BLOCK 2  FAMILY, GENDER AND WELFARE

INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK 2
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UNIT 6  AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FAMILY
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UNIT 7  POLITICS AND THE FAMILY
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Introduction
Before you read the units in Block 2 it is worth thinking over some of the main points which were introduced in Block 1 and which will continue to provide a basis for your study of issues in Block 2. These main points include

1 The idea that social, cultural and economic factors affect what are often seen as purely biological events – such as giving birth, becoming ill or growing old. In other words, we live in specific social, cultural and economic circumstances which profoundly shape our experience of biological processes and events.

2 Social problems involve a process of social definition. How we understand them is shaped by the efforts of social and political groups and the activities of social institutions such as the mass media to provide frameworks of understanding and sets of definitions. The definitions of social problems may involve conflicting views or ideologies. Block 1 gave, as one example, the case of unemployment, which is seen by some as a 'structural' problem caused by economic and social forces, and by others as the effect of individual failings.

3 The individual – the starting point of Block 1 – must always be seen as living within a social context. In analysing social problems we should always pay attention to whether problems are being defined as 'personal' or 'social' matters (that is, whether they are seen as being caused by individual or social factors). This distinction is particularly significant for Block 2, because the 'personal/social' overlaps with another major distinction in the discussion of social problems – that between the 'private' and the 'public'. This is not quite the same as the 'personal/social' it enlarges what is meant by the 'personal' in that it situates the individual in one very particular social context, the family. In our society, and in the Western world generally, private matters are equated with the family. Public matters are those which take place outside the family setting (the realms of work, politics, etc.). But there is an important limitation to the way in which the family is seen as a social context when discussing social problems, because it is also seen as a 'natural' or 'presocial' setting for individuals – the place where they 'naturally' live their lives, are born, grow up, are socialized, and form their deepest emotional attachments and gain their identities. So, the family plays an ambiguous role in the discussion of social problems, being both a social context and a 'natural' institution. In spite of these ambiguities, the family occupies a central place in the way we think and talk about social problems. When we think and talk about the 'social context' in which individuals live, the family provides the natural starting point – it is what is immediately thought of as the primary social location of individuals. That is why Block 2, in moving away from Block 1's focus on the stages of life of individuals, is primarily concerned with the family – and with the implications of this natural centrality of the family for how we think about and respond to social problems.

At this point it would be useful for you to list any connections that occur to you that can be made between the family and social problems. Then compare them with the list which follows.

There are three main ways in which the family has connections to social problems:

1 The family can be seen as a cause of social problems. For example:
   (a) social problems can be seen as being caused by poor socialization or upbringing (often used to explain juvenile delinquency),
(b) Social problems have been explained as arising from a 'crisis of the family', e.g. the rise in the number of single-parent families has been used to explain declining moral standards, delinquency, etc. That is, social problems are seen as the consequence of the absence of the 'normal family'.

(c) The 'normal family' itself may be seen as the source of problems, through the high demands it places on its members – on wives especially, but also on husbands, children and elderly relatives.

2 The family can be seen as a solution to social problems. For example

(a) the family can be seen as the 'natural' place for the provision of care (looking after elderly relatives, for example) and for instilling discipline (bringing up children properly),

(b) a more complex variant of the first example is the argument that such responsibilities need to be 'restored' to the family because these functions have been taken away by a too-powerful state, thus undermining the ability of the family to provide care and instil discipline,

(c) parents can be helped, by trained experts, to provide 'better parenting' for their children, thus minimizing the possibilities of future problems.

3 The family can be seen as the 'target' of social interventions intended to solve social problems. For example

(a) the state may implement social policies designed to support and sustain the family (e.g. welfare policies such as child benefit to assist with the maintenance of children),

(b) state policies may be intended to help families stay together, rather than split up, or provide advice and guidance on how to function better as families (e.g. counselling and social work services),

(c) state policies may be directed at transferring responsibilities and duties back to the family from state agencies (sometimes talked of as 'parent power').

In these ways, the family can be seen to be intimately bound up with how social problems are defined and responded to. The centrality of the family means that the public/private boundary (which you may remember from Unit 1) is very significant for the analysis of social problems, for it is the family that is the most significant marker of this boundary. Even when the state intervenes in a social problem, it may do so to maintain the definition of a social problem as a 'private' issue – as the responsibility of the family or parents. If anything, the family has come to occupy an even more significant place in the discussion of social problems in Britain over the last twenty years.

Q Can you think of any reasons why this might be so?

There are different sorts of reasons for this growing significance of the family which you will find being considered in the following units.

1 A number of social changes have occurred in post-war Britain which have affected the family. These include a rising rate of divorce, an increasing number of illegitimate births, a growing number of single-parent families, the development of alternative life-styles, creating different types of non-familial households (e.g. communal living), the greater visibility of alternative 'sexualities' (e.g. homosexual and lesbian relationships), and the growth in the number of women in paid employment. Taken together, these sorts of changes have led some commentators to ask whether there is a 'crisis of the family'.

2 Some of these changes have been linked to 'social movements' – social groups who have organized to try to influence the direction of social and cultural change. The family, and its related issues of morality, gender roles and sexuality, have been a focus for many of these movements. For example, children's rights groups,
the women’s movement and gay movements have challenged many of the conventional assumptions about the family, while other organizations such as religious groups and others committed to the revival and restoration of ‘traditional moral values’ have been equally active in defence of the conventional family. It is because the family condenses a whole series of issues about sexuality, morality, gender roles and social order that it has come to occupy centre stage in these conflicts.

3 These first two processes (social change and social movements) have ensured that the family has also become a significant issue for politics and the state. Issues of how the state is supposed to intervene in the family, and of whether state policies support or undermine the family, have acquired increasing significance in political debate. As British politics has moved from a period of ‘consensus’ in the 1950s and 1960s to a period of greater overt conflict between the parties in the 1970s and 1980s, so the family (and the issues it contains) has become the subject of greater political conflict.

The issues to be discussed in Block 2 are presented in what can be called a social scientific perspective. Such an approach involves an analysis of the family, marriage, gender roles and sexuality. Many of our assumptions about these areas depend upon wider political, religious or even philosophical perspectives which we have learned and picked up during our socialization. Everyone is brought up to accept some way of living and acting in a family, or as a man or woman, as being right, natural, proper, or even as God-given. Other ways of acting are construed, conversely, as being wrong, sinful, unnatural, improper or even as inspired by the devil.

When you have finished working on Block 2, it is hoped that you will be able to see your own values about these problem areas in a more comparative perspective. One major merit of the social scientific approach to such issues is to encourage dispassionate analysis rather than the passing of moral judgements based upon the values one has learned as a consequence of being brought up in a particular cultural group. At the end of your work on Block 2 you may still hold that the moral views about these contentious areas, which you may have acquired in the course of your socialization, are the best ones. However, after studying Block 2 you should be more aware of values which may be different from your own, and more able to approach the areas of the family, gender roles and sexuality in a relatively dispassionate, analytical way. You will be able to answer questions such as:

1. What is meant by the phrase ‘the family in modern Britain’?
2. What changes have occurred in the institution of marriage in Britain in the last three decades?
3. What have been the significant changes, if any, in the social and economic position of women in Britain in the last thirty years?
4. What do ethnic, religious or political groups, other than those to which you belong, think are important values and issues for them?

More specifically in this second block, we shall examine in more detail the social construction of what some groups, but not necessarily others, define as important social problems in the area of the family, gender and sexuality, which may require some kinds of state-supported intervention. The views on these matters which are seen or heard in the mass media and in the speeches of many politicians reflect a number of important points of view, or ideological stances. On the whole, however, the views about the family, the gender roles of men and women, and about sexuality which are represented in such ways form a complex mixture which will be called here patriarchal ideology. This complex mixture of views ranges from liberal views at
one end of the spectrum to very traditionalist views at the other, with many combinations of elements from both ends of the spectrum being represented in between. Patrarchal ideology contains two basic role definitions. These are:

1. that women should mother babies and young children (i.e., men should not be expected to undertake this task),

2. that males should be prepared to fight for their country, class or ethnic group, and that normally it should be a male who holds the prominent position in organizational hierarchies.

At one end of the spectrum of patrarchal ideology lie traditionalist views of the sanctity of marriage. Marriage is seen as a life-long commitment between a woman and a man, in which the husband is the main economic support of his wife and children, the wife being the main person involved in housework, child-care activities, cooking, care of her husband and of the older generation. Divorce is seen as undesirable, as would be working mothers and extra-marital sexual liaisons by either partner, but especially by the wife. Some versions of the traditionalist patrarchal ideology, such as that found in some Latin European Catholic sub-cultures, represent men as less likely to control their sexual desire than women, so that a dual standard operates with regard to extra-marital sexual liaisons by men and by women. Hence the traditional institution of prostitution in which it is nearly always males who purchase sexual activities with girls or women, or sometimes with boys or young men. This traditional version of patrarchal ideology is to be found, or expressed in, the laws of some states in the present as well as in the past, in formal statements by religious organizations and religious leaders, and at a less formal level in the values expressed in the lives of millions of people in various countries, in all classes and status groups from members of royal families to workers and peasants.

At the other end of the spectrum, the more liberal type of patrarchal ideological discourse accepts divorce and re-marriage after divorce. This type of ideology holds that women should be treated equally alongside men in matters such as equal payment for equal work, and that sexual activities outside marriage are just as desirable or undesirable for women as for men. The liberal version remains a version of patrarchal ideology, nevertheless. This is because it broadly accepts that women care for babies and young children and that men should fight for their country if necessary.

As you will see in Unit 9, women remain in lower positions in the hierarchies of many British organizations in spite of the fact that many people, including men, think that equality for women is 'good thing.' Women remain responsible for child-rearing, and many household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, washing and ironing, even in households in which the man thinks of himself as reasonably liberal in outlook. It is in practice very difficult to break with one of the fundamental values of patrarchal ideology, that women mother children that is, that women should do most of the everyday tasks associated with caring for and bringing up babies and children. In Britain, the complementary value, that men should fight or be prepared for fighting, is also operative in some situations, as was seen to some extent in the war over the Falklands/Malvinas Islands in 1982. Many other states, both capitalist and socialist/communist, practice conscription for most, if not all, their young men, but not for all their young women. The issue of the gender roles of men and women is, therefore, a separate one from that of whether a country is mainly capitalist or socialist.

Non-patrarchal ideologies are to be found in many modern Western societies, including Britain, but such ideologies are not dominant. Non-patrarchal values may be found, for instance, in social movements such as the Peace Movement, the women's movement, and among some gay men. These values, and their associated social practices, seek to emphasize that men can be primary carers of children or the sick, infirm, and old, that women can be the sole, or main, earner in a family, that homosexual desires should be accepted as readily as heterosexual ones. The virtues of fighting, of preparing for war and of toughness which are emphasized in patrarchal ideology, are criticized in non-patrarchal ideology. Instead, the values of
peace through international contacts, cultural exchanges and education about other people’s ways of life are emphasized with the aim of increasing **tolerance of differences**. These include differences of political and economic systems, differences of nationality and of ethnicity, of religious and political beliefs and values—especially about the family and marriage—and differences of gender and sexual orientation.

Throughout your reading of the units in this second block you may find it helpful to keep these differences in mind. This may help you to sort out your own ideas and values about the family, gender and sexuality more clearly. You should also try to keep in mind the relationship between wider moral and political values and those associated with the family, gender and sexuality. These connections are explored in Unit 7 of the block. There is a very strong association found between conservative positions in economic, military and social policy issues and patriarchal ideology. However, there are a few free-market conservatives who may oppose high taxation policies to fund the welfare state and who extend their acceptance of *laissez faire* values to the field of the family and sexuality. Such groups see no necessary connection between their economic and political values and any form of patriarchal ideology. In their view the state should be removed from interfering in economic markets, in housing markets, in health service provision, and also in matters of sexual behaviour. If people wish to purchase the services of prostitutes, or pornographic videos or books, for example, they should be free to do so. The state, the law, the police and the courts should not be involved. Some hold that there is no moral warrant for such state intervention and that the public should not be asked to pay the costs involved in the prosecution of people buying or selling sexual services. This view is found more in the United States than in Britain.

There are some members of the Conservative Party who hold that market forces should be allowed to operate in a society with as little state interference as possible, even if this results in periods of relatively high levels of unemployment compared to the levels which were found during the 1950s and 1960s, but who also hold that the state should interfere to maintain patriarchal values in the areas of marriage, the family and sexuality. These values and laws concern support for the monogamous family unit in housing policy, in welfare services and in education. On the other hand, there are groups who are radical in their economic and political values, in the sense of supporting state intervention in a market economy to iron out the undesirable aspects of market forces—especially unemployment caused by low demand or by low levels of industrial investment—who are also critical of patriarchal values. These groups may support non-patriarchal values, such as the values of equality of job opportunities for women, the lack of state interference in the sexual lives of adults and young people over the age of 17 or 18, and support for the Peace Movement and for the care of the natural environment.

There are many people in other political parties in Britain (the Social Democratic, Liberal, Labour and Communist parties) who hold some kind of social democratic or socialist view about economic affairs—that the state should play an active role in economic matters concerned with financial, taxation and welfare policies, for example—but who also hold patriarchal ideological values about the roles of men and women in the family, that men should be prepared to fight, and that homosexuality is an unnatural vice. There is, therefore, no automatic move from social democratic or socialist, economic views to holding non-patriarchal ideological values. The two can, and do, vary independently of one another. Political economic values and views are relatively autonomous of values about the family, sexuality and gender, so that there are, for example, some homosexual men and women who support free market capitalism.

In reading the units in Block 2 you should try to bear these various positions in mind. Block 2 is primarily concerned with the family, gender and sexuality. In later blocks of the course the other area mentioned here, the attitude to state provision of welfare services, will be discussed. You need to bear in mind how these two broad elements might fit together to form a matrix of possible positions which politically
active groups take on these matters. Figure 1 may help you to do this. It is, of course, greatly oversimplified, but it may help you to locate various positions which are developed in public debates from time to time and which you will reflect on in Block 2 and the rest of the course.

