

# **A Level Sociology**

## **Families and Households Essays**

Question

PEEC

Conclusion

Knowledge

Evaluation

Analysis

Introduction

**For AQA Paper 2 (7192/2)**

**Families and Households with Topics in Sociology**

## A pared down general mark scheme for 20 mark essays

Marks	Descriptor
<b>17-20</b>	<p>Sound, conceptually detailed knowledge of a range of relevant materia, good sophisticated understanding of the question and of the presented material. Appropriate material applied accurately and with sensitivity to the issues raised by the question.</p> <p>Analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant. Analysis will show clear explanation. Appropriate conclusions will be drawn.</p>
<b>13-16</b>	<p>Accurate, broad and/or deep but incomplete knowledge. Understands a number of significant aspects of the question; good understanding of the presented material.</p> <p>Application of material is largely explicitly relevant to the question, though some material may be inadequately focused.</p> <p>Some limited explicit evaluation e.g. the debate about the symmetrical family and/or some appropriate analysis, e.g. clear explanations of some of the presented material.</p>
<b>9-12</b>	<p>Largely accurate knowledge but limited range and depth. Understands some limited but significant aspects of the question; superficial understanding of the presented material.</p> <p>Applying listed material from the general topic area but with limited regard for its relevance to the issues raised by the question, or applying a narrow range of more relevant material.</p> <p>Evaluation limited at most to juxtaposition of competing positions or one to two isolated stated points. Analysis will be limited, with answers tending towards the descriptive.</p>
<b>5-8</b>	<p>Limited undeveloped knowledge, eg two to three insubstantial point. Understands only very limited aspects of the question; simplistic understanding of the presented material.</p> <p>Limited application of suitable material, and/or material often at a tangent to the demands of the question, e.g. drifting into a 'family and social change answer.</p> <p>Very limited, minimal or no evaluation. Attempts at analysis, if any, are thin and disjointed.</p>
<b>1-4</b>	<p>Very limited knowledge, e.g. one to two very insubstantial points about the family in general. Very little/no understanding of the question and of the presented material.</p> <p>Significant errors, and/or omissions, and/or significant incoherence in application of material. Minimal or no analysis or evaluation.</p>

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**Assess the view that the modern nuclear family is the most effective type of family unit in which to socialise children and stabilise adult personalities (20)**

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The above view is associated mainly with the Functionalist perspective, to an extent with the Marxist perspective, while Feminists tend to disagree.

George Murdock (1949) argued that the nuclear family performs four essential functions to meet the needs of society and its members: The stable satisfaction of the sex drive – which prevents the social disruption caused by a ‘sexual free for all’; the reproduction of the next generation and thus the continuation of society over time; thirdly, the socialisation of the young into society’s shared norms and values and finally he argued the family provides for society’s economic needs by providing food and shelter.

Murdock thus agrees with the two statements in the question and goes further, arguing that the nuclear family performs even more functions. Furthermore, he argued that the nuclear family was universal, following his study of over 250 different societies.

Some sociologists, however, criticise Murdock’s view as being too rose tinted – pointing out that conflict and disharmony can occur both within nuclear families and within societies where the nuclear family is dominant. A second criticism is that the nuclear family is not universal – Gough studied the Nayar of South India and found that women and men had several sexual partners, but this type of matrifocal family was functional for that society.

A second Functionalist, Talcott Parsons argued that the type of society affects the shape of the family – different societies require the family to perform different functions and so some types of family ‘fit in’ better with particular societies.

To illustrate this, Parsons argued that there were two basic types of society – modern industrial society and traditional pre-industrial society. He argued that the nuclear family fits the needs of industrial society and that the extended family fitted the needs of pre-industrial society. He argued that as society became industrialised, society had different needs, and that the nuclear family evolved to meet these needs. For example, one thing industrial society needed was a geographically mobile workforce – the nuclear family is appropriate here because it is more mobile than the extended family.

