**4 FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS**

**4.1 THE FAMILY, SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

p.225 GETTING YOU THINKING

Please note: The final three words of the summary of the 21st century Family Life Survey should be ‘**same**-sex parents’, not ‘**single**-sex parents’

**1.** A decline in morality; an increase in the number of children born outside marriage - especially to single mothers; families no longer sitting down to meals together; parents fighting with their children over the amount of time the latter spend playing computer games or watching television.

**2.** Higher levels of: sexual imagery in the media; drug use; violence; bad language.

**3.** The government not doing enough to protect the nuclear family and focusing on the needs of single mums and same-sex parents.

**4.** The question invites students to express an opinion.

**5.** The question invites students to express an opinion.

p.230 focus on research: Industrialisation and the nuclear family

**1.** Laslett (1972) argues that the extended family was not the norm in the pre-industrial period; Anderson (1971) found that the extended family was common after the Industrial Revolution had more or less finished in the middle of the 19th century, based on his case-study of Preston.

**2**. It saves them time and money not having to collect the data themselves; it may be impossible to collect relevant primary data when one is researching the past; since these records were collected officially they should be reasonably valid and reliable.

**3.** Laslett used secondary quantitative data (i.e. statistical data produced by someone other than the researcher him/herself). Qualitative sociologists would argue that such data sheds no light on the quality of family life or the meaning that family life held for those involved. For example, although people lived in nuclear households they might nevertheless have attached significance to relationships with their wider kin.

**4.** Functionalists argue that the family had evolved from a predominantly extended form in preindustrial times to a predominantly nuclear form at the time they were writing because the nuclear family is a better fit in terms of meeting the needs of a modern industrial society. Additionally, they argued that structural differentiation has meant that the family now performs a much narrower range of functions.

Critics of this theory have made a number of points:

* See answers to Q1
* Fletcher has argued that the family continues to perform a wide range of functions, even if the exact nature of some of these functions has been modified e.g. the economic function is now one of consumption rather than production.
* Interpretivist sociologists argue that Parsons presents an over-socialised view of the role of the family in primary socialisation
* Parsons has ignored the ‘dark side’ of family life e.g. the occurrence of physical and sexual abuse within families
* The picture is now rather dated as there has been a growth in family diversity, in part because of the growth in ethnic minorities with other family structures.

p.238 FOCUS ON SKILLS: FEMINIST EXPLANATIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**1.** Parents, peer groups and media (tabloid newspapers and lads’ magazines).

**2.** Being prepared to act violently is one of the possible consequences of coming to value aggression (although more traditional forms of masculinity would see the use of violence against those who are physically weaker as unmanly).

**3.** The idea of a ‘crisis in masculinity’ is linked with social changes that have undermined the traditional assumptions behind male superiority associated with the ‘breadwinner’ role, being the head of the household, being better qualified and so on. Some commentators have suggested that the resulting insecurity felt by some men has led them to seek to exercise control over their female partners if they think there is a risk that they might leave them.

**4.** Brookman’s research made use of methodological pluralism (i.e. used a number of different research techniques). This increases its validity. In depth interviews allow interviewees to answer in their own words at length, which also increases validity. Finally, the fact that in 80 per cent of the cases where females had been murdered they were in the process of leaving their partners or were suspected of being unfaithful makes the suggested link between male insecurity and murder more plausible.

However, the research is suggestive rather than conclusive. Interviewees can lie. There may be other possible explanations for the facts uncovered. Male insecurity may be a necessary, but not a sufficient, cause of murder. It’s unclear whether Brookman’s sample was representative.

**5.** Feminist theories provide a plausible explanation for the ubiquity (i.e. widespread nature) of male violence against female partners. However, they cannot explain domestic violence perpetrated by females against males or by partners in gay or lesbian couples.

p.241 Check your understanding

**1.** Production, skills training (education), health care and welfare.

**2**. ‘Structural differentiation’ refers to the process whereby the institutional organisation of society becomes increasingly complex (i.e. diverse) and the functions performed by each social institution become more specialised. In the case of the family, many of its functions were taken over by more specialised institutions such as the NHS so that it could focus exclusively on primary socialisation and the stabilisation of the adult personality.

**3.** A ‘symmetrical family’ is a type of nuclear family in which the roles of husband and wife increasingly overlap whilst not being exactly the same and in which domestic labour, child care and authority are increasingly shared.