Figure 1 The main types of values in contemporary politics

In Figure 1 the following positions can be seen:

**Position 1** = the ‘new right’ as illustrated by Thatcherism in Britain during the 1980s. It seeks to remove state interference from economic matters as much as possible. It is supportive of state interventions in support of a fairly centrist, or even liberal, version of patriarchal values on the family, gender, marriage and sexual orientation. More traditionalist regimes have existed in the recent past, as in Franco’s Spain, which supported the Catholic Church’s moral theology on these issues. (Note that some British conservatives accepted a position closer to Position 3 in Figure 1 in the 1950s and 1960s.) This position has been an important one in many Western countries, including Britain, during the 1980s because governments have sought to act on it.

**Position 2** = the ‘new liberalism’, which is consistently against all state intervention in both economic affairs and welfare provision and for preserving specific moral views about marriage, the family, gender roles, or sexuality. It is not widely held by many people in Britain, although it is more strongly supported in the United States.

**Position 3** = the ‘old left’ in both socialist and communist parties in Eastern and Western Europe. This position accepts state interventions in the economy and taxation to provide welfare and health services for all, regardless of the ability to pay on the part of the recipients of such services. It is combined with holding that the state may, or should, have laws about gender and sexuality, for instance, which reflect patriarchal ideology. It is a position which has been quite widespread in Europe and in the British labour movement, certainly till the 1980s.

**Position 4** = the ‘new radicalism’ position which has been articulated by socialist feminists and gay socialists. This position seeks state interventions to provide welfare services for all, as in Position 3, but opposes state interventions by the police, law courts, social and health services which perpetuate patriarchal values about gender roles, marriage and the family, and private sexual activities. This position is not held by large numbers of people in Britain or in Eastern or Western Europe. It is found more among some intellectual groups and is influential as a result, despite being small.
Reading the units in this block and later ones in this course should help you to clarify your own value-position on these questions. Such clarification is necessary so that you can be more explicit about your own values and how these may affect your attitudes towards state intervention in the areas of welfare, the family, gender and sexual orientation. Block 2 is concerned with the family, gender roles and sexuality. Blocks 3 and 4 will discuss welfare and state interventions in Britain.

**Unit 6 An Introduction to the Family**

The central question at the outset of Block 2 is this *Is the family a biologically based institution?* Answering this question involves giving some definition of the ‘family’, a task which, as you will see, is not as easy as it might seem at first sight. The modern nuclear family, based on a marriage between a woman and a man together with their children, remains the major form of domestic living arrangement. New forms of domestic living have emerged in recent years which involve a small proportion of the population. The numbers of people re-marrying after divorce have increased since the law on divorce was changed.

Some of the major points to emerge from comparative materials on the family and kinship in other societies are outlined in the set reading for Unit 6, an article by Felicity Edholm entitled ‘The unnatural family’, which can be found in the Block 2 Offprints Booklet.

The television programme associated with Unit 6, TV programme 3, looks at some families living in Britain whose cultural and religious traditions differ from those of the English, Welsh, Scots, Irish and Celts in Britain and Ireland.

**Unit 7 Politics and the Family**

There has probably never been a time since the development of the modern state when political parties, in and out of government, did not have policies about the family, the rearing of children, childbirth, gender roles and laws governing sexual relations between people. In other words, the family and sexual relations have not been in some *private sphere*, totally removed from interventions by state agencies of various kinds, even though some ideological and political philosophies have held that there should be a *private sphere free from state interference*. The main political positions about the family, gender and sexuality are outlined and discussed in Unit 7. The unit makes it clear that the area of the family is not an apolitical one. As you work through Block 2 you will find that this issue of state intervention in family, marriage, child-rearing and sexuality is complex. There are no simple answers which any political group can easily adhere to. For example, the development of AIDS (Auto Immune Deficiency Syndrome) has raised such issues in a stark form. What should the state do to warn people, indeed children, of the dangers? These questions are discussed on Cassette 2, Side B, to which you should listen after working on Unit 7. It will provide a bridge to Unit 8. Part of Chapter 7 of the Course Reader, ‘Securing the family’ by Carol Smart, and Chapter 8, ‘Family matters and public policy’ by Malcolm Wicks, are set reading for this unit.

**Unit 8 Masculinity, Homophobia and Homosexuality**

Units 8 and 9 consider the gender roles of men and women in more detail. More specifically, Unit 8 examines the masculine gender role in British society. The material considered in this unit links with the basic question in the block about the relations between biology and the social construction of gender roles. Some people think, for example, that boys and men are naturally more aggressive than most girls and women. Unit 8 examines how boys are typically brought up to be able to fulfil the role that British culture assigns to men. Male homosexuality is mentioned specifically because, to some people, such activity is abnormal, whereas for others it
is an authentic form of sexual expression and love AIDS, and the social reaction it has engendered towards gay men in particular, is again an important issue in this context as it raises the issue of the proper way to conceive of the connection between state interventions and the private sphere of sexual activities.

As mentioned above, Cassette 2, Side B discusses these issues about state intervention and the development of AIDS in modern societies, including Britain.

Television programme 4 examines the attitudes of boys at the ages of 13, and at 17–18, towards their role in the family, housework, shopping and ‘male’ activities, to see if changes occur as they grow older. This is relevant to the main theme of Unit 8. By contrast, girls discuss their views about gender roles on Cassette 3, Side A. Listening to this will help prepare you for Unit 9.

**Unit 9 Women, Work and the Family**

The role of women is seen as being divided between unpaid housework, child-rearing and laundering and, for nearly two-thirds of women, some form of paid work outside the home. The problems and strains this produces, as well as the gains for women and their children, are discussed in Unit 9. The unit discusses some case studies of women in paid work in West Germany, Cuba and in Britain. This comparative material is important in highlighting the degree to which Britain lags behind both an economically poorer country, Cuba, which has a socialist/communist regime in power, and behind West Germany. The latter has been a more economically successful society over the last twenty or thirty years, but it has a capitalist/mixed economy type of social system like that of Britain. It provides more in the way of material and economic supports for working wives and mothers than are available in Britain. The explanation of this difference may lie in the presence of a more politically active patriarchal view of the role of women as being primarily housewives and mothers, not paid workers, in Britain. This may be seen in British developments in taxation and welfare policies since the end of the Second World War.

Television programme 5, ‘Working Mothers’, provides some important illustrative material for some of the major themes in Unit 9.

Chapter 7 in the Course Reader, Carol Smart’s article ‘Securing the family?’, is optional reading with this unit. It examines the impact of taxation policies on working women. You should have read part of it with Unit 7 earlier in this block.

**Unit 10 New Forms of Domestic Living**

Earlier in this introduction we noted that one reason for the contemporary significance of the family was the way in which processes of social changes had affected it. The units in this block have examined some of those changes – patterns of divorce, changing views of sexuality, changing patterns of women’s work. However, these changes have been greeted by a variety of responses which aim to restore ‘traditional’ views of the family and morality. Unit 10 explores some of the attempts to reaffirm the values of traditional or conventional morality in the face of these social changes.

A major source of patriarchal ideology is to be found in the social practices and moral teachings of religions. The Roman Catholic Church is examined in this unit as one major source of this ideology. The writings of a modern British moral philosopher, Roger Scruton, are also considered, for patriarchal values are defended by Scruton at a relatively complex level of argument. A section of his book, *Sexual Desire*, is included as set reading material for this unit. Cassette 3, Side B will help you in reading this extract from Roger Scruton’s book.
The effects of marriage on women and men, especially of marital breakdown (which affects one-third of all marriages in modern Britain) are discussed in the unit, and in a second supplementary reading from Nicky Hart’s work, ‘Mental breakdown as a personal crisis’

**Unit 11  The Body Politic: Health, Family and Society**

The development of specific forms of state intervention in family matters through the health service in Britain, especially in childbirth and the care of young babies and children, is outlined and discussed in this unit. More specifically, the role of the health visitor is examined and its development traced from nineteenth-century voluntary workers to the present day.

The role of the health visitor in modern Britain is portrayed and discussed in Television programme 6, which should be viewed in the context of this unit, even if you have to watch the programme at a different time from your reading of Unit 11. As suggested in the notes on the programme, do write down your own thoughts as you watch the programme, or immediately after watching.

In this unit there are breaks in which you are asked to reflect upon notions of a ‘reading’ of historical developments. These notes will help you to increase your skill of being able to spot the theoretical perspective lying behind the different viewpoints articulated in different units in this course and in the reader articles.

**Unit 12  Review**

Review units in Open University courses give you an opportunity to pause, to look back systematically over the work you have done in a block, and to pull out the major themes which are operating between different units as well as within them. This unit provides some useful guidance for you in doing this task. It is a good idea to read the review unit before writing your TMA because it may help you to draw connections between the materials which you might otherwise miss.

You might find it useful to refer back to Malcolm Wicks’s ‘Family matters and public policy’ (Chapter 8 in the Course Reader) at the end of the block (This was a set reading with Unit 7.) It will provide you with an overview of major themes about the state, interventions, the welfare services and political parties’ policies. Thus the article serves as a bridge into the next two blocks of the course, which are more directly concerned with state agencies, welfare, and political policy issues.
Study Table for Block 2

Study Week 5
- Block Introduction
- Unit 6  *An Introduction to the Family*
- TV 3  *East Meets West*  Asian Families, Western Culture
- Offprint  F Edholm, 'The unnatural family'

Study Week 6
- Unit 7  *Politics and the Family*
- Reader  Chapter 7  'Securing the family? Rhetoric and policy in the field of social security'  (Carol Smart)
- Reader  Chapter 8  'Family matters and public policy'  (Malcolm Wicks)
- Cassette 2, Side B  AIDS

Study Week 7
- Unit 8  *Masculinity, Homophobia and Homosexuality*
- TV 4  Becoming a Man?
- Cassette 3, Side A  Girls Talking

Study Week 8
- Unit 9  *Women, Work and the Family*
- TV 5  Working Mothers
- TMA 02

Study Week 9
- Unit 10  *New Forms of Domestic Living*
- Offprint  R Scruton, 'The politics of sex'
- Offprint  N Hart, 'Mental breakdown as a personal crisis'
- Cassette 3, Side B  Reading Scruton

Study Weeks 10 and 11
- Unit 11  *The Body Politic: Health, Family and Society*
- Cassette 4, Side A  Health and the Family
- TV 6  Health Visiting and the Family

Study Week 12
- Unit 12  *Review*
- TMA 03
Unit 6 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FAMILY

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The family is the backdrop of all the important and significant events in human life – birth, marriage and death (see Figure 2)
The family is the most intimate group to which the majority of us belong. It gives us comfort, meaning, love, security, a refuge from the hostile world. But the family can also give us hate, guilt, dependence, jealousy, cruelty, violence and insecurity (Figure 3).

‘You don’t know where love ends and hate begins’
(Gillian Hayes, battered wife)

This quotation has resonance for us all. We all have positive and negative feelings towards the family. We all have high expectations about the family. We expect families to provide ‘togetherness’, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health and so on. Such happy families are a staple image of the world of advertising. But our expectations about the family are often at variance with reality or only partially, or only sometimes, fulfilled. In other words, ideals about the family which most people hold very dear do not always correspond to how individuals actually live out their lives. Why is this?

1.1 Aims

The aim of this unit is to set you thinking about the family – to raise questions about the family and the ways in which we live in families. What is the family? Do we all live in a family? What is the appeal of the family? My hope is that you will be critically reading the unit, relating what is written to your own experience. Throughout the unit, to help you do this, I have set activities and questions to guide you. You should view this unit as setting the scene to the areas you will be tackling in the rest of the block.

So first of all we need to consider what the family is. In trying to answer this question, the following section will ask you to consider your own experience of your family. It will look at demographic evidence on ‘family life’ and examine whether or not the family is universal. So
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OpenLearn
2 WHAT IS THE FAMILY?

2.1 Your family

We all know what the family is, after all we all have a family. As individuals the vast majority of us are all – or have been – members of a family group.

Stop for a moment and define your family

At first this seems like a simple exercise. But on reflection we realize that the word ‘family’ refers to a bewildering variety of groups of different shapes and sizes. Here are some common conversational usages:

- ‘The whole family was invited to the christening.’ Here what is being referred to is the infant’s relatives, or kin, in the very broadest sense.
- ‘Nearly all the groom’s family came to the wedding, but many of the bride’s family made excuses.’ From this point of view it would seem that the family has two groupings – his and hers.
- ‘Bring your wife and kids to the party, we haven’t met your family yet.’ This use of the term family refers to a central core or ‘nucleus’ of mother, father and children, which sociologists call the nuclear family.
- ‘Their son is getting married and their daughter has got a job in London. It’s a shame to see a family break up.’ Essentially what is described here is a domestic group or household, which continues in existence only so long as its members live together.

I am sure one could think of many other usages of the word family, but perhaps this indicates why such an apparently simple task as defining your family is not as easy as it seems. The word ‘family’ is also used in various shorthand ways as well. For instance when we really mean children – ‘Have John and Mary got any family?’ As a scientific term it can be utilized in a very different way and applied, for instance, to animals – the cat family – or even languages and plants. But the four common conversational usages outlined above are more relevant to social scientists because they draw attention to important aspects of life in many societies.

We are all brought up to feel a sense of attachment not just to our parents, brothers and sisters but to our wider kin (relatives). It does not make any difference whether we really like them or not. Our kin are those people who have a ‘family relationship’ to us because of links of blood, marriage or adoption. We are supposed to respect ‘ties of kinship’ to certain people regardless of their personal qualities. Imbedded in all these relationships is some sense of obligation. Sometimes these obligations have legal force, for example in the parent–child relationship, but more commonly they are part of our shared, ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions about family life such as the responsibility which children, especially girls, have for their ageing parents.