Parsons also argued that the family performs less functions with the move to industrialisation – as the health care and welfare functions come to be taken over by the state. However, the family becomes more specialised – and performs two ‘essential and irreducible functions’ – these are the two mentioned in the question – the primary socialisation of children is where we are first taught societies norms and values and learn to integrate with wider society and the stabilisation of adult personalities is where the family is the place of relaxation – the place to which one returns after a hard day of working to de - stress.

Parsons has, however been criticised, as with Murdock, for having a ‘rose tinted view’ – Feminists argue that women get an unfair deal in the traditional nuclear family, for example. A second criticism is that while he may have been right about the 1950s, when he was writing, the nuclear family seems less relevant in our post-modern age when many couples need dual incomes – meaning the nuclear family may be too small to effectively perform the two functions mentioned in the question.

The Marxist view of the family is that it does do what is stated in the question, but they criticise the Functionalist view, arguing that the family also performs functions for Capitalism. Firstly, they say it performs an 'ideological function' in that the family convinces children, through primary socialisation, that hierarchy is natural and inevitable. Secondly, they also see the family as acting as a unit of consumption – the family is seen by Capitalists as a something to make money out of – what with the pressure to 'keep up with the Joneses and 'pester power'

Thus, applying Marxism we learn that the Functionalist view is too optimistic – they see the Capitalist system as infiltrating family life, through advertising, for example, which creates conflict within the family, undermining its ability to harmoniously socialise children and stabilise adult personalities.

Finally, we come onto Feminism. Radical Feminists are especially critical of the view in the question. They argue, for example, that many nuclear families are characterised by domestic abuse and point to the rising divorce rates in recent years to suggest that the nuclear family is not necessarily the best type of family. Moreover, many Feminists have argued that the nuclear family and the traditional gender roles that go along with it has for too long performed an ideological function – this set up is projected as the norm in society, a norm which women have been under pressure to conform to and a norm which serves to benefit men and oppress women – because women end up becoming dependent on men in their traditional roles – so they see the nuclear family as being the primary institution through which patriarchy is reproduced, again criticising the rather rose tinted view of the Functionalist perspective on the family.

So to conclude, while the statement in the question may have appeared to be the case in the 1950s, this no longer appears to be the case in British society today.

**Assess the view that the main aim of the of the family is to serve the needs of capitalism (20)**

**Decode/ Intro:**

- View in question = Marxist/ Marxist Feminist View
- Capitalist system = class structure, Bourgeoisie own means of production, produce and compete to make a profit, Proletariat are exploited.
- The Marxist perspective argues that all institutions, including the nuclear family, benefit the bourgeoisie and help them to oppress and exploit the proletariat
- Marxists Feminists argue that Capitalism works through exploiting women more than men.

Four Points – which you should explain and expand	Four matched evaluation points
<p>Engels argues that the nuclear family emerged as a direct result of capitalism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Before Capitalism – Primitive Communism (equality) and the promiscuous hoard.</li> <li>- With Capitalism – Inequality – lead to monogamous nuclear family so that rich families could pass down their wealth to their children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Functionalists</b> = more neutral, not about capitalism, emergence of the nuclear family in response to industrial society (Parsons functional fit theory).</li> <li>- Too deterministic, we still live in a Capitalist society and the nuclear family is in decline.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The family is part of an ideological apparatus, helping to enforce a set of beliefs and values which ultimately benefit capitalism.</li> <li>- For example children are brought up with a parental figure that they are taught to obey. This teaches them discipline, which will benefit their bosses when they join the workforce, and less likely to question their position in later life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'Age-Patriarchy' is part of nearly all cultures, it didn't just come about in the nuclear family with Capitalism</li> <li>- <b>The New Right</b> argue that rather than being an ideological apparatus nuclear families benefit society as a whole because they are the most stable environment in which to bring up children.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The family acts as a unit of consumption: Marxists argue that the family generates profits by targeting advertising at children who then use their 'pester power' to get goods bought by their parents.</li> <li>- Also, adults are encouraged to consume.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Late modernists</b> argue the fact that the nuclear family appears to be in decline (high divorce, more single parent families) makes us more individualized, and advertisers more able to get to children.</li> <li>- Pressure to consume is not limited to nuclear families</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Marxist Feminists argue that women are the takers of shit within the nuclear family within Capitalist systems             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The male working class is exploited and thus stressed from work, women's role within the family is to 'destress them' – soaking up the misery caused by Capitalism</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Radical Feminists</b> argue that 'patriarchy comes before Capitalism' – the oppression of women within the family started before Capitalism and continued in Communist societies too.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Overall Evaluation/ Crunch Paragraph/ Concluding thoughts.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quite a narrow perspective, focuses only on how the nuclear family benefits Capitalism</li> <li>• Many criticisms which seem to suggest the perspective isn't very relevant today, mainly as the nuclear family has declined.</li> <li>• Other perspectives may be more relevant – e.g. Feminism</li> <li>• Moreover the personal Life Perspective / Postmodernism suggest that Marxism is analyzing the family in the wrong way – we should be looking at things from the 'ground up' – from the perspective of the individual rather than from the perspective of society as a whole.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Conclusion</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On balance, while some of the general ideas of Marxism (such as class/ exploitation) still apply in today's society, their ideas no longer seem to apply to the modern family, or lack of it!</li> </ul>
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## **Assess the view that the main aim of the of the family is to serve the needs of capitalism (20)**

