed.
- 2 Radical feminists see the nuclear family as one expression of the most important characteristic of society, its patriarchal nature. Patriarchy can be seen in all areas of social life, but the family is where we are socialised into accepting it as normal and inevitable and where it is reinforced every day. For the most radical feminists, the only possible solution is for women to stop living in families and live separate lives from men, thus avoiding exploitative relationships.
- 3 Marxist feminists place a greater emphasis on the economic system, capitalism. They focus on the ways in which the exploitation of women within the family helps to sustain a wider, unjust system. For example, they would point out that women as mothers produce and nurture, without reward, the next generation of workers and that, as wives, through cooking, cleaning and also caring and soothing, they make it possible for men to return to work each day, keeping the system going.

Marxism: the family as economic exploitation

The work of Engels in the late nineteenth century provided an alternative to functionalism. He clearly located the nuclear family in an economic system based on class conflict and pointed out its role in the inheritance of private property. Later Marxists showed how the family helped capitalism in such ways as socialisation of the next generation into acceptance of capitalism and its values and putting male workers into situations where going on strike would be difficult because they would not be able to support their families. The family provided a space where men were powerful and could take out their anger and frustration about work on wives and children. It was also the main unit of consumption; in families people buy the consumer durables that help to keep the economy going.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is not another sociological perspective; it is fundamentally different, for it calls into question the usefulness of perspectives. Postmodernism is a term applied to a wide range of writings and ideas about recent social changes. At the heart of these lies the

idea that at some point in the late twentieth century we moved from the modern, industrial age into a new period in which old assumptions no longer hold. We now live, it is argued, in a period characterised by uncertainty and diversity.

One aspect of this is that there is now a far wider range of family types and roles within families available; for some people, at least, there is a range of options that was never available for earlier generations. Where once the great majority married, had children and stayed with one partner for life, options now available, and less disapproved of than in the past, include cohabiting, serial monogamy, staying single and same-sex relationships.

The emphasis on choice disguises the fact that many people have little choice. Our lives continue to be shaped by social forces around us. For some, the choices are even fewer than in the past, or are difficult. Unemployment, low income and ethnic and gender inequalities all limit choice. While postmodernism describes some interesting recent developments, it may be exaggerating their significance at the expense of recognising continuities from the recent past.

Exam-style questions

AS questions

- 1** Define the term 'patriarchy'.

2 marks

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- 2** Using one example, briefly explain why feminists argue that the nuclear family has led to the exploitation of women.

2 marks

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- 3** Using one example, briefly explain how the nuclear family can support the capitalist system.

2 marks

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- 6 marks

10 marks

[illegible]

A-level question

6 Read the item below and answer the question that follows.

The main sociological approaches to the study of families have been challenged by the postmodernist view, which focuses on the fragmentation of social life, the diversity of families and the choices individuals can now make. Other sociologists, however, argue that families have not changed as much as has been claimed.

Analyse two reasons why postmodernists reject other sociological theories of families.

10 marks

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AS and A-level question

Use this space to plan your essay and then write your essay on a separate sheet of paper and keep it with your workbook for reference.

7 Read the item below and answer the question that follows.

Feminist sociologists have argued that the patriarchal nature of society is based on families, where men have traditionally held power over women and children. The nuclear family in particular, where the man was assumed to be the head of the household, seemed to show this. This view is, however, rejected by other sociologists.

Evaluate the view that the main role of families is to maintain male dominance in society.

20 marks

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Section 3

Families and social policies

What are social policies?

Social policy refers to the plans and actions of government agencies, such as the health and social services, the welfare benefits system, schools and other public bodies.

Policies are based on laws that provide a framework within which these agencies operate.

Most social policies affect families in some way. Some are definitely aimed at families, such as laws governing marriage and divorce, abortion and contraception, child protection and so on. Others are not aimed at families but have important consequences for them, such as:

- compulsory schooling
- free National Health Service healthcare
- taxation policies

The context of social policies

Policies are decided upon by governments, but many other bodies, agencies and people contribute to the development of policies. Policies are also decided upon in a particular social context. The mass media are sometimes able to set an agenda for political decisions; they may give a high profile to a particular case or issue and, claiming to speak on behalf of the public, demand action.

One form that this may take is a moral panic. A moral panic occurs when mass media reporting of an event or issue causes widespread concern. The reporting is exaggerated, stigmatises a group seen as deviant and enforces a conservative ideology. Moral panics connected to the family have included those focused on:

- lone parent families in general, and teenage mothers in particular
- child abuse
- women who care for young children and work as well

Social policies are based on ideology; that is, they can be related to a set of ideas about the way things are and the way they should be.