Clearly in modern Britain we do not feel responsible – even when we know who they are – for all our kin. Even when we know that certain persons are related to us, we do not necessarily keep in touch with them. Other relatives may only be contacted at certain times with birthday and Christmas cards and the rare ‘get-togethers’ at weddings, christenings and funerals. Some relationships may be weak simply because of distance; an aunt down the road may be more significant to us than a brother in Australia. But it is not only distance that weakens relationships. Family rows and personality clashes can lead to a break in contact even when a close relative lives a few streets away. So we are selective. Of all our known kin we have a much smaller group of ‘effective’ kin, with whom social contact is maintained, and with whom our relationships are much more significant and meaningful.
I think we are all interested in knowing about our family. They are our roots. Some people go to great lengths to compile ‘family trees’ showing the branching of several generations of relatives. Indeed there is a growing industry of people offering their services to research family histories. This in itself might indicate the importance of the family for us. Try drawing up your family tree and indicate on it who are your effective kin. Are your effective kin biologically close kin? Why are these relatives significant to you? Do you feel a sense of obligation to any of your kin, if so, why?

Figure 4 shows my family tree. It covers four generations. I do not know my family history well enough to go further back. I do have contact with other people whom I know to be related, but I am unclear what their precise biological relationship to me is.

**Key**

- ME
- male
- female
- adopted
- deceased

Married, divorced, cohabitating, separated, effective kin.

I had some difficulty defining effective kin, but decided I would count all those kin with whom I have had regular contact in the last six months. However, I feel more close to some of my kin than others, and with these I have very regular and frequent contact and we feel mutually responsible for each other. I also have a small number of now elderly relatives for whom I feel responsible – but of whose exact relationship to me I am not certain (They have always been referred to as ‘aunties’).

How does my family tree compare with yours? Are there sufficient similarities for us to identify a ‘typical British family’?

Sociologists utilize two models of family structure to analyse kinship; these are the ‘extended’ family and the ‘nuclear’ family. The extended family is distinguished by a wide range of kin, covering more than two generations, who may live and work closely together. The nuclear family is a smaller unit of husband and wife and their biological children who are co-resident and relatively isolated from wider kin, this is thought to be the family form more typical of modern Western society.
2.2 The family in Britain: facts and figures

To determine whether or not your family is typical we need to know what the British family looks like. Is there such a thing as the typical family in Britain? To answer this question social scientists turn to the statistics, or demographic evidence. What does this tell us?

Table 1 shows the different types of households in Britain and the changes that took place between 1961 and 1985.

Q. What trends can you identify?
Three important trends stand out

1. There has been an increase – over double – of one-person households from 11% in 1961 to 24% in 1985. Typically such households are elderly people living alone or young people on their own prior to marriage.

2. The proportion of households which might be regarded as ‘typical’, that is a married couple with dependent children, has declined from 38% in 1961 to 29% in 1985.

3. The number of one-parent households with dependent children has increased; they formed only 2% of households in 1961 but 4% in 1985.

A word of caution. By highlighting change as I have done in the three points above one can create an impression that in twenty-four years considerable transformations in household patterns have taken place. Look again at Table 1, but this time compare households that consist of a married couple only. There has been little change between 1961 and 1985. Emphasizing this, rather than the three points noted above, gives a very different flavour to our account of living patterns. Do bear this in mind when examining the following statistics. It is not that statistics are a special form of lie (as Disraeli is reported to have said), but they do provide information of a more complex type than may appear at first sight. Table 1 classifies households. In Britain in the 1980s there are more households which do not consist of married couples and dependent children, but it does not follow from this that the majority of people (i.e. all adults and all children) do not live in nuclear families, or that the majority of children do not live in nuclear families.

Remember that statistical trends can be exaggerated by the manner in which information is classified and represented and by what is highlighted. So when reading claims involving statistics you need to look carefully at how they have been constructed, by whom, and for what purpose. Statistics can be abused, but used with caution they give a valuable insight, in this case into the pattern of living arrangements in modern Britain.
Below are various pieces of statistical information. Read them through carefully and make notes about what you feel they reveal about family relationships. See if you can link together two or more categories, for instance divorce and remarriage rates, which might have certain implications for understanding family practices. Keep notes of your ideas and compare them with my interpretation.

**Marriage**

(a) More people marry today than in former times. In mid Victorian England, for example, one third of women of marriageable age did not marry, mainly due to a shortage of men. Nowadays nine out of ten people will marry.

(b) Since the turn of the century more and more men and women have married, and from the Second World War until the early 1970s there was a gradual upward trend in the number of marriages.

(c) Figure 5 shows the total number of marriages in the United Kingdom for the years indicated.

![Marriage Graph](image)

**Divorce**

(a) Figure 6 shows the total number of divorces granted in the United Kingdom for the years indicated. Note that the Divorce Reform Act, which came into being in 1971, established 'irretrievable breakdown' of the marriage as the basis for divorce. In 1984 the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act allowed people to petition for dissolution of marriage after one year of marriage.

(b) In the United Kingdom in 1985 a total of 173,673 decrees were made absolute, an 11% increase over 1984 and more than double the number in 1971. The divorce rate for England and Wales in 1985 was 13.4 per thousand married people compared with only 2.1 per thousand in 1961.

(c) Over the last twenty-five years there has been a 600% increase in the divorce rate.

(d) 23% of couples who divorced in 1985 in England and Wales involved at least one partner who had been divorced before, compared with 9% in 1971 and 21% in 1984.
Figure 6
Total number of divorces (in thousands) in the United Kingdom
Source: Based on Social Trends, No. 17, 1987, Table 2.15, p. 49

(e) Table 2 shows the duration of marriages ending in divorce in Great Britain. Note the impact of the 1984 legislation whereas in 1984 1.2% of divorces in Great Britain occurred within two years of marriage, this proportion rose to 8.9% in 1985 (The 1984 legislation did not apply to Scotland.)

Table 2: Divorce by duration of marriage, 1961–85, Great Britain (percentages and numbers)

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(f) Teenage marriages are particularly at risk of breakdown. Whatever the length of marriage, the probability that a first marriage would end in separation was greater for women married under the age of 20 than for women who married later. Among women married in 1975–79, as many as 11% of those married at ages under 20 were separated within four years. For those aged 20–29 at marriage the proportion was 6%. Also, the proportions of women divorced were higher among those married at young ages. Among women married in 1970–74, 11% of those married before they were 20 were divorced within six years compared with 7% of women aged 20–29 at marriage (General Household Survey 1984, 1986, p. 27)
(g) 'As many as one in three marriages today will probably end in divorce' (Study Commission on the Family, 1983, p 11) and these divorces will affect a large number of children. The number of children aged under sixteen directly affected by divorcing couples was 156,000 in 1985. In 1985, 32% of the children of divorcing couples were aged under five with a further 37% aged 5 to 10. As many as one in five children born today will have parents who divorce before the children are sixteen years old.

In 1985, as a result of divorce proceedings, 554 children were committed to the care of a local authority under the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 and a further 1506 orders were made committing a child to the supervision of a local authority or welfare office. These numbers were down by 27% and 8% respectively on 1984' (Social Trends, No 17, 1987, p 51)

**Remarriage**

(a) One in three marriages involves a remarriage for at least one partner, and approximately one in six marriages involves a remarriage for both partners.

(b) Something like 80% of those divorcing under the age of thirty will remarry within five years (Study Commission on the Family, 1983, p 12).

(c) 'The remarriage rate for men is nearly three times as high as that for women, though the actual numbers of remarriages are similar. In 1985 101,000 men remarried in Great Britain, compared with over 95,000 women. The difference in rates between the sexes is due mainly to there being many more widows and divorced women than widowers and divorced men, especially among the older section of the population, so the eligible populations are different' (Social Trends, No 17, 1987, p 48)

**Cohabitation**

(NB It is likely that the available evidence underestimates the amount of cohabitation.)

(a) The extent of cohabitation (that is, a man and a woman living together without having married with a civil or religious ceremony) is increasing.

(b) 'Only 3% of women married for the first time in the late 1960s lived with their husbands before marriage. By the early 1970s this had increased to 10% and by the late 1970s the proportion was 20%. At that time, one in ten single women aged 20-29 were reported currently cohabiting' (Study Commission on the Family, 1983, p 11)

(c) Pre-marital cohabitation during the 1970s and early 1980s was more common, and tended to be for longer periods among couples in which at least one partner had been married before than among those marrying for the first time (General Household Survey, 1984, 1986, p 27).

(d) There has been an increasing proportion of illegitimate births that are registered on the joint information of both parents from 38% in 1961 to 65% in 1985 (Social Trends, No 17, 1987, Table 2.20, p 52).

**One-parent families**

(a) Among families with dependent children, a major change during the 1970s and early 1980s has been an increase in the proportion of families headed by a lone parent rather than a married couple. Table 3 shows that in 1982-84, 13% of families with dependent children were headed by a lone parent, compared with 8% in 1971-73.

Most lone-parent families are lone-mother families. In 1982-84 only 1% of families were headed by a lone father and this proportion has remained fairly stable since 1971.
Table 3 also shows that most of the increase in the proportion of lone-mother families was accounted for by increases in the proportions of families headed by single and divorced lone mothers: for example, the proportion of families headed by divorced lone mothers increased from 2% of families in 1971–73 to 5% in 1982–84. These changes reflect the trends towards higher divorce rates, the increasing incidence of births to unmarried women and the greater likelihood that an unmarried mother will keep her child' (General Household Survey 1984, 1986, p. 13). See Figure 7.

Figure 7
Different types of one-parent family in Great Britain in 1971–73 and 1982–84 (based on Table 3)

Note that Table 3 shows percentages for all family types (showing lone-parent families as a percentage of the total number of families with dependent children), whereas Figure 7 shows the proportion of each type of lone-parent family as a percentage of that category. Thus whilst between 1971–73 and 1982–84 the percentage of families headed by a lone father has not changed, as a percentage of all single-parent families it has decreased, because of the increase in lone-mother families.
(b) ‘In 1971 an estimated 570,000 families in Great Britain were headed by just one parent. This had grown to 750,000 in 1976 and estimates for 1980 suggest that there were 890,000 one-parent families. ‘One and a half million children lived in such families’ (Study Commission on the Family, 1983, p. 13).

(c) There are important geographical variations in that one-parent families are heavily concentrated in certain inner-city areas.

(d) There are also some variations between families of differing minority ethnic groups, e.g. few families of Asian origin are headed by a lone parent.

**Children**

(a) Total live births in England and Wales fell from 811,000 in 1961 to 656,000 in 1985.

(b) The number of illegitimate births in England and Wales rose from 48,000 in 1961 to 126,000 in 1985.

(c) The proportion of births that were illegitimate more than trebled in the period 1961 to 1985 from 6% to 19%.

(d) The number of adoptions in Great Britain has fluctuated recently, from 11,000 in 1981 and 12,000 in 1982, to 9,000 in 1984, thereby resuming the downward trend of the last decade. The number is now less than half the 1971 total of 23,000. This trend contrasts with the increase in illegitimate births over the same period ((a)-(d) *Social Trends*, No. 17, 1987, p. 52).

Could it be that an increasing number of lone parents have become more willing and able to support their children themselves rather than have them adopted? Could it be that men and women who are cohabiting are having children? (If a man and woman are not married their children are classified as illegitimate.)

(e) Table 4 shows that, while in 1979 83% of children lived with both (married) parents, 9% lived with a lone mother, 4% with their own mother and a stepfather, 2% were living with cohabiting parents and 1% were adopted or fostered. The majority of children in 1979 lived in households with both natural parents but note how the picture varies depending on the age of the child.
Table 5  Number of dependent children* by marital status, 1983 and 1984 combined, Great Britain (percentages and numbers)

(f)  Table 5 shows us that the average number of children in lone-mother families varied according to the mother’s marital status. Single lone mothers had the lowest average number of dependent children and separated lone mothers the highest.

The elderly
The number of people aged sixty-five or over is nearly five times greater now than in 1901, and in 1984 represented nearly 15% of the population compared with less than 5% in 1901. The number has grown by over two million since 1961 (Unit 4, section 2.1). Put another way, in 1901 one person in every twenty was aged over sixty-five but by 1984 this was about one in every seven. For those over seventy-five, the respective figures are one in every seventy-six at the turn of the century and one in every sixteen today.

Comment
Here are a few suggestions of points you may have noted about family life.

Marriage remains popular, but two trends have affected marriage – divorce and cohabitation. While the trend to more divorce may on the face of it suggest a disillusionment with marriage, the remarriage rates of divorcees suggest a different interpretation.

It seems likely that many couples now enter marriage with higher expectations than those of their parents or grandparents and are in a sense more committed to marriage as a means of achieving a fulfilling relationship and a good life. When some couples find their expectations unfulfilled, separation and then divorce is often a consequence. In the past many such people had to tolerate unhappy marriages. In this sense, it is important not to equate increased divorce, too readily, with an increase in the number of unhappy marriages (Study Commission on the Family, 1963, p 12).

The divorce reforms which came into force in 1971 made ‘irretrievable breakdown of marriage’ the basis for divorce where both parties wanted a divorce they had to prove that their marriage had broken down by showing that they had lived apart for two years. Even where one partner did not want a divorce, perhaps for religious reasons, the other partner could then petition for divorce after five years’ separation. The first full year to which the legislation applied was 1972, and in that year over 119,000 divorces were made absolute in England and Wales with the courts having to deal with a mammoth backlog of broken marriages.
Cohabitation is increasing. What was generally unacceptable one generation ago is more accepted today. But can we read from this a rejection of marriage? Cohabitation is more likely to precede a second or subsequent rather than a first marriage, possibly this is because one of the persons involved is unable to remarry immediately. Certainly more cohabiting couples are jointly registering the birth of their baby which might suggest stability in such relationships. However, such families are still very much a minority of living arrangements for parents and their children. 83% of all children live in families where both parents live and remain married to each other.