### **Long Version**

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Capitalism is an economic system characterised by private ownership of means of production. The Marxist perspective argues that in many ways the family serves the needs of capitalism in a number of ways, ultimately benefitting the bourgeoisie and the proletariat remaining oppressed and exploited. Other perspectives however such as feminism would argue that serving the needs of capitalism is not the main aim of the family. They would argue instead that the family benefits males and reinforces a patriarchal society.

Engels argues that the nuclear family emerged as a direct result of capitalism. Primitive communism is the name given to society before capitalism had emerged. There was no private property and no family as such. Instead Engels called groups or tribes “the promiscuous horde” with no restrictions on sexual relationships. The introduction of capitalism meant that the wealthy wanted to secure control of the means of production. This brought around the monogamous nuclear family, as rich men had to ensure the paternity of their children so that they could pass down their property to legitimate heirs. This argument has been criticised by feminists who argue that this further reinforces patriarchy with women simply bearing children to provide men with legitimate heirs.

Functionalists however would dispute this view of the emergence of the nuclear family arguing instead that it came about in response to the demand of post-industrial society. Parsons functional fit theory explains how the family has evolved in keeping with the needs of society at that time. In post-industrial society when families farmed the land, they were typically extended, however after the industrial revolution the nuclear family emerged, creating a mobile workforce who could easily relocate to wherever work was available in the factories. This view has been criticised by Laslett who has argued that church records demonstrate that the extended family was already in decline and the nuclear family more popular even before the revolution, therefore cannot be seen as a direct response.

Marxists argued that the family can be seen as an ideological apparatus, helping to enforce a set of beliefs and values which ultimately benefit capitalism. For example children are brought up with a parental figure that they are taught to obey. This teaches them discipline, which will benefit their bosses when they join the workforce, but also teaches them about hierarchy and that inequality is inevitable making them less likely to question their position as an exploited proletariat when they go out to work, again benefitting capitalism. Again feminists have criticised this argument, due to the fact that children are socialised into the idea that the people in charge or at the top of the hierarchy are usually men again demonstrating that children are being socialised into gender specific roles in a patriarchal society.

Functionalists argue that rather than being an ideological apparatus spreading the ideas and values of capitalism, families benefit society as a whole through the function of primary socialisation. Functionalists argue that the family socialises children into the acceptable norms and values of society and ensures that order is maintained and deviance reduced. Marxists would challenge this

view arguing that society is made up of two opposing groups, with a conflict of interests, therefore they would not interpret the family as having a positive role, or society's agreeing on a set of shared norms and values.