**4.** Functionalist perspectives in sociology start from the proposition that society is like a biological organism (the ‘organic analogy’) such as a human body. Just as bodies have needs which must be met if they are to survive and flourish, so too do societies. The needs of bodies are met by organs – such as the heart, the kidneys, and the lungs – each of which performs certain functions for the whole. In an analogous way, in the view of functionalist sociologists, the needs of societies are met by social institutions, such as the family, schools, religion, etc. So when functionalists describe the family as ‘functional’, they mean that the family as a social institution meets certain societal needs that are essential for a society’s survival, for example, the family contributes to value consensus by making sure the next generation is socialised into shared and common values.

**5.** The ‘dark side of the family’ refers to those features of family life that are generally hidden from the view of outsiders which have negative consequences for its members such as domestic violence, child abuse, the psychological costs of divorce and so on.

**6.** The symmetrical family became the dominant family form of the 20th century according to Willmott and Young because: the growth of the welfare state and full employment in the 1950s undermined the need for support from the extended family, increasing social mobility was often associated with geographical mobility and slum clearance saw many working class families rehoused in council estates and new towns, severing their links with extended kin.

**7.** According to functionalists, the nuclear family is functional for both (modern) society and its members because: it provides primary socialisation, stabilises adult personality, enables the reproduction of the population in a stable environment, acts as a unit of consumption and facilitates geographical mobility.

**8**. Marxists argue that the nuclear family benefits capitalism, rather than society at large, because it reproduces the labour force needed by capital, it soaks up the frustrations and resentments experienced by workers and it provides the demand for consumer goods on which the profitability of capitalist enterprises depends.

**9.** The four types of feminism are Marxist, radical, liberal and difference feminism. All feminists share a concern with gender inequality and patriarchy. However, they differ in their views about the source of female subordination, the extent to which women can be seen as a single subordinated group and the way forward. For Marxist feminists, gender equality will only be possible once capitalism is overthrown; for radical feminists it requires an end to patriarchy; for liberal feminists it requires reforms within capitalism and for difference feminists it requires recognition of the different social circumstances facing different groups of women such as those brought about by social class, ethnicity and religion.

**10.** Women in the UK have gained considerable power both within and beyond the family in the last 50 years.

The increasing employment of married women has altered their position within the family as they have greater economic clout. Changes in divorce laws have given women greater power in choosing to end a marriage. Also, the growth of female controlled contraception and changes in the law relating to abortion has given them greater reproductive control.

Outside the family, increased educational success has widened their options for employment and legislation has outlawed unequal pay for equal work and employment discrimination. Legislation has also given women more choices in relation to maternity and employment. Finally, the recognition and general condemnation of sexism has also undermined at least some aspects of patriarchy.

**11.** Some feminists believe that the family oppresses and exploits women because: they see the domestic labour and child care she performs as unpaid and often taken for granted; they see the emotional work she does in supporting other family members as largely unreciprocated and because many women experience various forms of abuse within the family at the hands of their husbands/partners.

**4.2 THE FAMILY AND SOCIAL POLICY**

P.246 FOCUS ON SKILLS: EARLY CHILDHOOD UNDER LaBOUR

**1.** The boy born in 2009 could expect: to spend more time at home with his mother in the first year; to be breastfed; to attend a formal childcare setting before three and to access higher quality schooling earlier; to experience less harsh parenting and greater stimulation in the home.

**2.** The boy’s health was likely to have been better than his sister’s because he was less likely to have been born at a low birth weight and because his mother would have had greater access to health related advice (e.g. through Sure Start).

**3.** Labour governments between 1997 and 2010 introduced a number of policies which narrowed class inequalities: they introduced Sure Start centres in 1998, a National Minimum Wage in 1999 and Child Tax Credits for all families paying income tax in 2003. All of these helped to narrow the gap between more deprived and more affluent families despite the view of New Right sociologists that these policies have created a ‘nanny state’ Both Bradshaw and Stewart believe that these family policies were relatively successful because child neglect and abuse fell between 2000 and 2010 and British children reported that they were more ‘happy’ with their family in international surveys.

P.248 FOCUS ON SKILLS: TROUBLED FAMILIES

**1.** Cameron sees absent fathers as a symptom of a more general set of problems related to families which struggle financially and which fail to socialise children adequately. These problems include crime, the belief that they do not have to work and can be dependent on benefits, alcohol abuse, drug addiction, riots and anti-social or anti-neighbourly behaviour.