There has been a substantial increase in the number of one-parent families (One needs to be cautious about exaggerating this trend since many children after the First World War grew up in such families.) The trend toward divorce has contributed most towards an increase in one-parent families. However, again one needs to be cautious. A snapshot at any one time – like Table 4 – can give a false impression since family circumstances change, for example a lone parent may well remarry. It does not tell us the total number of parents and children in the population who have lived at some time as a one-parent family.

**Conclusion: continuity and change**

This demographic evidence suggests that the family unit remains an important social institution. Most young people will marry. Some – perhaps an increasing number – will live with their partner before marriage. Two-thirds of marriages will survive until the death of one partner and thus the vast majority of children will grow up living with both natural parents. But a significant number of children will be affected by the divorce of their parents and a sizeable number will spend some part of their childhood in a one-parent or step family.

How valid is it to talk of the typical or average British family? One can focus on change and emphasize the diversity of family life: one-parent families, reconstituted families, the ageing population (more and more young children in Britain will have not only grandparents but great-grandparents too), family forms of various ethnic groups, as well as diversity being created by changes in the relationship between work/unemployment and the family (such as more married women working). Many of these issues will be taken up in later units. While accepting change and diversity, it is also important to stress the continuity of the family unit. The dominant type of family unit for those with dependent children remains the nuclear family. While the snapshot picture (Table 1) shows that only a minority of households consists of families with children, it continues to be the typical experience of most people to be brought up in such families even when they now live alone.

**2.3 Is the family universal?**

As an astute reader of this course you will probably answer this question by saying it all depends what you mean by ‘the family’. This is undoubtedly part of the answer. We have seen that we easily slip from using the family to describe, for example, a married couple and their children living together, to describing the ranges of kin connected to us by either blood, marriage or adoption. In our everyday interactions we soon grasp which social group is being referred to by the overall context in which the term ‘family’ is being used.

In the previous section on the facts and figures of the family the knotty problem of actually defining the family was deftly avoided. Sometimes the term ‘household’ was used. Essentially the term ‘household’ is defined as one person living alone or a group who live regularly at the same address sharing at least one room. Sometimes when quoting statistics from the General Household Survey (GHS) the term ‘family’ was used the GHS (1986, p 10) defines a family as ‘a married couple on their own or a married couple or lone parent with their never-married children (provided that these children have no children of their own)’. This definition is not without
problems. Can you identify these? A major problem is who is excluded and who is included by such a definition. Thus grandparents living with their 'children's family' are classified as non-family members. A brother and sister living together are deemed to be a non-family household. It is unclear whether children living with a natural parent and that parent's new spouse and their children are counted as one family or a household with more than one family! There are numerous anomalies with the GHS definition of the family, as there are with any other. For what an examination of how we live in Britain reveals is that many people do not live in standardized groups that could be called a family. Indeed at any given time, the nuclear family of parents and their biological children is a minority living arrangement. Adults are found to be living in a variety of household forms and sizes. We cannot conclude from this that we are rejecting 'the family' en masse for some other form of living arrangement. Rather the nuclear family is a living arrangement which the majority of us will experience for part of our lives. We saw that the majority of children grow up living with both married parents. Death, divorce, remaining single, and not having children are some of the reasons the nuclear family is not the dominant living arrangement for the majority of adults.

From our own society it would be difficult to conclude that we have a typical family form. We cannot alight on a meaning that clearly pinpoints who is included in the definition, or one that embraces how we all live. It is important that you keep in mind this definitional difficulty because when you read or hear people talking about, for example, 'problem families' or 'deviant families', you need to be aware of what is being defined as non-problematic and non-deviant. That is to say, using these labels conveys an implicit assumption about what a normal family is.

Looking at the demographic evidence on child residence in Britain we could argue that the nuclear family is indeed the norm for children (Table 4 in the previous section shows that in 1979 83% of all children under 15 lived with both their natural parents — although this information does not tell us how many other people lived in those households!) But does it follow from this that this is the best way to bring up children, or that children who do not live in nuclear families are in some way deprived? Of course, posed in this way, one would say no. However, messages about what is the normal family environment for children also incorporate messages about what is socially desirable for children, as well as messages about other areas of our lives, as, for example, ideas about normal and appropriate gender behaviours — how men and women should behave as husbands and wives, and as fathers and mothers. These messages, or ideologies, describe the co-resident nuclear family in which the woman is housewife and mother primarily located within the 'private' world of the family, and the man is breadwinner and primarily located in the 'public' world of paid work. This ideology depicts these arrangements as universal and normatively desirable, and there is an underlying assumption that at the root this arrangement is biologically determined.

It is axiomatic that if a society is going to continue it must reproduce a new generation. But does it follow that the co-resident nuclear family, with its particular sexual division of labour, is the only way to organize reproduction? Is it the case that the co-resident nuclear family is the way reproduction is organized in other cultures?

I have emphasized social arrangements here because, as you have seen from Block 1, it is not the biological fact that human beings reproduce themselves that is important for social scientists, but the way society handles this biological fact. Human beings have found a multitude of ways to organize biological processes, and a plethora of beliefs to explain them. Human beings throughout history have struggled to control the natural world. You have already seen from Unit 1 that the study of childbirth, a process we might suppose to be a specifically biological one, does not occur in isolation from the wider setting in which birth is managed. The social world powerfully intervenes, organizes and ultimately affects the process of childbirth. There is an interplay between biology and society. Certainly the family has roots in major biological processes — birth, sickness, death, intimacy, sexuality,
eating and sleeping. But all these processes can take place outside the family, and can be organized in a variety of ways, both within and outside what we call the nuclear family. To say the nuclear family is ‘natural’ does not tell us how supposedly natural processes are organized in the family, and does not encourage an examination of the numerous alternative ways of organizing ‘natural processes.’ Nor does it lead us to ask questions about why a society might regard what it calls the family as a natural institution. Conceptualizing the family as ‘natural’ makes it easier to think of the family in essentialist terms, that is, to believe the family – or something we recognize as the family – will be found in all societies. It sounds impressive, but actually tells us little or nothing at all. Its explanatory power is negligible, because it requires a very elastic definition of the family to be true.

There now exists an extensive literature in the field of anthropology documenting societal differences in living arrangements, demonstrating conclusively the cultural specificity of our social structures and social organization. Unfortunately we do not have the time to follow up this literature here, but in order that you get an insight into the cultural variability of living arrangements and the beliefs informing such arrangements I would like you to read Felicity Edholm’s article ‘The unnatural family.’

Now read the article by Felicity Edholm, ‘The unnatural family’, which you will find in the Block 2 Offprints Booklet.

- When you are reading through this article bear in mind why you are reading it now. If you are uncertain re-read the previous three paragraphs. This will help you focus on the key points. I do not expect you to remember the names and details of the different cultures, fascinating though this detail is.

- Why does Edholm look at conception, incest, parent/child relations, marriage and household residence?

- After you have read through the article write a few notes summarizing the key points.

Edholm argues that we are profoundly ethnocentric in our characterization of the family. By examining the variety of living arrangements, and the variety of understanding and meanings which other cultures attach to conception, incest, parent–child relations and marriage – the very heart of our construction of the nuclear family – Edholm concludes that the nuclear family is not a fact of nature, but a particular cultural formulation and construction of reproduction. The nuclear family is neither natural nor universal.

Your work on this unit so far will have demonstrated to you that a term like the family which we commonly use, and to which we all attach a great deal of importance, embodies a more complex and contradictory set of ideas, practices and relationships than our everyday usage might suggest. Even when thinking about different family types we often seek to understand the unfamiliar by mapping on our own terms of reference. Did you find yourself doing this when watching TV? That we can identify so much confusion and uncertainty about what the family is and means in no way diminishes or undermines the social significance of the ideal of the family. Indeed it is a testament to the ideological power of the concept of the family that it is such a difficult term to relinquish. So what is the appeal of the family?
There is no one definition or description of a typical family. The family, as we have seen, defies precise definition. Yet at a common-sense level we all know what it is. We all have experience of it. What is so fascinating about the family is that despite all the vicissitudes of life it remains a significant institution. Surveys reveal more satisfaction about the family than with other aspects of life in Britain. Why is this? What is the appeal of the family?

To answer this question it is worth asking ourselves what we get out of the family. What do men and women want from the family? Are the things we gain from the family positive and good? Are there negative and bad consequences of family living? You should try to answer these questions for yourself. To assist your thinking you may find that filling in the table below helps. I have filled in some 'first thoughts' to trigger your reflections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td><strong>Financial &amp; emotional security</strong></td>
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<td>A housekeeper</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Negative</strong></th>
<th><strong>Oppression &amp; inequality</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibilities &amp; burdens</td>
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3.1 Negative aspects of the family

You may have come up with some of the things which sociologists and psychologists have called the dark side of the family: the family as a trap to its members, isolated from the wider community and inward looking, exclusive and private, concerned only with the welfare of its members, ignoring, uncaring and hostile to others. In the late sixties radical psychiatrists like Ronald Lang and David Cooper argued that the family damaged the development of individuality by producing an environment that was too restrictive, too cloistered. Relationships within the family are often confused and conflictual. It is an environment of anger, jealousy and shame. Tension and hostility that exist between husband and wife are transmitted to the children. The family is an emotional battleground. The child has an identity thrust upon it, rather than being allowed to develop. There is a psychological tension between the dependence of a child on its parents and the child's progression to an independent adult. Parents want to see their child grow up, and yet they want to hang on to the small dependent child. Family members develop a need for love - which brings some pleasure - but this can also be the basis for repression, violence and guilt.

This theme was echoed by the anthropologist Edmund Leach in his 1967 BBC Reith Lectures when he suggested 'Far from being the basis of the good society, the family with all its tawdry secrets and narrow privacy is the source of all our discontents.' You may have picked up on the family as the site or source of both men's and women's oppression. Men are forced by their role as breadwinner to engage in long hours of - and, for many, tedious - work, away from the home. In consequence it is difficult for them to develop close bonds with their children and to be involved intimately with their care and development. This may lead them to feel excluded from and unloved by their family and ultimately may cause a rift between spouses. The family, with all its attendant responsibilities, may be expressed not as the site of comfort and human fulfilment but rather as a policing agent that forces men to work, and which is ungrateful to them for all their efforts on its behalf. Prevailing attitudes about the role of the breadwinner not only heap scorn on fathers who renge on their duties by walking out, but also exert tremendous psychological pressure on men who through unemployment are unable to fulfil this role. (This is often argued to be the source of the high incidence of psychological illness among unemployed men.)

It may not be until they are older that men come to realize what the breadwinner role has cost them in terms of relationships with their children, as these two fathers quoted by Philip Hudson suggest.

'Do you know the worst thing in my life was something my son said to me the other day. We're very close, he and I, and we can say anything we like but there's always been a difference between us and he said 'Dad, when I was a little boy and wanted you to play with me you always said you were too tired or busy' - and do you know, that really hurt because I can never have that time back.'

'Everything I read convinced me that my wife would have a really tough time when the kids left home. But she didn't. I was the one who almost cracked up.'

'I had started to let up a little on the time and energy I was devoting to my job. I decided that I had cheated myself. I had not allowed myself time to enjoy my children as they were growing up. They were strangers to me in some ways. I wanted to get closer to them. But they had no desire or need to get close to me at that time.'

'When they were little they used to wheedle me to do things with them, but I tried to avoid whatever it was they wanted. Now that I wanted to do things with them, they were too busy with their own lives.' (Hudson, 1984)

The man's role of breadwinner which marginalizes his role in the upbringing of his children is demonstrated by the fact that the courts almost invariably award custody to mothers in divorce cases.

For women, the family and marriage have been identified as the main sources of female oppression. In spite of growing participation of married women in paid
employment and legislation promising equal pay and equal opportunities, the basic assumption guiding men and women, as well as policy-makers, is that women are primarily responsible for the maintenance of the household - as housewives and mothers - even when they are engaged in paid employment. The consequence of this is that women are brought up and come to see this as their primary role in society and are thereby denied the opportunity to participate in the wider society and to gain equality with men.

The identification of women with domesticity as a vocation leads to women having the caring role for not only children and spouse, but also elderly and disabled relatives - regardless of whether they would actually wish to do this, or whether they are available to do this. As Hilary Land (1985) and Elizabeth Wilson (1977) have shown, the policies of the state both in welfare and income maintenance provisions assume and insist that women are obliged to carry out - and are destined for - housework and caring for those in need. In addition housework - which is hard and never-ending and unpaid - is carried out in the privacy and solitude of the family home. The 'imprisonment' of women in the family home has, therefore, been seen as one of the major explanations for the higher incidence of depression among women than men. In a study on the social origins of depression carried out in the late 1970s in Camberwell by Brown and Harris, two in three married, working-class women with a child at home were suffering from clinical depression or were borderline cases, compared with 17% of a cross-sample of all women in the study. Married, working-class women were at a higher risk of depression when they had young children at home (quoted in Lees, 1986). As Ann Oakley comments, depression is 'a psychiatric label that hides the social facts of the housewife's loneliness, low self-esteem and work dissatisfaction' (1982, p. 176)

In addition the division of labour in the family is associated with the greater power of the man. Modern families are unequal. '[t]he principle of the wage-earner and his dependants, of the husband who contributes cash while the wife contributes household labour, is not a division of labour between equals, but an unequal exchange in which the man's interests predominate' (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982, p. 65). Thus the wife and children are in very real maternal senses dependent upon the husband/father.

Jan Pahl's (1980) study of the distribution of money within marriage has shown how unequal the relationship between husband and wife actually is, and revealed the real dependency/poverty of the wife which is hidden within the privacy of the domestic economy. Other studies have similarly demonstrated that after divorce some women experience a higher standard of living on supplementary benefits than when they were married because of their lack of access to their husband's wage during the marriage. Carol Smart identifies this particular aspect of women's vulnerability in marriage as '... hidden much of the time by the structure of the domestic economy, particularly the institution of housekeeping which can masquerade as a wage, or simply by the privacy of domestic life that obscures the extensiveness and special nature of poverty suffered by women' (Smart, 1984).