Finally, Marxists argue that the family acts as a unit of consumption. The proletariat are exploited for their labour making consumer goods in factories which are then sold to them at a higher price than they were paid to produce them. Marxists argue that the family generates profits by targeting advertising at children who then use their 'pester power' to get goods bought by their parents. We also have a culture of 'keeping up with the Jones's' where we consume the latest consumer products, again benefiting capitalism by lining the pockets of the bourgeoisie. However the Marxist perspective only views there being two classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Some commentators would argue that recently we have seen an emergence of an underclass who despite demonstrating a culture of unemployment, can still buy consumer goods without having to be exploited for their labour.

In conclusion the Marxist perspective has a number of compelling arguments as to how the family may serve the needs of capitalism; however it is unclear whether this argument is valid, especially in today's diverse and rapidly changing society with a growing service sector and emergence of an underclass. Other perspectives such as feminism argue that the family does not serve the needs of capitalism, instead the needs of men, whereas functionalists focus on the positive functions of the family. Undeniably the family does hold benefits for its members by creating a supportive and loving environment for members, therefore to see it as purely benefiting capitalism would be short-sighted.

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## Assess the Feminist view of family life and relationships (20)

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1. **Liberal Feminists** -Agree with the 'march of progress' view of Young and Wilmott. They believe the following

- Now that women have formal, legal equality with men in the public sphere (the world of politics and work), the goal of female liberation and gender equality has been achieved.
- As a result, women now have freedom of choice about the gender roles they adopt within their relationships.
- They argue that women going into paid work has improved the lives of women in relationships
- They argue that the gradual movement towards gender equality in domestic roles supports their view
- They also argue that the increasing amount of family diversity supports their view that women now have much more freedom
- Women who are in traditional gender roles (in the expressive, housewife role for example) choose to be there.
- Liberal Feminists argue that the following social policies have successfully changed to role of women in the family –
  - The divorce act of 1969 gave women the right to divorce on an equal footing to men – which lead to a spike in the divorce rate
  - The equal pay act of 1972 was an important step towards women's independence from men
  - Increasingly generous maternity cover and pay made it easier for women to have children and then return to work.

2. **Criticisms of Liberal Feminism**

- Radical Feminists - women in employment still tend to be disproportionately responsible for "unpaid" domestic tasks and child rearing (dual burden/ triple shift)
- Radical Feminists – many relationships are still abusive to women (Domestic Violence)
- Liberal Feminist views are ethnocentric. They simply reflect the views and the position of white middle class women ignoring the inequalities experienced by, for example, black feminists.
- **Late Modernists such as Giddens** –notes that there is a downside to greater gender equality - with more choice, personal relationships inevitably become less stable and can be ended more or less at will by any partner!

3. **Radical Feminists** - argue that patriarchy (the ideal of male superiority) is so entrenched in society that mere policy changes alone are insufficient to bring about gender equality. They argue, for example, that despite the equal pay act, sexism still exists in the sphere of work –

- Anne Oakley and the housewife role.... Rather than the March of Progress view
- There is little evidence of the 'new man' who does their fair share of domestic chores. They argue women have acquired the 'dual burden' of paid work and unpaid housework and the family remains patriarchal – men benefit from women's paid earnings and their domestic labour.



- Some Feminists even argue that overly generous maternity cover compared to paternity cover reinforces the idea that women should be the primary child carer, unintentionally disadvantaging women
  - Duncsmobe and Marsden (1995) argue that women suffer from the 'triple shift' where they have to do paid work, domestic work and 'emotion work' – being expected to take on the emotional burden of caring for children.
  - This last point is more difficult to assess as it is much harder to quantify emotion work compared to the amounts of domestic work and paid work carried out by men and women.
  - Class differences also play a role – with working class mothers suffering more because they cannot afford childcare.
  - Mirlees- Black points out that ¼ women experience domestic violence – and many are reluctant to leave their partner –
4. **The New Right** - argue that Feminists are too critical of the traditional nuclear family –they say this is the most stable environment in which to bring up children.