**2.** The New Right see the traditional family as the bulwark of social order and social stability. Cameron blames the 2011 riots on ‘a slow motion moral collapse’ which he associates with the collapse of the traditional nuclear family.

**3.** Owen Jones in his book *Chavs* (2011) argues that the last few decades have seen a growing demonisation of the working class as “chavs”, members of an ‘underclass’ who are both permanently unemployed and unemployable, happy to live off benefits, and given to petty crime, racism and unwanted pregnancies. In reality, Jones argues, what has happened has been the systematic destruction of working-class communities, jobs and workplaces (linked to globalisation and neoliberal economic policies), which has created council housing estates and areas of low quality, privately rented accommodation where few jobs are available and where those that are available are low paid and insecure.

That there are individuals and families that are both troubled and, indeed, troublesome is not in dispute. What is at issue is whether these problems are restricted to a small minority of the population who have largely been the authors of their own fate, or whether it is that the problems associated with growing class inequalities have simply hit this group the hardestand that they have then been vilified as the cause of wider problems in society.

P.250 check your understanding

**1.** New Right sociologists believe that social policy should support the traditional nuclear family, heterosexual marriage for life, respect for authority and financial self sufficiency.

**2.** The legalisation of abortion, the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the liberalisation of divorce laws and the supporting of single-parent families.

**3.** ‘Familial ideology’ is a set of beliefs which affirm the desirability of the traditional nuclear family, for example, a family comprising of two generations in which a married, heterosexual couple take care of their biological offspring, with the husband acting as the breadwinner and the wife as the homemaker.

**4.** The Coalition government defined ‘troubled families’ as households who:

* are involved in crime and anti-social behaviour
* have children who persistently truant from school
* have adults who have never worked or who are long-term unemployed and are therefore welfare dependent (Note: a typographical error in the book means that it refers to the ‘long-term employed’.)
* are a high cost to the public purse in terms of what they claim from the state and other problems such as poor health.

**5**. The New Right see feminist ideas as turning the ‘natural’ order of things upside down and undermining the traditional nuclear family by, for example, encouraging women to be financially independent.

**6**. New Right sociologists see the welfare state as undermining the traditional nuclear family and (traditional) morality by, for example, providing support for single parent families and gay and lesbian families.

**7.** ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ are value-judgements. What might be viewed as good from a New Right perspective might be bad as viewed from a feminist perspective, for example. Thus, Labour’s encouragement of paid employment for mothers would be seen as undesirable by New Right commentators, but desirable by feminists. On the other hand, the reduction in child poverty under Labour is likely to be viewed as good by all commentators.

**8.** The Coalition government sought to strengthen marriage by introducing a Marriage Allowance (a tax break for married couples) worth up to £212 per year and by extending the right to marry to gay men and lesbian couples.

In terms of family policy, the Coalition government introduced tax-free childcare and additional childcare support for low income families through Universal Credit. It also introduced shared parental leave and increased government funding for relationship support. Coalition family policy focused on ‘troubled families’ (see Answer to Q4) and, when David Cameron was returned as PM in 2015, he announced an extension of the programme because of its claimed success. However, the result of the austerity policies pursued by the Coalition government have impacted severely on the poorest and most vulnerable families according to Bradshaw (2013) and resulted in a rise in child poverty.

**9.** All governments desire to be seen as championing marriage and the (nuclear) family since the majority of the population view this as the ‘ideal’ arrangement, including those living in single-parent families. However as social mores change, so do government policies. Few would have anticipated that a government led by a Conservative PM (David Cameron) would have passed legislation enabling gay men and lesbians to marry, for example. In 2014, the Coalition government introduced a new ‘families test’ involving 5 questions that all proposed policies or legislation would need to address before they could be agreed by Ministers. (Note: be careful not to confuse the nuclear family with the *traditional* nuclear family of male breadwinner and female housewife. The nuclear family can take many different forms.)

**4.3 DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND FAMILY LIFE**

P.256 FOCUS ON RESEARCH: WOMEN WHO CHOOSE CHILDLESSNESS FAIR TO MATCH THE STEREOTYPES

**1.** The survey can be described as a piece of qualitative research since, although it offers some numerical data, it was mainly concerned with exploring how the interviewees explained their childlessness in their own words.