This unequal relationship is apparent when one considers the word 'family' and its origins. Family comes from the Latin *familium*, meaning a servant or slave, which reminds us that wives and children, along with servants, were historically part of man's property. Two roots of this idea of the family are conjured up and conveyed when we say women 'marry into' their husbands' families, and families are said to have 'died out' if an all-female generation occurs.

In highlighting negative aspects of the family and thinking of the family as an enclosed group, experienced possibly by men and women as a prison, one may focus on family violence. It is becoming a common occurrence to pick up the papers and read of horrendous cases of child abuse. One quarter of reported violent crime is wife assault (Dobash and Dobash, 1977, pp. 426-42) and a very large proportion of rapes are carried out by men who know their victims well - estranged husbands.
boyfriends, fathers and uncles (Rape Crisis Centre, 1977). Moreover it is confidently assumed that domestic violence is very under-reported and that its incidence is much higher. The power that men have over women in the family is experienced very really in this area for most women in such situations there is no other alternative but to stay and endure it. Family violence, which includes battery and assault on aged relatives, shows very starkly how vulnerable people can be within the family and how women are trapped much more than men (see Figure 3).

Indeed violence in the family raises other important questions about modern family life. Why when a man is brutally assaulting his wife are police and neighbours so reluctant to intervene? Possibly the answer is to be found in prevailing ideas about the family – private, domestic, autonomous – and the religious bond and acceptance of male power in the family. Our society believes that the bond between husband and wife is special, outsiders should keep out even when it is quite clear that extreme, violent assault is occurring to a woman. Why is the woman in a situation like this so reluctant to go for help and protection? Many women themselves feel that violence is a normal risk of marriage and that if they are battered it is their own fault – they should have found ways to avoid it. Dobash and Dobash explain violence in contemporary marriage in terms of the patriarchal underpinnings of the family itself.

In Western society a man feels that marriage gives him the right to expect domestic service and sexual exclusivity from his wife. The fulfilment of these behaviours is not only personally pleasant to him, it also becomes an outward sign of his rightful possession of authority over her and an ability to control her (Dobash and Dobash, 1977, p. 478).

Whilst not all women are physically battered, because of the nature of marriage many men have the power to batter ‘their’ women if they so wish.

I expect you have come up with many other aspects of, or consequences of, families that are negative – bitter marriages, disappointed parents, disturbed adolescents or whatever. But if the catalogue of family-induced evils is so great why are we so attached to the family and the family ideal?

3.2 Positive aspects of the family

In approaching this question you may have focused on human needs and aspirations, affection, security, intimacy, sexual love and parenthood. These are very real human needs. To avoid being repetitive I am going to structure my response to the positive aspect of the family around three issues:

- Why do people marry?
- Why do people have children?
- Familial ideology

**Why do we marry?**

We have already seen in this unit that marriage is popular. Nine out of 10 people will marry. Some 90% of women are married before the age of 30. Men marry a slightly later age, but 90% of them are married before the age of 40. Everyone is expected to marry now, and they are expected – and expect themselves – to marry young. The older that people – but particularly women – get, the more pressure is exerted to get married. You are ‘on the shelf,’ ‘odd,’ ‘gay’. Social life becomes organized around married couples, to be single is to be on the margins, not fitting in, an embarrassment for yourself and others. In view of the popularity of marriage, it is hardly surprising that the two questions ‘Should I marry?’ and ‘Should we have children?’ apparently do not occur to most people. ‘Parenthood, like marriage, was taken for granted’ says Lyn Richards of the Australian couples whom she interviewed.
'Why not stay single?' and 'Why not stay childless?' had been equally non-questioned. Virtually none of the men or women had asked either question of themselves or their partners. Almost everyone interviewed remembered people expecting them to have children. Having children had been expected from childhood. Marriage and childrearing were part of the same unquestioned assumption about growing up. (Quoted in Oakley, 1982, pp. 243–4)

Similarly, when Diana Leonard in her research in Swansea in the early 1970s asked girls when they had decided to get married, they said they could not remember a time when it had not been a consideration. Rather than choosing not to get married, girls 'fail' to get married (Leonard, 1980).

Marriage is one of the key events of life, the 'rite of passage' that confers adult status. Diana Leonard (1980) demonstrated that a proper wedding is a key goal for many. Much time, effort and expense are put into ensuring that the ritual of marriage is performed correctly. Leonard argues that marriage represents an important change from being somebody's child, a semi-dependant, to becoming someone else's spouse and this marks an important shift in the customary and legal relations between children and their parents. Marriage is a way of breaking free from parental controls. This independence is expressed by the couple, and demonstrated to the world, by moving into their own home. 'The trouble was that home and husband come as a double gift-wrapped package you married for the one as much as for the other' (Ingham, 1981, p. 119).

Marriage is also popular because it legitimizes sexual relations – no longer confined to future grapes in the back of a car on the parents' sofa, but at any time in your own home. This aspect is particularly true for women. Female sexuality is constructed and constrained by the categorization of slags and drags, a woman's femininity and sexuality is only rendered "safe" when confined to the bonds of marriage. There is just no alternative, as girls see it, to married life. (Lees, 1986, p. 109).

'Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage' being in love with somebody is the reason for getting married to them (as long as it is a heterosexual love match?) The prevalence of marriage and the tendency of divorced couples to remarry are inevitably interpreted as lending support to the success of marriage in providing couples with a secure and romantic future – the 'they lived happily ever after' of fairy tales. Is love sexual desire? Is it partnership and companionship? Surprisingly, we actually know very little about it – except that romantic love is highly prized in our culture. We are brought up to believe that it is something we will recognize when it happens to us and this will be the time to pledge ourselves to our future partner.

It would seem, however, that girls and women are more immersed in romance than men. It is a key element in female, especially adolescent girls', culture. They are the target for the very lucrative romantic fiction market. But studies of adolescent girls suggest that they are not starry-eyed about marriage – the realities of marriage are all too apparent through the experiences of mothers, elder sisters and neighbours. Nevertheless they hope their marriage will be different, they hope to find 'a man who will understand them, share things with them and protect them from the loneliness that they see around them. What they seem to be expressing is the rather unlikely hope that love will save them from the grim reality of most of the marriages they observe' (Lees, 1986, p. 105).

The romantic vision is tempered by practicalities, however.

Although romance breathed life and energy into shopfloor culture it was not a simple notion, but a complex and contradictory element in women's lives. Their commitment to love and marriage and their insistence upon heterosexuality were underpinned by the economic constraints which necessitated an 'alliance' between men and women if they are to enjoy a reasonable standard of living and some of the freedoms of being away from their parents. Marriage was part of a strategy adopted by women to realize some of the benefits of our society.
It was not, however, simply material benefits that were at issue. Womanhood, as it was understood on the shopfloor, was realized through marriage and motherhood, the celebration of engagements and weddings was part of the confirmation of this. The tensions between romance and realism existed and were skilfully lived out on a day-to-day basis and when women looked to the future (Westwood, 1984, pp 104–5).

Whilst girls’ and women’s aspirations for their marriage are tempered by the reality of marriage as they have witnessed it, nevertheless, as Sallie Westwood has noted:

Working-class women are committed to the family because it is an experience and a space which offers them some degree of autonomy over their lives and the warmth, support and affection from a group of people who matter and who in turn make a woman feel she is important and valued (Westwood, 1984).

Indeed many sociological studies of family life have shown that marriage provides for women the network of friends and relatives who offer a system of support, this network is based on women (see, for example, Kerr, 1958).

Much has been written about women’s feelings about marriage – that stress on love and emotion – but there is little on men’s feelings. This may have much to do with definitions of masculinity and femininity in our society, and what is acceptable for men to express publicly, rather than evidence that men do not have needs for love and affection that they hope will be realized in marriage. (However, I am a woman and may well be wrong!) Paul Willis argues ‘The contortions and strange (romantic) rituals of the girls are seen as part of their girlliness, of their inherent weakness and confusion. Their romanticism is tolerated with a knowing masculinity, which privately feels it knows more about the world’ (Willis, 1977, p 45) Once they are married and have been for a long time, men may be more prepared to express, and give weight to, their need for affection and companionship. Thus David, a husband interviewed by Maureen Green, said: ‘I think marriage is deep friendship and complete trust’ (1984, p 263) Emphasizing human values, providing a place where individuals have worth for themselves – giving ‘men an evening refuge from the icy blast of competition’ (Shorter, 1979, p 272) – these are the kind of factors which make marriage attractive to men.

Jessie Bernard (1973) has shown that the needs and expectations that men bring to marriage can be very different from those of women. A woman may want to get married because she cannot support herself by her income alone, as the earlier quote from Sallie Westwood suggests. The prospect of earning sufficient money to be financially independent is only open to relatively few well-paid, middle-class women. Since, on average, women earn only two-thirds of men’s earnings it is only therefore through marriage that women have potential access to a decent living wage. Moreover life is much more hazardous for a single woman – hazards that are the consequence of a patriarchal society, but from which women need protection. The very real fear of sexual harassment places constraints on women’s freedom and is a reason for ‘getting a man’.

She could not go out alone at night. She could not in a moment of loneliness go out to a local tavern to have a drink in company. She could not even appear to be lacking an escort, if that escort decided to abandon her she was helpless. She couldn’t defend herself, she had to depend on a male for that. She averted her eyes from any male who passed her and never smiled at them even when they greeted her. Her dream of choosing and living a life of her own had vanished. (French, 1978, quoted in Lees, 1986, p 94).

So Mira in Marilyn French’s novel The Women’s Room realized about being a woman alone. This fear of vulnerability will have resonance to all of you who are women, and it is something teenage girls are all too aware of, as Lees’ interviews showed.
'A boy can go out and just enjoy himself but a girl can’t really. She’s got to worry. Old men come along and molest her. I don’t like going out. You feel safer if you go out with other girls than go out on your own. You’re even safer with a boy, that’s what you feel whether it’s true or not.’

'Say you have a boy protecting you. It’s as if no one can hurt you or nothing. You’re protected and everything. If someone does something to you, then there’s him there and it just makes you feel secure.’

'He doesn’t like it when other people are out to get you. It doesn’t mean that other people can’t do nothing to you, but it’s kind of protective toward you.’

(Lees, 1986, p 93)

The suggestion that women are looking to marriee to provide them with material benefits and emotional security implies that marriage really is a contract. What benefits do men accrue from the contract? 'Sex and chips’ replied one female reader to the question ‘What do men really want?’ posed in a serious newspaper (quoted in Hudson, 1984, p 1) And on the face of it this may not be completely off the mark. Certainly marriage seems to be good for men. Single males are four times as likely to be in mental hospital as are married males of the same age (Remember the incidence of mental illness for women?) Married men live longer and are healthier than single men. So marriage does offer material advantages, and ones which boys recognize. Listen to what Spike has to say in Paul Willis’s study.

I’ve got the right bird. I’ve been going with her for eighteen months now. Her’s as good as gold. She’s fucking done well. She’s clean. She loves doing fucking housework. Trousers I bought yesterday. I took ‘em up last night. And she turned them up for me. She’s as good as gold and I wanna get married as soon as I can’ (Willis, 1978, pp 44–5)

Spike is expressing, albeit in an overtly macho way, the prevailing view and reality of sexual divisions in our society. Men provide for their family – the breadwinner role – and in return they expect to be serviced. This means not only sexual services – and indeed there is no such crime as rape in marriage (which does not mean in my view that it does not take place) – but also services like catering, laundry, cleaning and so on. Were such services purchased on the open market, they would cost men dearly. In providing for her husband’s well-being and taking on most (if not all) other domestic tasks, a wife presents her husband’s employer with a worker who is fit for work and able to give his undivided attention to work’ (Finch, 1983, p 80). There is no evidence to suggest that the increased participation of women in the labour market has lessened her responsibilities for child care and housework, and this issue is explored further in Unit 9 and TV5. The widely held assumption of our society is that women, regardless of whether they are in paid employment or not, are responsible for whatever needs doing in terms of both housework and child care.

The article by Tim Rayment from The Sunday Times, reproduced overleaf, reports one evaluation of the economic advantages of a wife. When reading it, you might also note the connections between the evaluation and evidence offered earlier in this unit about patterns of remarriage.

Marriage may have other economic advantages for men. A wife can bring status and credit to a man and be a distinct advantage to him in his career – entertaining the boss and clients, for example, and a visible example, through her appearance and taste, of his financial success. For the wealthy, marriage has long been an important way of enlarging and consolidating property and wealth, as well as a crucial means of political alliance. When Downes came with wives it was a valuable incentive for men to marry and increase their wealth. And primogeniture (inheritance by the first son) necessitated the securing of a wife to guarantee a legitimate male heir. Reforms to increase married women’s property rights have partially changed this aspect of marriage, but the fact that men and women largely marry within their own class is of tremendous importance to business and political elites, as many studies of such families have shown.

"The Sunday Times" reproduction
'Marriage is like a cage one sees the birds outside desperate to get in, and those inside desperate to get out' so wrote Michel De Montaigne in the sixteenth century! When we look at the marriage and divorce rates nowadays, maybe this is still true. But despite high divorce rates and the increasing popularity of cohabitation, there are strong assumptions in our society that normal men and normal women will wish to be married, and that this is the first stage of setting up a family. But, as we have seen, the reasons that women and men marry are not the same. Men and women go into marriage for – and get out of marriage – different things. This tells us
something about the position of men and women in society and about prevailing ideas about men and women. Men and women may well get married because they wish to have children. Indeed, it may well be that some couples marry to legitimize an impending birth or a birth that has already occurred. Certainly in our society there are strong cultural messages that once the ‘normal’ man and woman have married children will shortly follow. Marriage is the first stage in family-building, but a family without children lacks purpose. The second stage, to complete the family, is having children. So why do we have children?

Why do we have children?