#### 5. Post modernists

Argue that we no longer live in a 'modern world' with its orderly structures such as the nuclear family. Instead we now live in a chaotic post-modern age in which family structures are much more fragmented and we have more choice and diversity of family types. **Post-Modernists** (and **Social Action Theorists**) argue that Feminists ignore the fact that individual actors make choices about family life and relationships. Structural approaches wrongly assume that our actions are shaped and dictated by the 'needs of society'

Social Action Theorists and Post-Modernists prefer 'life course analyses as a way of understanding family life. Life course analysis focuses individual family members and their experiences of family life, focussing on how individuals think about their families and how they make choices and decisions about their family relationships throughout the course of their lives. **This criticises the over generalised theories of Feminism.**

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## Assess Sociological explanations for changes in the patterns of marriage and cohabitation

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There have been many changes in the patterns of marriage and cohabitation in the last 40 years. This is due a number of different factors including secularisation and changing attitudes towards the value of marriage and larger acceptance of cohabitation. Divorce rates have also influenced patterns of marriages and remarriages – likewise has women’s liberation and changing attitudes in women’s position.

Secularisation - or the decreased value of religion in society has had a large impact on marriage roles and cohabitation. Marriage is now viewed as a contract of love, friendship and trust – often resulting in divorce if these fail to continue throughout the marriage (only ½ of marriages last for ten years). This is juxtaposed to the religious nature of marriage in the past – a binding contract – ‘til death do us part’. Cohabitation has also become less frowned upon. However, this trend seems to be generational. 80% of 16-24 year olds said it was acceptable to cohabit in 2007, compared to only 44% of the 56-64 year olds.

These changes in societal values have resulted in a decrease of marriage – due to declining of value and the increasing accessibility of divorce whilst roles of cohabitation are still on a steady incline.

The divorce act of 1969 made irretrievable breakdown the sole basis for attaining divorce. This caused a large influx of divorce, peaking in 1999. The seemingly stable idea of marriage now began to contract for many people. If their partner was not suitable, divorce was now available, which is another factor for the rise in cohabitation and the decrease in marriage.

Cohabitation is now seen as an option instead of marriage supporting more freedom and flexibility. Living together apart is one example of a serious relationship type where people do not live together. However, 80% of cohabitating partners intend to marry.

A decrease in secularisation has brought about an acceptance of cohabitation of same sex couples. The 2004 civil partnership act also allowed homosexual couples to marry – some sociologists argue that cohabitation – particularly a lesbian couple – is a way of resisting gender scripts and norms.

This is relative to women’s liberation – women now resist the idea of marriage due to financial independent and stability. Also, women are increasingly resisting the idea of segregated conjugal roles for a more symmetrical relationship. For many women, cohabitation offers these opportunities. Availability of contraception has lessened the obligation of having to conceive children when in a long term relationship. Feminists argue this is a movement of resistance towards the patriarchal institutions of marriage not the family as such.

Concluding, patterns of marriage and cohabitation have changed significantly due to divorce, women’s liberation and secularisation. Secularisation is perhaps the basis for the change due to social change in attitudes towards cohabitation and marriage. However, women’s liberation and divorce further instil this idea, offering more choice to the individual.

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## Assess the view that relationships in Britain are characterised by Symmetry (20)

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### *Read the essay below then award it mark out of 20*

The idea that relationships are increasingly characterised by symmetry is based on Young and Wilmott's (1973) concept of the symmetrical family. Based on a study of families in East Long, they took a 'march of progress' view of the history of the family, and argued that there was a long term trend away from the traditional nuclear family with its segregated conjugal roles in which men took on the instrumental (breadwinner) role and women took on the expressive (caring) role.

According to W and Y, the symmetrical family was on the increase among younger couples. The SF was characterised by joint conjugal roles in which men and women were more equal in three ways.... (1) women were increasingly going out to work full time (2) men were increasingly helping with housework and child care and (3) couples were increasingly spending their leisure time together rather than separately.

40 years On from Y and W, the idea that modern relationships are generally characterised by equality has been suggested by late-modern thinkers Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, who talk of the Pure relationship and the negotiated family – in which men and women are essentially free to construct a relationship that suits them. Both of these thinkers, along with Liberal Feminists in general argue that in recent decades relationships have become more egalitarian because women today have greater independence – due to the normalisation of contraception (which Giddens refers to as plastic sexuality) which has given women control over the reproductive process, which means in women delaying childbirth the number of 20-24 year olds having children has halved in 40 years), and women also have greater independence because of greater opportunities in education and work – women now outperform men in all levels of education and 25% of households today have women as the main 'breadwinner'.