Examples of social policies affecting families

- Laws on divorce
- Arrangements for maternity and paternity leave and pay
- The setting up of the Child Support Agency, which makes absent fathers pay towards the costs of bringing up their children
- Rules on who receives benefits; for example, child benefit is paid to the mother, not the father
- The amount and type of support given to people who care for long-term sick or disabled members of their family
- Making parents responsible for the behaviour of their children
- The rights of children as shown in, for example, the Children Act 1989, which says that children's interests must be put first in decisions affecting their future, such as who they live with after parents have separated or divorced

Ideologies and social policies

The ideology underlying many social policies has been based on the stereotypical 'cereal packet family'. It was assumed that the family would be based on a married couple who could be treated as a unit rather than as individuals (for example, for tax purposes). It was also assumed that there was a clear division of labour within the family by gender, that the man worked full time as the 'breadwinner' while the woman's main responsibility was the home.

It is possible to see the influence of these ideas in many long-standing social policies. For example, primary school hours are still based on the assumption that the mother is free to take her children to school and collect them at the end of the day. Women who work full time find it difficult or impossible to do this. Only recently has this been recognised through greater provision of after-school activities.

The wider picture: social policies in other times and places

Example	Policies	Outcome
China today	One child per family: various benefits for couples who have only one child	Many couples prefer to have a male child and have found ways of ensuring this, such as aborting female foetuses, so that there is now a growing gender imbalance with more males than females in younger age groups.
Romania, 1980s, under Communist government with falling living standards	Policies to increase birth rate: restricted contraception and abortion, infertility treatment centres, divorce made more difficult, marriage age lowered to 15, extra tax paid by unmarried adults and childless couples	Many couples had more children than they wanted or could afford, and many were given up for adoption
Nazi Germany, 1930s	Part of the Nazi ideology involved women's role being focused on being a mother. There were financial incentives to have children and a medal, the Cross of Honour of the German Mother, for women who had four or more children	The birth rate increased considerably. During the Second World War, however, many German women served in the armed forces or worked
Britain during the Second World War	1,450 nurseries for children of working mothers set up	This allowed women to work full time (for example, in factories or in agriculture), contributing to the war effort

Recent social policies in the UK

- All three main parties refer extensively to families in their manifestos.
- Conservative policies before 1997 were strongly New Right, based on supporting the traditional nuclear family, making absent fathers contribute financially to their children's upbringing through the Child Support Agency and discouraging other types of family.
- The Labour governments of 1997–2010 saw a family headed by a married couple as normally the best place to bring up children but also introduced policies that gave more status to other types of families; for example:
 - unmarried cohabiting couples (including gay couples) now able to adopt children
 - Civil Partnership Act 2005 — gay couples able in effect to get married
 - a series of policies aimed at lifting children out of poverty, such as Working Family Tax Credits, have particularly helped lone parents
 - subsidised nursery childcare, a substantial increase in maternity pay and the right of parents to ask for flexible working hours
- Labour family policies are partly influenced by New Right ideas but were more liberal and affected by wider anti-poverty measures.

2010–15 Coalition policies

Daily life for families was made harder by the austerity policies introduced by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government from 2010 to 2015. Many families had to rethink their domestic and work arrangements, for example by working longer hours, taking on an additional job or by switching roles so that

the father became primary carer. Some have resorted to shift parenting, working opposite shift patterns so that one parent is always with the children while the other works and so that childcare costs are avoided. This means, however, that the parents spend little time together.

In 2013 the Coalition passed legislation allowing same-sex couples to marry.

Case study: Luthfa and Minhaj Rahman

Luthfa and Minhaj are in their twenties and live in South London. They have a 1-year-old son. Since Luthfa returned to work after her maternity leave they have been shift parenting in order to avoid paying for childcare.

Luthfa works from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. as a personal assistant, while Minhaj works in the evenings as a waiter. He gets home from work about midnight each day.

Luthfa told the Family Commission: 'I didn't realise how hard it would be. By the time Minhaj gets home from work I am in bed. Then, in the morning, I am off to work again. Luckily my mum is also able to help out. We wouldn't be able to manage without the help and support of the family. It's great that our son gets to spend plenty of time with both his parents but it does mean that my husband and I get to spend very little time together as a couple. If only childcare was cheaper this would definitely take some of the strain off our family.'

Exam-style questions

AS questions

- 1** Define the term 'cereal packet family'.

2 marks

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- 2** Using one example, explain briefly how social policies can encourage people to live in a particular type of family.

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- 3** Outline three social policies that can be seen as supporting traditional nuclear families.

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- 4** Outline three social policies that have had an effect on roles and relationships within families.

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AS and A-level questions

- 5** Outline and explain two moral panics that have affected social policies about families.

10 marks

- 6** Read the item below and answer the question that follows.

Laws and other social policies can affect families in many ways. For example, New Right sociologists who are concerned by what they see as the decline of the nuclear family have been critical of policies that, for example, seem to encourage lone parent families by providing welfare benefits, and have advocated policies that would encourage marriage.

Evaluate sociological explanations of the relationship between social policies and the family.

20 marks