**2.** The study found ‘little evidence’ that childlessness was the result of alternative values or selfishness.

**3.** Parenthood was viewed as involving unwanted disruption and change as well as a heightened risk of financial insecurity.

**4.** The view that a growth in voluntary childlessness ‘undermines the nuclear family unit’ would only be true if it were to reach much higher levels than currently exist. Indeed, the authors of the study state that: “The evidence presented here suggests that now is not the time for direct intervention in Britain - fertility rates may be low, but in fact the UK has one of the higher fertility rates in the European Community”.

P.260 FOCUS ON SKILLS: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GRANDPARENTS AND   
TEENAGE GRANDCHILDREN

**1.** Material support took the form of financial support, from pocket money to school fees.

**2.** Grandchildren benefit from being able to share problems and concerns with grandparents. Grandparents can also act as intermediaries between grandchildren and their parents.

**3.** When grandchildren are young, grandparents often provide childcare and/or outings and teach their grandchildren skills. As they get older, the relationship tends to revolve around talking and giving advice. During teenage years the direction of care and support tends to reverse.

**4.** **Benefits:** financial – spreading housing and living costs among a larger number of people is likely to produce savings; practical – grandparents are able to help with childcare and grandchildren can help with care of grandparents as they get older; safety – domestic abuse is less likely to take place unnoticed; emotional – less risk of loneliness in old age and more people around to provide emotional support when needed.

**Challenges:** there may be generational differences in values and social norms that could cause conflict, e.g. in relation to child rearing; it may be more difficult to gain privacy when desired; there could be conflicts over the allocation of domestic bills; the parent whose own parents are living with them may experience conflicts of loyalty between them and their husband/wife.

P.264 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**1.** Among the reasons for the decline in the birth rate in the UK between 1900 and 2000 are: the decline in the infant mortality rate in the first 60 years of the century which meant that couples could achieve their desired family size with fewer babies; changes in women’s attitudes to their purposes in life in the second half of the century (with a decline in the priority given to motherhood); rising aspirations in terms of standards of living leading couples to limit the number of children they had for financial reasons.

**2.** The main reasons for the fall in infant mortality in the first half of the 20th century were not medical, but to do with changes in society: improved sanitation and drinking water, improved knowledge and education about hygiene and improvement in living standards, particularly diet and nutrition.

**3.** Four reasons why women’s attitudes towards child bearing changed in the second half of the 20th century were: the influence of the Women’s Liberation Movement on attitudes towards female dependence on men; the growing educational success of girls and women; the growing movement of married women into employment; the growing availability of effective contraception controlled by women (e.g. the contraceptive pill from the Sixties).

**4.** The general fertility rate refers to the average number of children women of child bearing age (defined as 15-44) have in any one year. The total fertility rate refers to the total number of children born on average to a woman during her child bearing life. Or, more precisely, according to the ONS: the TFR is the average number of live children a group of women would have if they experienced the age specific fertility rates for the calendar year in question throughout their childbearing lifespan.

**5.** According to the ONS, there is no single explanation underlying the rise in fertility in England and Wales in the first decade of the 21st century. Possible causes may include:

* more women currently in their twenties having children
* more women at older ages (born in the 1960s and 1970s) are having children that had previously postponed having them
* increases in the numbers of foreign born women who tend to have higher fertility than UK born women
* government policy and the economic climate indirectly influencing individuals' decisions around childbearing”

**6.** Among the factors leading some women to remain voluntarily childless are: an increase in the number of women prioritising their career or personal autonomy over having children; the availability of effective contraception controlled by women; fear of disruption and/or the financial costs involved.

**7.** The decline in birth and fertility rates has resulted in smaller families where the mother is likely to continue working after starting a family and may delay having children until she is in her late thirties or early forties.

**8.** The main change is that many grandparents now provide regular childcare for their grandchildren to enable mothers to work full or part-time.

**9.** An ageing society has significant implications in terms of: a growing need for health and social care which will have to be paid for, the likelihood of growing numbers of multi-generational families and the fact that informal care is likely to fall on adult daughters, with implications for their availability for paid employment. Indeed, some commentators have talked about a ‘demographic timebomb’ in this regard.

These developments raise important questions about how taxation is spread throughout the population, about how health and social care are organised in relation to each other and about relations between the generations. However, it is also important to avoid stereotyping old people as frail, dependent and a ‘burden’. Older people are increasingly involved in informal, voluntary and paid employment after the age at which they are eligible for state pensions, and many are fit and active.