However, not all observers are convinced that we have achieved symmetry in relationships. For a start, it is now 45 years since the equal pay act, and it remains the case that women still, on average, earn less than men, suggesting that in terms of earning power, women are not as 'free' as men to leave relationships, as there are still 75% of households in which men earn more than women.

Radical Feminists also point out that many relationships are still characterised by women taking on the 'dual burden' and evidence of this lies in numerous quantitative studies of 'who does the housework' – which demonstrate that women do approximately 7 hours more housework a week than men, the equivalent of a full working day more. However, this is more likely to be the case lower down the social class scale, as couples at the top can afford to pay someone else to do the household chores.

When couples have children, women are still the primary child carers, and only 10% of families have the father as the main carer. It is also the case that single parent families are most likely to be headed by a woman (again in 90% of cases.) and this seems to be the case across all social classes, and ethnic groups. This is evidence of the triple shift, with women doing more emotion work. However, recent changes in paternity pay might change this...

In relation to all of the above, it is also worth pointing out that there are ethnic variations in the trend to symmetry – white, middle class relationships may well be characterised by symmetry, but many Asian families are still very traditional, and about 50% of Pakistani-British households are of the traditional nuclear family form (something the New Right would be in favour of).

Radical Feminists also point out that in intimate aspects of modern relationships; women seem to be worse off than men. Women are the victims of DV in about 85% of cases, and the recent pornification of culture seems to be encouraging young men to view women as sex-objects, possibly leading to increasing amounts of rape-in-relationships (defined as normal in boys' peer groups).

So overall, in conclusion, it seems that although there is a trend to symmetry, claims that modern relationships are equal are most certainly exaggerated based on national level evidence.

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## Assess the view that the family has become more child-centred (20)

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POINTS IN RED

EXPLANATION IN GREEN

EVALUATION IN BLUE

Introduction – The view in the question is associated with the ‘March of Progress view’ of childhood - that society and the family have both become more child centred.

### Four possible points for the view in the question

- Point 1 – Child welfare policies protect children in the family – *Laws prevent them from working, children MUST go to school, children have rights, social services can intervene if necessary*

Evaluation – It is possible to interpret these laws as preventing the family from being more child centred – e.g. compulsory schooling.

- Point 2 – Adults have fewer children – *This enables them to spend more time with each child. The amount time parents spend with children has increased in recent decades*

Evaluation – This is not true for all families – Many parents, especially fathers work long hours and cannot see their children.

- Point 3 – Parents spend more time with their children

Evaluation – Sociologists such as Furedi suggest this is a negative side of the ‘child centred’ family – Helicopter parents, cotton wool kids who are dependent and anxious – resulting in KIdults.

- Point 4– Parents spend more money on their children

Evaluate using Marxism

### Five Possible Points against the view in the question

- Point 1 - Sue Palmer argues that the family isn't child centred because of toxic childhood

*This is where rapid social and technological changes have led to children being harmed – e.g. fast food/ computer games/ long hours worked by parents*

- Point 2 - Neil Postman argues that childhood is disappearing
- Point 3 - Conflict theorists point out there is a ‘dark side’ of family life for some children
- Point 4 – Higher rates of divorce suggest the family is not child centred
- Point 5 – Changing roles for women suggests women are less focussed on their children

Evaluation – The New Right would suggest this is a negative development, but Feminists argue that this means positive role models for girls growing up with working mothers

Conclusion – While parents and society like to think of the family as being more child centred, and where this is the case, it is not at all clear that this is a good thing. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that this is not the case – Changing women’s roles, new technologies, government policies all seem to work against child centredness. The view in the question is far from the last word on this topic.