To pose the question in this way presupposes that we have a choice. Remember the earlier quotation from Lyn Richards’ work in Australia. Almost everyone interviewed remembered people expecting them to have children. Having children had been expected from childhood. Marriage and children were part of the same unquestioned assumption about growing up. Maybe we have assumed we will have children because in the past having children inevitably followed from sexual intercourse. The ability to control reproduction is a relatively recent phenomenon so the implied choice in the question is also a relatively recent one. While this is largely true, it cannot be assumed that in earlier times people were ignorant of birth control methods. Pessaries, sheaths, herbal abortifacients, cautus interruptus, coitus reservatus, abortion, infanticide and infanticide were known as far back as ancient Egypt. Before the twentieth century many abortionists were the female midwives who assisted at births and to whom you have been introduced in Unit 1. Of course, knowing that a society at a particular time has knowledge of birth control does not mean that we know the extent to which it was actually practised. Unfortunately there is no time in this week’s work to look at the history of birth control. However, before leaving the issue, it is worth reflecting on birth control in light of our earlier discussion about power relationships between men and women both within marriage and in wider society. In heterosexual intercourse which partner has knowledge of, access to and takes responsibility for birth control is a power factor in such relationships. Power relationships about birth control, and the consequences of sexual intercourse, permeate marital (and non-marital) relations between the sexes and have major repercussions on the nature and structure of families.

That ‘normal’ men and women will get married and have children is a deeply rooted expectation in our society and possibly this is why we never question that this will be our future. The vast majority of those who marry will have children. Some married couples do choose not to have children but such a choice is still seen as unusual and is often considered unnatural. The selfish act of a materialistic couple, rather than a positive act stemming from the belief that every child should be a wanted child. Some couples cannot have children because they are infertile. Because of the importance of children in our culture this can cause major life crises for them, affecting the woman’s view of her femininity and the man’s view of his masculinity. The couple have to face a changed future rebuilt without the expectation of children, and one in which they are stigmatized and pitied.

Sex and sexuality are seen as necessary evils in the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition which is central to western culture. Sex should take place in a heterosexual marriage and should be for the purpose of begetting children. ‘Indulging’ in sex without accepting the rest — marriage and children — is still widely condemned. If you think I’m being a little old-fashioned, just think about the interminable and exceedingly emotional disputes that still take place about not only the content and form of sex education in school, but even whether or not ‘such matters’ should be discussed in school at all.

The rules and consequences of the ‘marriage—sex—children package’ are not the same for men and women which, I would suggest, is why men and women have very different interests in children. Motherhood, we are told, is woman’s ‘sacred calling’ and ‘natural destiny’, and at the same time her most honoured and exalted role. If women have power, it is in this role hence the saying, ‘The hand that rocks
It is what marks her as a real woman. Fatherhood does not define a man in the same way. What marks out the real man is when he enters the labour force. For women paid work is still seen either as a temporary fill-in between leaving school and getting married and having babies, or something undertaken to supplement the family income. I am not saying that this is actually how women experience their lives but rather this is the ideological environment within which women live out their lives. Indeed Martin and Roberts found that young, childless women expressed the least commitment to work. The fact that young, childless women are less attracted to work suggests that the pull of anticipated domesticity and motherhood reduces young women’s interest in working while the experience of being at home makes women more interested in working (1984, p 177). A case perhaps of experience defeating hope! All women are believed to have a biological instinct or drive to become mothers and to nurture children. These ideas are widely held by both men and women and are the basis for a whole range of other attitudes and beliefs — that women are gentle, caring, emotional and protective, the qualities associated with motherhood. There is a twist in all this in that beliefs about women having natural urges to be mothers are also beliefs about marriage, that is, the dominant ideology of reproduction is that no sane, rational female wants to be a mother outside marriage. I’m sure you’ve heard the joke.

**Doctor:** Well, Mrs Brown, I’ve splendid news for you.

**Patient:** It’s Miss Brown.

**Doctor:** Miss Brown, I have terrible news for you.

Brought up to believe that womanhood is equivalent to motherhood, having a child for a woman marks a dramatic change in status, and brings with it social approval. Sally Westwood’s women factory-workers celebrated pregnancy, motherhood and babies as the ‘universal and identifying feature of womanhood.’ In this, it cut
across racial and ethnic divisions, shopfloor culture celebrated motherhood as the final stage in the process of becoming a woman' (Westwood, 1984, p 228) Sara Maitland recalls how she was 'miraculously restored to my mother's love, and approval I was having a baby for her that meant I was a good girl and a good woman' (quoted in Gittins, 1985, p 95) Thus having a child shows the world she is now a Woman Motherhood is so widely perceived in our society as the ultimate proof of feminine nature, the very purpose of female existence, that it takes considerable courage and pain for a woman to admit that she does not have the gift for it, or wishes to obtain fulfilment in life in other areas

Men's status is not so interwoven with fatherhood There is no equivalent ideology about fatherhood Men are not seen as having an inexorable, inextricable paternity urge, though they are seen as having a sex drive Thus if a man accrues status in the process of parenting it is more to do with his virility Children may bring men credit, they do not define them 'Babies, toddlers and young children have had their often acutely pleasurable place in the male experience but on the margins of the male life' (Jackson, 1983, p 9, my emphasis)

I am sure that both mothers and fathers receive tremendous joy and emotional satisfaction from their children. The unqualified and total love which young children give their parents must engage both men and women. It is unlike any other relationship in adult life. But the sexual division of labour I have described earlier in this unit invariably prevents fathers being involved in the parenting role. In his opening chapter to Fatherhood – revealingly subtitled The Invisible Man – Brian Jackson notes how little we know about fathers. His review both of fiction and documentary evidence

was a reminder of how remote, or at least distanced, the father figure could be, and how infrequently the relationship with the new child was seen through his eyes.

Many of the fathers interviewed have no difficulty recalling their sense of a mother's relationship with them when one asked about their father, there is hesitation

(1983, p 3)

Indeed, parenting is invariably identified by the professionals as mothering. When you are next in a bookshop flip through the 'baby' books and see for whom they are written and who is pictured looking after the baby. Usually even in the 'modern' editions it is 'mum'. Women are encouraged and enabled by cultural norms to express intimate feelings openly, men are not, and do not normally express such feelings. This does not mean that fathers care or feel any less. The problem for men is that their breadwinner role and our cultural norms exclude them from developing full relationships with their children and deny them the language and confidence to express their feelings – with the tragic consequences that the quotations in section 3.1 reveal.

Women are more directly and intimately involved with their children. The physical closeness permitted to a mother in our culture is intensely satisfying and sensual, while men's love for their children has to develop in other less physical ways. For many women, having a child may be seen by them as the only way in which they can obtain a permanent and loving relationship with another person. Indeed, since women as mothers generally are more centrally involved in child-rearing, the potential for influencing their children's behaviour, attitudes and education is enormous. Given the kinds of alternative on offer to teenage girls and young women, it is hardly surprising that motherhood seems infinitely more satisfying and fulfilling than paid employment.

Sociologists and historians argue that having children for both men and women was in the past an economic necessity for parents from an early age children contributed to the household income, and still do in many Third World countries. As you have already seen from Units 2 and 3, the concept of childhood itself is a historically specific one. Now sociologists tell us that children are an economic cost to the family unit. However, one should not accept this 'received wisdom' uncritically.
Unit 1 examined maternal and perinatal mortality rates and showed that in the past childbirth frequently resulted in the mother’s and infant’s death. In assessing the economic contribution of children to the household income in the past, we should not forget that the possible death of both mother and child must have constantly threatened the security of the household. Nor can we simply assume that children do not contribute to the economy of the household in modern Britain. The labour of young girls both in child care and domestic work is crucial to the functioning of many family units, enabling the mother to do other work or to enter paid employment, for example. However, it is in another area that parents might see children as economic assets – as an insurance policy for old age. Unit 4 has shown that there is a crisis in ‘carrying’ this means that both men and women may want children ‘as a general form of security for old age, as a defence against institutionalization, as a source of love and emotional support, and as a bastion against loneliness’ (Gittins, 1985, pp. 98–9). In *Why Children?* Irena Kleptsis writes about these fears and her decision to remain childless.

When depressed about the fragility and transience of friendships, or the inconstancies of lovers, it was the myth of a child, a blood relation and what it could bring me, which seemed to me the only guarantee against loneliness and isolation, the only way of maintaining a connection to the rest of society. And certainly one of the difficulties for me, a woman who now knows that she will never bear children, is to let go of that myth without sinking into total despair (1980, p. 18).

Sociologists of the family writing in the increasingly affluent 1950s and ’60s played down this aspect of the family, confident as they were in ‘the march of progress’ with the caring welfare state which had stripped the family of the responsibility for the old. Even then, this was a highly partial reading of the situation. Large amounts of unpaid and unrecognized caring for the elderly (as well as the sick and the disabled) have always taken place in families or between family members. Moreover, elderly people live in fear of being put into old people’s homes and hospitals, associated as they are with destitution, dependency and the workhouse (indeed many hospitals are converted workhouses). Younger members of old people’s families recognize and sympathize with these fears, and feel a tremendous guilt if they have to resort to this kind of provision to resolve the problem of caring for their elderly kin. The caring role of the family is now publicly extolled with the economic and social beliefs that have been labelled ‘Thatchersm’. These economic and social policies aim to reduce state expenditure and look to the family as the ‘natural’ agency for care in our society. In most cases, of course, the family really means women – and is but an extension of the cultural definition of women as ‘carers’ (see Finch and Groves, 1983, Walker, 1982). Indeed, as men do not generally ‘enjoy’ the longevity of women they may well assume that their wives will care for them in old age. Perhaps it is women who need their children in their declining years.

Parents may thus well look to children, particularly their female children, for succour in their old age. Yet children marry, move away, emigrate, and frequently quarrel with parents, or die young, so there can only be a hope rather than a guarantee that having children will automatically provide economic, emotional and loving security in old age.

In the previous section on ‘Why do we marry?’ I suggested that economic inheritance might well be a consideration. Engels argued that the bourgeoisie wanted legitimate children – male heirs – to pass on their property to. This is, of course, a particular class interest for having children, the majority of us do not have relatively significant wealth holdings to pass on (although increased ownership of houses is giving more people an ‘estate’ for their children to inherit). However, inheritance can be viewed differently. In a world where few of us experience fulfilment in our lives, where we are alienated, ‘our stamp upon the world has been, traditionally, our stamp upon our children’ (Downick and Grundberg, 1980, p. 7), or as Melba Wilson says ‘I suppose, too, that like a lot of people, I wanted to leave something of myself behind’ (in Downick and Grundberg, 1980, p. 112). That
'something' of ourselves to pass on to our children could be our skills, knowledge, values, traditions, beliefs, or other characteristics and traits. A way, in a secular world, of achieving immortality? The reality of our needs and desires may be to live vicariously through our children, projecting on to them all our own frustrated hopes and desires.

**Marriage, children and the family**

Marriage and children, wrapped round and called the family, are the likely futures for most people. What we hope for and what we actually receive may not be the same. The dreams and reality may differ. We may dream as adolescents of freedom and independence in our own home fitted with all the material goods constantly paraded before our eyes on the television, the reality of unemployment, expensive mortgages, high rents and a baby may actually mean living in poverty, cooped up with our parents— not independent and definitely not free. A woman may see marriage and her own family as a guarantee of security and safety. The reality may be a terrifying and violent prison. What is so fascinating about the family and family life is that its appeal and its inequities are closely related—two sides of the same coin.

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*Having come to some conclusion about what men and women get out of the family, I can now complete the table I started at the beginning of section 3. How does it compare with yours?*

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<th>MEN</th>
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<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
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<td>A housekeeper</td>
<td>Financial &amp; emotional security</td>
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<td>Adult status</td>
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<td>Legitimate access to sex partner</td>
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<td>Female companionship</td>
<td>Companionship of husband and female kin</td>
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<td>Servicing/care/comfort</td>
<td>Affection &amp; support</td>
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<td>Stand as social status has a wife</td>
<td>Financial support &amp; material benefits</td>
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<td>Power</td>
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<td>Fatherhood &amp; children</td>
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<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
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<td>Financial responsibilities &amp; burdens</td>
<td>Oppression &amp; inequality</td>
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<td>Estrangement from wife &amp; children</td>
<td>Never-ending hard work</td>
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<td>Lack of independence</td>
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<td>Disappointment &amp; unhappiness</td>
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Men and women get different things from the family. Some are good and some are bad, sometimes we experience the benefits and costs at one and the same time, sometimes the good things go sour. Circumstances change, family situations change. Possibly these changes are brought on by children growing up, parents getting older, material circumstances altering or whatever. How we experience families, what we want and what we actually get from our family cannot simply be explained by the internal dynamics of family life and interpersonal relationships. The family exists within a wider social, political and economic environment which creates, structures and constrains the individual opportunities and choices available to those within it.
Looking at the ways in which this occurs and its consequences for both men’s and women’s lives will be the subject of later units in this block. But part of the world which families inhabit is the world of ideas and beliefs, social expectations and pressures: seemingly powerful forces which both legitimize and justify our present living arrangements, but which are also conveyed, reinforced and recreated by the family itself. Part of the appeal of the family lies in the pervasiveness of our parental beliefs and practices, in what is called familial ideology.

**Familial ideology**

Familial ideology in our society asserts that the co-resident nuclear family is a universal and desirable way to live, and that the prevailing sexual division of labour, in which the woman is housewife and mother and primarily located within the private world of the family and the man is the wage-earner and breadwinner located in the public world of work, is universal and normatively desirable. There is clearly a maternal basis to this ideology in that in capitalist society production does take place outside the home and does make it very difficult for a woman not to be dependent in a real sense on a man. So the family itself both is the ideological site in which gender differences are constructed, and creates the material relations in which men and women are differently engaged in waged labour.