**10.** A ‘beanpole family’ is a family that involves four or more generations but few aunts, uncles, nieces or nephews.

**11.** Cultural diversity is associated with the multi-ethnic composition of the contemporary UK. For example, compared to the White ethnic-majority, African Caribbean adults are less likely to be married and there is a higher percentage of single parent families led by women (i.e. ‘matrifocal’ families), e.g. among 20 year old African Caribbean mothers, 66 per cent remain single compared to only 11 per cent of their white peers.

**12**. An ‘inter-ethnic’ or ‘dual-heritage’ family is one in which partners come from different ethnic groups.

**4.4 MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND FAMILY DIVERSITY**

P.270 FOCUS ON SKILLS: ArrANGED MARRIAGES

**1.** Arranged marriages among young British Asians have been modernised in that both parties are free to accept or reject their parents’ choice of marriage partner.

**2.** Arranged marriages are still popular among young British Asians because: they avoid the potential humiliations associated with ‘dating’; the potential couple would be supported by their extended kin; they represent cultural continuity.

**3.** Love marriages tend to be based on sexual attraction and carry high expectations associated with notions of romantic love, which may be hard to sustain after the early stages of a relationship. Involvement of wider kin may be seen as interference and as unwelcome, which places a great deal of responsibility for the success of the relationship on the couple alone. The lack of shame associated with divorce may discourage partners from committing to working thorough their marriage during difficult periods.

**4.** Arranged marriages are often more successful in terms of longevity because the couple expect to have to work at the relationship, it is buttressed by cultural expectations and supported by the extended family. The fact that it is planned is an integral part of this wider mixture of factors.

However, longevity may conceal unhappiness (an ‘empty-shell’ marriage) where the couple stays together for the sake of appearances. This raises the question of what is understood by to be a successful marriage.

P.272 FOCUS ON research: cohabitation – testing commitment

**1.** The aim of the study was to see if it was possible for a couple to enter into cohabitation with different levels and understandings of commitment.

**2.** Representative samples allow researchers to generalise the findings of their research to the wider population  
from which the sample was drawn.

**3.** Structured questionnaires carry the risk of unduly constraining the answers respondents can give and of leaving unasked questions that may be relevant to the goal of the research.

**4.** Surveying couples jointly could result in answers where one person has had an undue influence on the answers provided.

**5.** The findings of the study challenge the New Right idea that cohabitation is ‘marriage-lite’ in that the majority of the couples surveyed claimed that they saw living together as a ‘serious and permanent commitment’ which would evolve into marriage at some stage. However, the study was concerned with the subjective views of couples and the lived reality may or may not match this.

p.281 Check your understanding

**1.** In monogamous marriages people can only have a single partner at a time; in polygamous marriages they can have more than one partner at a time.

**2.** (Note: the question should refer to New Right commentators in general, rather than Patricia Morgan specifically.) The three causes of the decline in marriage according to New Right commentators are: more sexually permissive attitudes originating in the 1960s, increasing secularisation and the welfare state.

**3.** The GMR refers to the number of men and women who get married in any given year per 1000 men and women aged 16 and over who are unmarried. Between 1970 and 2009 it declined from 59.5 for women and 77.5 for men to 19.2 and 21.3 respectively.

**4.** A reconstituted family (aka a step-family or blended family) is the name for a family formed by the joining of two adults via marriage, cohabitation or civil partnership, who have a child or children from previous relationships.

**5.** The life-course refers to the series of socially significant life stages someone passes through from birth to death.

**6.** There are a number of reasons for the popularity of cohabitation. Many couples see it as a rational way to establish their likely long-term compatibility before embarking on marriage. Indeed, the large majority of marriages in the UK today are preceded by cohabitation. Also, if someone who is awaiting a divorce wishes to live with someone, cohabitation is the only option since marriage cannot take place until a *decree nisi* is granted. Additionally, the prohibitive cost of wedding ceremonies encourages the temporary or permanent postponement of marriage. Finally, secularisation means that for most people cohabitation is no longer stigmatised.

**7.** Currently, in both the UK and the USA, women are more likely than men to petition for divorce, by a ratio of roughly 2:1. It is far from clear why this is so. However, recent research in the USA offers some clues (Rosenfeld, 2015).

It was widely believed that the main reason for this disparity was that wives were more sensitive to relationship difficulties than husbands. However, the research found that both men and women were equally likely to end non-marital (i.e. cohabiting) relationships, so this fact doesn’t support that belief.