## Assess the view that the 'childhood is disappearing' (20)

<p><b>Neil Postman – Childhood is disappearing</b></p>	<p>Neil Postman (1994) argues that 'childhood' is disappearing at a dazzling speed. Three pieces of evidence that support this view are that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children now have the same rights as adults</li> <li>• Traditional children's games are disappearing</li> <li>• Children are increasingly acting like adults – committing more crime for example</li> </ul> <p>Postman argues that the decline of childhood is due to the rise of television culture. He argues that TV and information technology more generally has destroyed the previous information hierarchy. Children no longer require specialist skills to access information.</p> <p>As a result the adult authority breaks down and the ignorance of childhood is replaced with knowledge and cynicism</p>
<p><b>Toxic childhood</b></p>	<p>Sue Palmer points out that we live in an age of 'Toxic Childhood'. She says that rapid cultural and technological changes in the past 25 years have damaged children's physical, emotional and intellectual development. They are, in effect made to grow up quicker, suggesting that the boundary between adulthood and childhood is breaking down. These changes stem from junk food, computer games and intensive marketing to children, to the long hours worked by parents and by the growing emphasis on testing in education.</p> <p>Concerns have also been expressed about young people's behaviour. Julia Margo and Mike Dixon for example point out that UK children are near the top of international league tables for obesity, self-harm, drug and alcohol abuse and teen pregnancies.</p>
<p><b>More supporting evidence for Postman</b></p>	<p>Two further pieces of evidence/ examples that support Postman's view are...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have become more exposed to the adult world through the internet – they are exposed to sex and violence at much younger ages than previously</li> <li>• Children increasingly act like adults – in terms of dress for example.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Infantilisation</b></p>	<p>Frank Furedi argues that childhood is characterised by 'cotton wool kids' – children are too protected and have too little freedom and independence which prevents them from growing up and becoming independent, free thinking adults. Instead even people in their 30s act like children today.</p>
<p><b>A separate childhood culture</b></p>	<p>Iona Opie argues that childhood is still a separate category..... There is still strong evidence of a separation between childhood and adulthood.</p> <p>Another criticism of Postman is that 'Western notions of 'childhood' as a distinct category is actually spreading across the world.</p>

<b>More criticisms of Postman</b>	<p>There are plenty of other examples of where the boundary between childhood and adulthood remains strong...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The extension of schooling keeps children in a state of childhood for longer</li><li>• Children's freedom is more restricted today than ever</li></ul> <p>Finally, Jens Qvortrup argues that the number of adults with children is actually falling and so there are less people today campaigning for children's rights.</p>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>In conclusion.. it is difficult to say whether childhood is disappearing as it is socially constructed and the boundaries between childhood and adulthood are continually shifting.</p>

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**Assess the view that government policies and laws have led to an increase in family diversity  
(20)**

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One only needs to look through history at cross cultural examples of social policy to confirm that the impact that this can have on the family can be extreme. Take for example the one child policy in China which has resulted in thousands of female babies being abandoned at birth. In Germany, during the rule of the Nazi Government during the 1930's disabled individuals and homosexuals were sterilised and the Aryan race encouraged to procreate and in the Soviet Union it was believed at one time that the family would die out altogether. In the UK, sociologists studying social policy tend to focus their interest on whether social policy encourages the conventional family or whether in fact social policy reflects the fact that families are diversifying and supports these changes.

The conservative party who were in power between 1979 and 1997 under Margaret Thatcher and John Major have been accused of supporting the traditional family at the expense of non-conventional families due to their New Right ideology. This ideology arguably has resulted in policies which encourage more conventional family types and are not as supportive of family diversity. The sociologist Charles Murray argues that the underclass had been created due to overgenerous state hand-outs and single parent families leading to moral decline and juvenile delinquency. As a result the government introduced a back to basics campaign, aimed at reviving the 'golden age of the family'. One policy which illustrates this mentality is the amendments made to taxation policy so that cohabiting couples could no longer claim more in tax allowances than married couples, therefore encouraging cohabiting couples to marry and possibly reduce the amount of children born outside of wedlock. Abbott and Wallace (1992) however claim that although based in new right ideology the conservative party took a more balanced approach to family life by making divorce easier to obtain and giving illegitimate children the same rights as those born to married parents. However, regardless of ideology, it is evident that social policy can have an impact on family life with some policies encouraging marriage over cohabitation thus reinforcing traditional family values.