The dominance of this ideology in our society therefore leads us to expect that we will live our lives in the family. It is the starting-point from which we judge alternative ways of living. Those who are excluded from the family can be massively disadvantaged individually and socially (for example, single people, children in care). Those who choose alternative life-styles will have to struggle and constantly justify themselves. For ideals of family relationships have become enshrined in our legal, social, religious and economic systems which in turn reinforce the ideology and penalize or ostracize those who transgress it. Thus there are real pressures on people to behave in certain ways, to lead their lives according to acceptable norms and practices. These pressures explain in part the appeal of the family.

Familial ideology is constantly reinforced by wider arrangements and organization in society (for example, government housing policy as illustrated by Sophie Watson in Chapter 9 of the Reader) and is embedded and shaped in other non-familial institutions, such as welfare and public health provision (which will be discussed in Unit 11). Donzelot (1980) argues that society has become increasingly influenced by the ideal of the family and that as a consequence society has become increasingly ‘familialized’.

In studying the family we need to differentiate clearly between an ideology of the family and the way in which individuals actually interact and live together, have babies, marry, divorce, work, bring up children and so on. Obviously ideology influences powerfully the way people live their lives — but it is not clear precisely how it does this.
The aim of this unit has been to set you thinking about the family, and to problematize the idea of the family. I hope it has achieved this. I hope you will now recognize that, although we may all talk about the family unambiguously, how people actually live, how they experience their families and what familial relations mean to them is much more complex, contradictory and indeed changeable in an individual’s life than is revealed by any one definition of the family. So when you find social workers, the media, the government – or even yourselves – talking about ‘the family’, you will know to be cautious of such an approach. As we have seen, what is assumed by the term ‘the family’ necessarily takes account of how we actually live out our lives and the diversity and complexity of our lives. As Unit 7 will show, to understand the real position of families, and the individuals in them, we have to consider the relationship between the family and wider social processes.

One final point to recognize that the family in British society is not a fact of nature but a specific social construction is in no way to minimize or reject the very real needs that human beings have for love and security. This is true for me and I am sure for you too, and, as we have seen, this plays a part in the enduring popularity of the familial ideal.

I hope you’ve enjoyed studying this unit. Good studying.

REFERENCES

INGHAM, M (1981) Now We Are Thirty, London, Methuen
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources for permission to use material in this unit

Text
RAYMENT, T ‘Why a wife’s worth her weight in gold’, The Sunday Times, 29 March 1987

Figures
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Unit 7 POLITICS AND THE FAMILY

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You will be using two chapters from the Reader during your study of this unit

- a section (at least) of Chapter 7 by Carol Smart, 'Securing the family? Rhetoric and policy in the field of social security', and

- the whole of Chapter 8 by Malcolm Wicks, 'Family matters and public policy'

There are no television programmes or audiocassettes associated with this week's work

Aims

This unit deals with the relationship between the family and politics, in terms of both the way in which the idea of 'the family' is used in political ideologies, and how the policies and policy proposals of political parties may affect the family. The unit is intended to

1. Introduce the ways in which the ideas of the family play a part in political ideologies
2. Contrast the current views on the family of the major British political parties
3. Compare the policies towards the family of these parties
4. Provide ways of making these comparisons
1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 6 you have been considering some of the difficulties which are involved in identifying and studying the family. Among the problems raised by that unit was the way in which our society views the family both as 'normal' (that is, the way most people live) and as an 'ideal' (that is, the way we should aspire to live). The unit contrasted the assumptions about the family with evidence about the diversity of households within Britain, suggesting that a large proportion of households do not correspond to the 'normal' image of the family. Unit 6 concluded by considering these assumptions and images as an ideology of the family (or a 'familial ideology') which can be seen as a powerful element in British culture.

In this unit we shall pursue this issue of the 'ideology of the family' in different ways. But as we do so, it is important that you keep in mind Unit 6's distinction between the 'ideal' of the family and the diversity of household forms in which people live. It will also be important to hold on to another idea with which Unit 6 dealt: that is, the idea that families may contain members with different needs and interests. Unit 6 focused on this in terms of the different reasons which men and women may have for marrying. If you think back to Unit 2 of the course, you may also remember that the same issue was raised in the context of assumptions that the needs and interests of children are automatically met in families. During this unit we will be considering two ways of viewing the family. On the one hand, it can be seen as an essentially harmonious whole, within which the needs and interests of its members are integrated and reconciled. On the other, it can be seen as a social group which contains potentially conflicting interests, and where it cannot be assumed that there is a single, overarching definition of the 'needs of the family' which takes account of the needs of its members.

These issues about the family form the starting point of this unit. Its purpose is to explore some of the connections between the family and politics in contemporary Britain. We shall be looking at two related issues. One concerns the role which ideas of the family play in political ideology in Britain. That is, we shall be asking what sorts of images of the family are expressed in the ideologies of the major political parties, and what part these images play in those ideologies. Second, we shall look at the relationship between the policies of the parties and the family. That is, we shall ask how the parties direct their policies towards the family and consider what sort of consequences those policies may have.

2 THE FAMILY AS A POLITICAL ISSUE

The idea of the family, and all the assumptions about men, women and children that it contains, is a constant political issue—see, for example, the extract from the Guardian overleaf. This may be surprising given that we expect to view the family as a 'private sphere' and that politics is part of the 'public domain'. But this separation of private and public is a limited—indeed, historically specific—one, and politics and 'the family' intersect in a number of ways. In what follows, I have noted a few of the ways in which the family has been seen as a political issue in recent years. As you read through them, see if you can identify anything which they might have in common.
In 1979 the DHSS published a report on marital breakdown entitled *Marriage Matters*. The working party who compiled the report felt it necessary to define ‘marital’ as ‘referring to any cohabiting relationship between a man and a woman’. Even though such a definition still assumed monogamy and heterosexuality as the norm, traditionalists found the definition ‘too liberal’ and sought to recommend that the term ‘marital status’ be confined to those *legally* married.

In 1986 the government of Dr Garret Fitzgerald in the Irish Republic held a referendum to seek a mandate for limited divorce reforms. The heated debate which preceded the vote was one which saw the traditionalists arguing that such reforms would undermine the family and lead to greater promiscuity. Many pointed to Britain as an example of this. Those supporting the reforms did not attack the family, rather they offered a different notion of the family based on assumptions of (limited) equality for women.

In Britain the debate in parliament preceding the Education Act 1986 discussed among other things the issue of sex education. A number of rebel Conservative MPs put forward an amendment to the effect that parents should be able to withdraw their children from sex education classes. Whilst this amendment was defeated, the government provided for the teaching of sex education ‘within the values and morals of family life’.

During the 1980s it is perhaps the AIDS panic which has been the most significant issue to raise to full public debate questions of sexuality and monogamy and the significance of the family. Traditionalists, such as Mrs Mary Whitehouse, saw the AIDS epidemic as a retribution on those whom they see as ‘permissive’, promiscuous, or having an ‘alternative’ sexual identity. One Chief Constable, James Anderton, claimed to have listened to God and suggested that there existed in society a ‘human cesspit’ of promiscuity and homosexuality. It is clear that homosexual men have taken the ‘blame’ for AIDS, notwithstanding the evidence that in the area most hit – Africa – the virus is being transmitted by heterosexual activity.

*Source The Guardian, 17 February 1987*

Political life is constrained by the potent symbol of the family assumptions on which it is based. The late Labour MP, Tom Driberg, once suggested that he wished for the day when he could describe himself in his campaign literature as ‘homosexual’ and ‘promiscuous’. In the Greenwich by-election of 1987, Deirdre Woods, the Labour candidate, was pilloried by sections of the popular press because her early family life did not live up to the ‘ideal’—conflict had existed between her parents. The successful candidate—Mrs Rose Barnes—presented herself as a ‘nice, decent and honest mother of two’ who would bring some common sense to the House of Commons (Benton, 1987). Here it is important to point to the manner in which the family is a basic category of calculation used by individuals and commentators to assess political parties, politicians and policies.

The poll reproduced overleaf is one example which illustrates the degree to which issues and policies are interpreted according to the basic category of the family. It is worth noting the ‘dilemma’ which exists for most respondents between the needs of the country and the needs of the family. Generally speaking across all classes and all voting preferences, ‘the family’ is used as a mode of political calculation in contradiction to the ‘country’ or the ‘nation’. The respondents were asked to indicate which of the ‘interests’—the family or the nation—their friends would perceive as the most important. In fact Marplan were attempting to elicit the views of the respondents, but without a direct question for fear that this would generate false results. To the extent that answers to this question do indicate that respondents used ‘friends’ as a cover under which to state their own interests, it is clear that ‘the family’ is an important reference point for their assessment of politics. Finally, consider the extent to which ‘the family’ is a symbol here. There appears to be a certain ambiguity about what this term ‘the family’ stands for. For example, the D and E classes associate the interests of the family with increased public spending, whilst other classes associate these interests with tax cuts. Thus we need to realize the extent of family diversity—a subject discussed in Unit 6—and the manner in which such diversity involves different interpretations of what the symbol ‘the family’ stands for.

It is not difficult to see why the family should be so central a category. The predominance of the family in our society means that for most individuals their early physical and emotional development takes place within the family. Whether particular individuals experience ‘happy’ or ‘unhappy’ childhoods, for most people the family seems to be the only place in which personal ties of affiliation and solidarity can be potentially realized. Thus, in adult life, individuals seek to put this potential into practice. For most individuals, then, the family becomes a primary focus of attention as a consequence, the question is raised of how the public political sphere is read, or made sense of, through the ‘grid’ of family interests and relations.

It is also worth thinking about the way in which politics itself reflects the assumptions about the sexual division of labour which are embedded in our idea of the family. In our society the sexual division of labour involves a high degree of specialization and differentiation such that women have come to be equated with the home, or private sphere, and men with the public world, which includes political activity.

In the world of organized politics in Britain, women are under-represented. Although they are 51% of the population, in the general election of 1987 only forty-six Conservative candidates, ninety-two Labour candidates and one hundred Alliance candidates were women, and of these only a small percentage were in ‘winnable’ seats (forty-one were returned). In an important sense, the formal political process reflects the sexual division of labour as the basis of the private/public divide. Harriet Harman, a Labour MP, once described the Labour Party as a ‘single-sex party’ and criticized the House of Commons in the following terms: ‘The problem with many MPs is that their job is the be-all-and-end-all of their lives. Which can make them very narrow-minded. They are often congratulated for exploiting their wives and ignoring their children’ (reported in News on Sunday, April 1987). The (lack of) involvement of women in politics may be affected by the way they see conventional politics being based on a male-dominated ‘macho’ style (Campbell, 1987).
The relation between the family and politics is a two-way process. It is important to recognize the extent to which state institutions influence and even construct the family, even in its most apparently intimate personal relations. Consider sexual identity and conduct. Marriage laws assume norms of monogamy and heterosexuality, and they exclude alternative forms as unacceptable and even illegal.

At present some twelve million people are dependent on state welfare benefits. In calculating such claims, the DHSS aggregates members of a household into a family unit with a male breadwinner as the presumed head of that unit. Moreover, whilst a
woman can request (since 1985) to be considered as the breadwinner, she must satisfy two conditions. Firstly, she must have worked in the previous six months, and secondly she must have written permission from her husband or male cohabitee. Equally significant is the notion of 'liable relative' used by the Department of Health and Social Services. Through this idea, couples are assumed to support each other and their children. If a couple apply for benefits these will include allowances (over and above child benefit) for children. If, however, the father leaves the home, the mother is not allowed to claim for her children in her own right. She must seek maintenance payments through the court or allow the DHSS to do so on her behalf. Whilst this policy expresses a social view of the responsibility of fathers, the formal maintenance order is no guarantee that the mother will actually receive the money, and this may mean the difference between a reasonable existence and dire poverty.

What I have tried to highlight in this brief examination is that the institutions of the state seek to establish the self-sufficient family as the norm of social reality. Many social policies rest upon and reaffirm conventional notions of gender relations and sexuality. Now read the editorial from the Guardian of 6 June 1986 which is reproduced below.

Source: The Guardian, 6 June 1986

At the start of this section, I asked you to make a note of anything which these examples about the family and politics had in common. Jot down anything you have identified.
Each of the examples touches upon the idea of the family and the assumptions it contains about the division of labour between man and woman. Each of them highlights some aspect of what is taken as the ‘normal’ behaviour of men and women, their appropriate social roles, and their relationship to the family. However, the examples also illuminate different sorts of connections between politics and the family. I have noted different sorts of connotations

- that ideas of the family are used to judge politicians and politicians. The family may provide an interpretative framework through which the policies of political parties are evaluated. (Think, for example, of the illustrations usually provided to explain the effects of Budget changes.) But the ideal of the family may also be used as a standard by which individual politicians—and their ‘fitness’—may be judged,

- that state policies, particularly in the area of social welfare, are directed towards the family, and work to reinforce the idea of the ‘normal’ family, and the conventional sexual division of labour within it, and

- that the condition of ‘the family’ is itself a political issue. Political ideologies contain images of the family, and it is the subject of political argument (for example, over changes in the divorce laws).

It is these last two types of connection—between state policies and the family, and between political ideologies and images of the family—which will be the main focus of the rest of the unit. As the first step in this direction, you will need to read the article by Malcolm Wicks in the Course Reader (Loney et al. 1987). In this, Wicks considers both types of connection between the family and politics which I have just identified.

I would now like you to read Chapter 8 by Malcolm Wicks in the Course Reader. Read the article in full but focus your reading around the two questions below.

1. Why does Wicks suggest that it was no coincidence that the public debate which arose around the issue of the family should correspond to a debate on the welfare state?

2. Wicks warns you to be sceptical of rhetoric which claims to strengthen the family—why?

In answer to the first of these questions, Wicks notes the degree to which, since Beveridge, the idea of the welfare state has been bound up with questions of community care and the role of the family. The family and state welfare are parts of a single process of the provision of welfare. Any crisis, perceived or not, in the one will generate implications for the other. In the mid-1970s after the oil price crisis and economic stagnation, new questions regarding the welfare state and the family arose.
2.1 The welfare state debate

Wicks highlights the centrality of the 'welfare state' for questions of the family and its future. In the mid 1970s the welfare state was under scrutiny from all political positions regarding its moral, political, and social effects on family life. In order to understand the place of the family in British politics it is necessary to define the broad parameters of the welfare state debate. The continuum shown in Figure 1 and the discussion below suggest the broad lines of debate.