Rosenfeld suggests that the main reason for the preponderance of female petitioners is that women find marriage generally less satisfying than men do. Rosenfeld refers to what he calls ‘the stalled gender revolution’ meaning that, as much as women’s lives in society have changed since the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, within the family there has been less change, with women still doing the bulk of child care and domestic labour even when both partners are in paid employment. The fact that divorced men are more likely to remarry than divorced women, lends some support to this claim – although the fact that women are more likely to take primary responsibility for any children following divorce could also be a factor (since they may have less time for dating and are likely to be sensitive to their children’s feelings about remarrying).

The suggestion that women expect more from marriage than they often get is also supported by the fact that in 2012 a majority of women initiated divorces in England and Wales were on the grounds of the husband’s ‘unreasonable conduct’, although, again, one must be cautious in taking this figure at face value as the stated grounds for divorce do not always coincide with the real grounds.

**8.** Postmodernists believe it is more useful to study people’s life courses than families because they argue that this offers a more dynamic view of the constantly changing nature of people’s family circumstances in postmodern societies. Moreover, postmodernists argue that the concept of family is no longer particularly useful to describe the wide range of living arrangements people can find themselves in today.

**9.** The main reasons for the dramatic increase in both the number and proportion of single person households in recent decades are: the growth in divorce where one partner (usually the man) moves out of the family home and lives alone; the growth in life expectancy alongside the continuing gender disparity in life expectancy resulting in more women than men (widows rather than widowers) living alone; the decline in the extended family and geographical mobility resulting in more children living as adults at some distance from their parents.

**10.** The view that ‘the rise in divorce in the later part of the 20th century indicated that marriages were becoming stronger’ is logically self-contradictory. However, it is possible, as functionalists argue, that this development reflected higher *expectations* of marriage with the result that people whose marriage failed to meet these expectations got divorced. It is also true that an increase in divorce does not necessarily indicate a rise in marital breakdown, since divorce represents only one type of marital breakdown. It is possible that the proportion of broken marriages remained the same whilst the proportion of empty-shell marriages and separations declined as more people opted for divorce instead.

**4.5 DOMESTIC LABOUR, POWER RELATIONSHIPS AND THE FAMILY**

p.288 Focus on skills: don’t dare call me a housewife…i’m the domestic ceo

**1.** 93 per cent claimed to make all or most of the family’s financial decisions.

**2.** The additional responsibilities were: accountant, financial adviser, executive decision maker, school liaison officer, chief administration expert and holiday and social planner.

**3.** The studies cited in the chapter paint a picture of marriage in which women still tend to do more work of various kinds and have less authority than husbands. The article paints a very different picture in which women are very much in charge and occupy a high-status executive role.

**4.** The view that mothers are (like) CEOs of families may have some plausibility in relation to affluent families which can afford to employ nannies, cleaners, maids, chauffeurs, etc. However, it is implausible when applied to other families as Gaby Hinsliff suggests. In these cases, the analogy with an unpaid intern is probably nearer the mark.

p.290/1 Focus on skills: STAY AT HOME MOTHERS – ‘WE DON’T CARE ABOUT HAVING IT ALL’

**1.** The 2009 YouGov poll concluded thatamong women in their twentieswho were mothers, only 12 per cent wanted to work full-time and 31 per cent didn’t want to work at all.

**2.** Hakim argues that women make rational choices in relation to paid employment and motherhood and that not all mothers wish to combine motherhood with continued full-time employment. The results of the YouGov survey suggest that this is true.

**3.** Opinion poll surveys are a far from reliable guide to how people behave since actions do not necessarily square with stated subjective preferences. If, nevertheless, a real decline in the proportion of women who wish to pursue careers rather than motherhood is taking place, then this will alter the gender balance of the labour force as well as the societal distribution of household earnings.

**4.** The article refers to the poll findings of the ‘Generation Y’ representatives interviewed by YouGov and a single example – Emily Petley. One can assume that the sample selected by YouGov is representative of young women since there is nothing to suggest that the polling organisation was asked to select a non-representative sample. However, the presentation of the findings is somewhat misleading in that it would appear that YouGov found that 57 per cent (100 – 12+31) of the mothers surveyed wanted to work part-time. Hence, to describe them as ‘stay-at-home’ mothers is inaccurate. It is not possible to say whether Ms Petley is typical of her generation or atypical.