The labour party however, tended to introduce policies more in line with their support of family diversity. They introduced a number of policies which have led to a more diverse landscape of families in the United Kingdom. The sociologist Jenny Sommerville (2000) claims that Tony Blair's conservative government increased expectations about parental responsibility whilst also recognising diversity. One policy which illustrates this is the legislation introduced which allowed civil partnerships for gay and lesbian couples and also later on gave them the right to adopt children and is an example of policy adopting more individualistic gender regimes than the previous conservative government. However labour have still been accused of conforming to familial ideology in that policy is largely focused on motherhood rather than fatherhood or parenting in general, for example illustrated in limited rights of father to take paid paternity leave. Despite this however, it is important to recognise the progress made through forward thinking policies such as the civil partnership act which have directly impacted upon family life and diversified the family.

Other commentators have argued that social policy can be used as a form of state control to monitor families to ensure the family is performing the intended function. Power is diffused throughout society to health visitors, doctors, social workers to ensure quality of parenting. Donzelot (1977) uses Foucault's concept of surveillance to argue that professionals carrying out observation and monitoring of families are in fact exercising power and control, effectively 'policing families'. This concept can be seen in social policy which allows parents of truanting students to be prosecuted and made to attend



parenting classes. Other theorists would disagree with this idea on the basis that the family tend to some extent to be seen as a private sphere and therefore social policy only ever skims the surface of family life having little impact in reality. In conclusion to this point, although the concept of surveillance is extreme, it does illustrate the extent to which social policy can directly impact upon parenting of children, which will have an impact on the nature of family life with quality parenting encouraged.

In conclusion, the political ideology behind government that implements social policy can directly impact on the nature and extent of family diversity. Although not as extreme as cross cultural examples, there are several instances of social policy which have facilitated wider diversity such as the civil partnership act, the divorce law reform act and maternity allowances to name but a few. Many sociologists however still hold the view that most social policy will only intervene in family life to a limited extent.

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## Examine the reasons for changes in the birth rate and family size (20)

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### Declining birth rate 1900-2000 – 5 points – *with selected explanations/ elaborations*

1. Technological changes
  - *Contraception.... Sexuality not linked to reproduction*
  - *Link to secularisation*
  - *Link to Feminism – women have control over their reproduction*
  - *Also abortion*
2. Decline in Infant Mortality Rate
3. Changes in women's roles
4. Policy changes
5. Attitudinal changes - *postmodernism and the pure relationship*

### Analysis/ evaluation points

- Significant differences by ethnicity
- Most people still choose to have babies, just later
- Birth rates now going back up again

### **Recent Increasing birth rate since 2000 – 3 points** - *with selected explanations/ elaborations*

1. Policy changes - *New Labour – Welfare policies made it cheaper for couples to have children*
2. Higher number of immigrants with higher fertility rates
3. Normalisation of later child birth

### Analysis/ evaluation points

- Beck/ Giddens say changing women's roles the most important factor which explains changes in the birth rate,
- But technology and policy changes need to be in place alongside changing women's roles
- Economic factors also seem to be important.
- Feminists argue = good/ Postmodernists argue shows increasing choice.

### Declining family size – 5 points – *with selected explanations and elaborations*

1. Children no longer an economic asset
2. Cost of having children increased
3. Functional fit theory – decline of extended family - *Smaller family is more mobile, fits industrial society*
4. Increase in the divorce rate - *Creates more single parent families*
5. Women having babies later (changing gender roles) - *Simply less time for more kids*

### Increasing family size

- Increase in multigenerational households - *cost of living/ Kidults*
- Asian families generally larger/ Also immigrants

### Analysis/ evaluation points/ conclusion

- Number of different factors explain these trends
- Not simply a matter of people just choosing
- There are still structural factors (e.g. money) which account for changes in birth rate and family size.