P.291 Check your understanding

**1.** Oakley was critical of the fact that ‘malestream’ sociology had failed to recognise it as worthy of study, thereby rendering it ‘invisible’, sociologically-speaking.

**2.** Quantitative research suggests that, even when wives are working full-time, they continue to carry out more domestic labour than their husbands.

**3.** The ‘double burden’ refers to the idea that married women today continue to do most of the work in the home whilst also being employed outside the home.

**4.** Hakim means that the division of labour between husbands and wives is not necessarily evidence of patriarchy, but evidence that women choose to invest more than men in the domestic sphere for reasons that make sense to them.

**5.** ‘Emotion work’ refers to the work mainly done by women to support the emotional wellbeing of others by, for example, asking them how they’re doing, showing them affection and sympathising with their troubles.

**6.** Loscocco and Walzer (2013) meta-study found that women were, in general, less satisfied with their marriage than men and more likely to initiate divorce proceedings. Women are also less likely to seek to remarry. They imply that married men benefit more from marriage than married women because women do most of the work in maintaining the emotional aspect of the relationship and the ties between the family and the wider community.

**7.** There are a number of possible explanations for why men have (traditionally) dominated decision-making within marriage:

* biological explanations – which claim that it is a result of men’s greater physical strength and capacity for aggression,
* familial and patriarchal ideologies which construct separate roles for men and women within marriage as both natural and appropriate
* economic explanations – which suggest that power is associated with the financial contribution made to the household and that, because men have traditionally earned more, this has given them greater power.

**8.** Ideologies are belief systems that claim both to explain why the world is as it is and why this is how it should be. The patriarchal ideologies that developed in this country in Victorian times saw men and women as having quite different natures that suited them for distinct roles in life, that of the head of the household and breadwinner for husbands and that of homemaker and child carer for women. These ideas were challenged by the second wave of feminism that emerged in the sixties and seventies which put forward a counter-ideology. People’s attitudes today tend to reflect the influence of one or other of these ideologies.

**9**. ‘Relative resources theory’ argues that the distribution of power within the family reflects the relative financial contribution made by each partner: the greater the financial contribution, the greater the power. (See the third bullet point in relation to Q7 above.)

**10.** This view suggests that the apparent achievement of much greater gender equality in society at large since the Women’s Liberation Movement of the sixties and seventies has not been matched within the home and that women therefore continue to carry a double – or in some versions of the argument – a triple-burden of work within and outside of the home.

**4.6 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CHILDHOOD**

P.296 Focus on skills: childhood in Britain

**1.** The 5 dimensions were: material wellbeing, health and safety, education, behaviours, and housing and environment.

**2.** The factors that led to the UK not being higher than sixteenth were: poverty, high infant mortality, poor participation in further education (among 15-19 year olds), poor housing standards and high rates of alcohol abuse and pregnancy among teenagers.

**3.** UNICEF produces child wellbeing reports on a regular basis and in a previous 2007 report the UK ranked last in a list of 21 rich countries. Following that report the state, in partnership with voluntary organisations, implemented a wide range of reforms designed to improve children’s wellbeing. Among these was the creation of the Department of Children, Families and Schools, a Children’s Plan, more resources for childcare, schools and child-health, a child poverty strategy and, in 2010, a Child Poverty Act which set a target for the eradication of child poverty by 2020.

The fact that the UK had moved up to a mid-table position in the 2013 report – based on 2009-10 data - indicates the difference state action can make. Action taken in relation to smoking, obesity and alcohol consumption had all met with some success, although the UK still had one of the highest alcohol abuse rates among young people aged 11 to 15. However, UNICEF UK has warned that these improvements seen under the last Labour government risked being reversed by the austerity policies implemented by the Coalition government elected in 2010 (and continued by the Conservative government which followed in 2015). It stated that “since 2010 the downgrading of youth policy and cuts to local government services are having a profound negative effect”. **negative effect”.**

P.303 Focus on skills: Too much TV can cause emotional turmoil for children

**1.** 62 per cent of 11-year-olds, 71 per cent of 13-year-olds and 68 per cent of 15-year-olds.

**2.** Older children who spent less than an hour a day playing video games were nearly 3 times more likely to say they were happy and enjoyed life than those who spent a longer time.

**3.** Postman (1982) argued that childhood as a time of innocent happiness was being lost because TV exposed them to the harsh realities of the adult world at a young age. Palmer (2007) similarly argues that adults increasingly use TV and electronic games as a way of occupying children rather than playing with them or spending time otherwise interacting with them. She blames this for creating children who are more distractible, impulsive and self-obsessed. Hinkley’s research paints a similarly negative picture of the effects of too much time spent looking at a screen, claiming that for every extra hour of screen time, there was a 30 per cent increase in emotional problems for girls and a 20 per cent increase for boys.

**4.** The key issue here is the direction of cause and effect. The research suggests a direct association between spending a lot of time in front of a screen and various negative consequences, including disengagement from family life. However, it is unclear whether it is the time spent in front of a screen which causes the disengagement or whether poorly functioning families lead children to compensate by spending more time engaging with electronic devices – or, indeed, whether there’s some third factor causing both outcomes.

P.304 Check your understanding

**1.** According to Aries (1962), children in pre-industrial society, once they reached the age of 7 or thereabouts, were treated as ‘mini-adults’, being dressed in smaller versions of adult garb, expected to work and being included in adult social life.

**2.** Four ways in which the state has helped to construct childhood in the UK are: the introduction of compulsory education; laws forbidding child labour; laws controlling the age before which children are not permitted to assume various adult responsibilities (e.g. getting married) and laws defining the circumstances under which children can be removed from their parents.

**3.** To say that something is a ‘social construction’ is to say that the phenomenon in question owes more to society than biology. It is evidenced by the fact that the phenomenon varies both historically and cross-culturally.

**4.** ‘Renaissance children’ is the name given to contemporary middle-class children in Britain by Vincent and Ball (2007) whose parents go to great lengths to develop their children’s cultural capital. The term borrows from the idea of the ‘Renaissance man (sic)’. ‘Renaissance’ literally means rebirth and was the name given to the revival in European art and architecture that took place between the 14th and 16th centuries, associated with such figures as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. These figures were multi-talented painters, sculptors, inventors, etc., so the notion of Renaissance children is intended to convey the idea of children who are encouraged to develop wide-ranging talents and interests by their parents.

**5.** The notion of a ‘toxic childhood’ relates to the claim made by Palmer (2007) in her book of that name that children today are being deprived of a traditional childhood and family life because parents have ceased interacting with their children who now spend an inordinate amount of time watching TV and playing computer games.

**6.** The ‘conventional view’ of childhood, associated with functionalism and the New Right, sees children as in need of guidance and nurturing by two parents of the opposite sex involved in a stable, monogamous, marital relationship if they are to thrive and grow up into responsible citizens.

**7.** The experience of childhood varies significantly for children growing up in different geographical and social locations. Amongst British children today, for example, it varies according to gender, social class, ethnicity and religion. In this sense, childhood can be said to be a ‘relative concept’. The experience of childhood is very different, for instance, for children who attend boarding schools compared to those who attend day schools.

**8.** During the 20th century children came to be seen as distinct from adults and as in need of special consideration and attention and many changes took place designed to protect childhood ‘innocence’. Before this time, high infant mortality discouraged the more sentimental view of children associated with the 20th century – although the 19th century can be seen as a period of transition – and many children were involved in paid employment from a young age.

**9.** A number of social commentators claim that childhood is under threat today. Amongst the claims made are the following:

* Phillips (1997) claims that children have been given too much power as a result of pressure by the ‘children’s rights’ lobby and that parental authority has been undermined by the media and peer groups. She is also concerned about the premature sexualisation of girls.
* Postman (1982) argues that childhood as a time of innocent happiness is being lost because over-consumption of TV exposes them to the harsh realities of the adult world at a young age and that a process of ‘social blurring’ is taking place, blurring the distinction between childhood and adulthood,
* Palmer (2007) also decries the amount of time children today spend in front of the TV or playing computer games, arguing that “every year children become more distractible, impulsive and self-obsessed”.

**10.** The view that children actively contribute to the social construction of their own childhood is clearly true to some extent since children are not merely passive receptacles. Indeed, Phillips (1997) argues that children have too much power in getting their own way today. However, children’s agency is limited by a host of legislative constraints and by the ideology of parental rights. The tragic victims of parental abuse whose death is regularly reported in the news media clearly had little control over what happened to them. Similarly, children’s relative lack of sophistication and fear of being seen as different from their peers means that they are easy prey for commercial interests and vulnerable to on-line bullying.