![Figure 1: Pro-welfare state vs Anti-welfare state](image)

Defenders of the welfare state perceive the need for a centralized welfare system with appropriate professionals and experts who will implement centrally determined policies. The needs of individuals, families, and communities are more or less determined by such experts in the field of policy-making. Proponents of this position may perceive the family as in 'partnership' with the state, but it is clear that, even in the most radical versions of this position, the state is seen to be the leading 'actor' in this partnership (see, for example, Beresford and Croft, 1984; see also Croft, 1986). If the state defines the agenda, the family implements the terms of that agenda.

There is also a strong anti-welfare state tradition in British society. Broadly defined, this is an anti-state 'liberal' position which seeks to alter the emphasis of the production of welfare and health services. A right-wing variant of this position perceives the market and consumer choice as the alternative mechanism to the welfare state. A left-wing, anti-state position seeks to establish newly empowered communities who would determine their own welfare needs and control how those needs are to be met.

The second question which I asked you to consider when reading the article by Wicks concerned his criticism of a rhetoric which presumed to 'strengthen the family'. Wicks offers two 'cautions'. Firstly, that such claims may be merely based on the need to strengthen the 'national interest', an ambiguous term and one which can be based on aims and objectives which may in fact undermine family life. Secondly, that, especially since feminism has entered the debate over the politics of the family, we need to distinguish between the assumed 'needs of the family' as a unit and the needs of the individuals who make up families which may require different sorts of policies.

Again taking our cue from Wicks, we can note the extent to which the issue of equality is central to questions of the politics of the family. This central aspect of politics in Britain can be represented as a continuum; see Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Disaggregation of family unit](image)
The continuum seeks to establish the broad range of positions which might be taken on the question of equality. Those whose position tends to the left-hand side of the continuum will adopt either a position of equality of opportunity, positive action or indeed positive discrimination. Those on the right-hand side will seek to establish the need for society to be a hierarchy of status differences, and assume that the family is 'naturally' a harmonious unit.

Important for our consideration of the politics of the family is that in terms of substantive political practice and policy-making those who advocate inequality base their ideas on what has been called a 'methodological familism' in practice (Morgan, 1985) that is, they perceive the family as the basic and necessary building-block of society. The family is perceived as a unit of social existence which is based on necessary inequalities between individuals. However, as a position towards the left-hand side of the continuum is adopted, there is an attempt to demystify the family that is, to disaggregate the family into the individuals that constitute it and to base policies on the needs and wishes of those individuals as representatives of social groups (men, women, children etc.). Thus the question of 'equality' affects the extent to which 'the family' will be perceived as the unit of analysis. Those advocating inequality will perceive the patriarchal family as the unit which is addressed by policy and political activity. Those seeking equality disaggregate this unit and seek to establish, for example, policies based on the needs of women, children and so on. It is important to note that this argument for 'disaggregation' is not an argument for the abolition of the family. Disaggregation means treating the family as composed of a set of individuals who may have distinct interests and needs which may be concealed if one considers them only as members of a family. Thus, viewed from the standpoint of the family, women appear as wives and mothers, but these roles do not exhaust the range of possible roles which women might play. What disaggregation means, then, is viewing the members of the family as distinct individuals and not solely in terms of their roles within the family. Thus in France, in the early 1980s, a socialist government established a Ministry for Women. They wanted to generate equality of opportunity for women, and the Ministry was based on the presumption that the 'family' was not the proper unit of analysis. In 1986 when the conservative government of Jacques Chirac took power, the same Ministry was renamed the Ministry of the Family. This was not simply a change of name, for it expressed the view that the family was the central point of analysis.

Figure 3
Source Raban and Lee (1983)
However, these two issues are interrelated, and Figure 3 seeks to facilitate an understanding of that relationship. Political theories and ideologies can be located in the table on the basis of their position along each of the continua. The rhetoric and policy proposals of political parties will be informed by their adoption of one or more of these ideological positions.

Box number 3 would be adopted by a political ideology which perceived social order as based on an unequal hierarchy of occupations and statuses in which the welfare state was necessary in order that the hierarchy be maintained. Here the family would be a central feature of such a social order, and the idea of the family as the basic building-block of that society would be predominant. It would, furthermore, be the notion of a patriarchal family that was fostered here. Such an ideology is exemplified in the paternalistic ‘one-nation’ Toryism dominant in the Conservative Party during the years of post-war political consensus.

The position adopted within Box number 4 would not see the welfare state as having an extensive role in maintaining social order. Whilst social order here would be perceived as based on a necessary inequality, an alternative mechanism for regulating that inequality would be sought. For economic liberalism, market forces are perceived as that mechanism. Left to itself, a free market of self-sufficient individuals will maintain a social order of basic and necessary inequality. Within economic liberalism the precise status of the family is not clear, although it is worth noting that the idea of free individuals within the market place usually implies free male individuals.

In the British context, Box number 1 is expressed in the tradition of social democracy or ‘Labourism’. The choice of words is slightly complicated here because of the creation of the Social Democratic Party by ex-Labour politicians in 1981. ‘Social democracy’ was the term often used by political analysts to describe the ideology and policies of the British Labour Party from its origins through to the 1970s. But because of the creation of a Social Democratic Party which laid claim to at least part of those traditions, I shall instead be using the term ‘Labourism’ to describe the ideology and policies of the Labour Party. Like Conservative paternalists, they perceive the need for a welfare state to regulate social order and work in partnership with the family. However, they disagree as to the form which that social order should take. Here Labourism seeks to establish, in varying degrees, equality of opportunity for all.

Box number 2 contains all those positions which define themselves as libertarian and seek to establish greater degrees of equality. The welfare state is criticized because of its role in social control and its ability to repress freedoms. Libertarian socialisms which developed from the New Left of the 1960s fall within this category. Here the state should perceive its role as empowering communities, and its activities are restricted to supplying the resources to allow communities to develop themselves. The family is demystified and disaggregated. It is not considered the unit of analysis, rather such a position seeks to look inside the family and examine the varying interests within it. This position stresses the importance of women’s needs, children’s needs and so on as separate issues. Equally, alternative household forms such as lesbian mothers, gay couples or communal living are seen as equally valid forms of living and in need of support. It is also the case that any alternatives to the family itself would be seen as equally legitimate as conventional family forms. This position might be defined as one of social—or cultural—pluralism, in that it seeks to encourage and support social diversity.

### 2.2 Political parties and the family

These political ideologies form a basis from which political parties develop their rhetoric about, and policies towards, the family. By ‘rhetoric’ I mean the way parties talk about the family, the image of the family they present, and the ways in which those images of the family fit into their view of what the social order of British
society is, and what it should be like. In the remainder of this unit, we will be considering the rhetoric and policies of the main British political parties about the family in more detail. But first I would like you to test how useful the grid I drew up is for analysing political parties and their view of the family.

Look back at the grid in Figure 3. Try to place each of the main political parties in the quadrant which you think best represents its view of the family.

I hope you found that this was not a completely easy or straightforward exercise. Let me suggest some reasons why such a grid is of only limited use in trying to classify political parties’ views of the family.

First, no political party is a simple expression of one ideology. Many commentators refer to parties as ‘broad churches’ or ‘coalitions’ as ways of expressing the idea that they have more than one ideological tendency within their ranks. Thus, any party may straddle more than one box at any given moment, or in terms of any particular policy. Such a grid is not very sensitive to this possible diversity of views within, as opposed to between, parties.

Secondly, in choosing where to place parties there are difficulties about whether to locate them in terms of what they say about the family (rhetoric) or what they do in relation to the family (policies). That is, party rhetoric and policy may not fit together perfectly.

Thirdly, the table tends to simplify what is a complex debate. As well as the two issues mentioned in the table – equality and the role of the welfare state – there are also the issues of freedom and liberty, on which the political parties will have differing views.

This does not mean that the exercise of drawing up and filling in such a grid is an invalid exercise, for it draws our attention to some central distinctions which need to be made in studying politics and the family (the view of the family, the view of social order, the place of the welfare state and so forth). It also provides a starting-point for distinguishing and classifying the different parties. But it is also important to keep the limitations of such exercises in mind. They do involve simplification – and perhaps even over-simplification (think, for example, of the commonly used left–right continuum for classifying politicians and parties). It is important to remember that this is the case. Such exercises require us to leave out ‘complications’ in order to make things fit.

In the remainder of this unit we shall be considering political parties and the family in ways which should help us to overcome some of the problems which I have just raised about this grid. That is, we shall be looking in more detail at the rhetoric of the parties about the family, and with an awareness of the possible diversity of ideological positions within any particular party. We shall also be considering the policy proposals of the parties which most directly affect the family – in the areas of welfare – and considering the relationship between rhetoric and policy.

Before we begin this analysis of the parties, however, there are two points to make about when this unit was written and its possible consequences for what follows. It was written in June and July 1987, immediately following a general election won by the Conservative Party. In writing the unit, therefore, I have been able to draw on party rhetoric and policy proposals up to June 1987 from what were then the three
major political parties in Britain – the Conservative Party, the Labour Party and the Alliance (the Liberal Party allied with the Social Democratic Party)

When we come to look at policy, there is an important distinction to be drawn between the Conservative Party and the others. Between 1979 and 1987 only the Conservative Party had been in government. Consequently, when considering policy, we need to distinguish between the Conservatives, who had been in the position to **enact** policies, and the Labour and Alliance Parties who had only been in the position to present the proposals for policies which they would enact if they formed a government.

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At the end of each section dealing with a political party, I hope you will be in a position to fill in a different sort of table

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Party</th>
<th>Concept of the family</th>
<th>Welfare/community care policies</th>
<th>Welfare benefits policies</th>
<th>Likely effects on families</th>
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<td>Labour</td>
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This table should enable you to summarise the main points of each section, and will provide a basis for comparison in the conclusion to the unit.
Study the extract reproduced below from the 1987 Conservative Party Election Manifesto. Jot down notes on what you consider to be the most important points

Stable prices
Nothing erodes a country's competitive edge faster than inflation. Nothing so undermines personal thrift and independence as to see the value of a lifetime's savings eaten away in retirement through spiralling prices. And nothing threatens the social fabric of a nation more than the conflicts and divisiveness which inflation creates.

There is no better yardstick of a party's fitness to govern than its attitude to inflation. Nothing is so politically immoral as a party that ignores that yardstick.

Lower taxes
We are the only Party that believes in lower taxation.
As the Party determined to achieve growing prosperity we recognise that it is people who create wealth, not governments. Lower taxation coupled with lower inflation makes everyone better off. It encourages people to work harder, to be inventive and to take risks. It promotes a climate of enterprise and initiative.

There is a strong moral case for reducing taxation. High taxes deprive people of their independence and make their choices for them. The desire to do better for one's family is one of the strongest motives in human nature. As a party committed to the family and opposed to the over-powerful State, we want people to keep more of what they earn, and to have more freedom of choice about what they do for themselves, their families and for others less fortunate. (Conservative Manifesto, 1987, pp 36-7)

I noted the following points:

- Inflation is here defined as a key problem not only because it undermines Britain's ability to be competitive but also because it undermines 'personal independence' and, significantly, social order itself. Inflation is thereby a threat to social as well as economic stability.

- Inflation is a moral question. Parties which do not place the eradication of inflation as the priority of their programme are immoral.

- Second only to inflation is the necessity to reduce taxes in order to increase personal independence.

- The Conservative Party identifies itself as the party of the family and on the side of the family against the all-powerful State. The extract suggests the family to be a natural institution.

Inflation is identified as the central problem for a government due to the Conservative Party's commitment to a monetarist economic theory. Monetarism is a reformulation of a nineteenth-century laissez-faire doctrine. Laissez-faire means to 'leave alone' and this injunction is pressed by monetarists on the state with regard to its relations with, and policies for, the economy. The aim is that the state should take only a minimal role in economic life. A market economy should be left 'free' to run itself by way of its own 'rules' - in this case the 'price mechanism'. Any intervention above the 'minimal' is considered by monetarists to have the result of distorting the market's ability to find its own equilibrium. Indeed such 'excessive' interventions by the state are said to create inflation, particularly where governments 'print' money. According to monetarism, the sole justification for the state to intervene in the economy is to eradicate any inflationary tendencies that have been created or allowed to build up. One Friedrich Hayek, an economic liberal recently adopted by the 'New Right' and one-time advisor to Mrs Thatcher, argued that the
state should be considered much as is a maintenance squad in a factory; it should not produce goods but simply maintain a 'well-oiled' and smooth functioning market.

Thus monetarism can best be described as an economic 'liberalism', for it denies the validity of intervention by the state in economic affairs - and is thus anti-state - and it emphasizes the privileged place of the individual consumer.

However, we might also want to know whether the Conservative Party is pro- or anti-equality. In fact, this aspect of Conservative Party rhetoric rejects any strategies for equality. As Mrs. Thatcher expressed it as early as 1975 'There is far less general desire for equality in Britain than is often claimed. The pursuit of equality is a mirage.' This free market approach rejects 'equality' as an 'artificial' concept and one that is opposed to the 'traditions' of the British 'mind' and the market economy. Even though this free market position may not actively define inequality as a desirable goal, inequality is a necessary consequence of a free market economy because it is basic to the generation of competition and initiative so essential to a flourishing market.

However, it is the very 'liberalism' of this approach that suggests that free market economics is only an aspect of Conservative Party ideology. The problem here is that any 'liberalism' always presents itself as being inherently libertarian and thus antiauthority, as potential anarchy and thus a threat to social order. Indeed, whilst this free-market philosophy has always existed within the Conservative Party it had been largely marginalized between 1945 and the mid-1970s. It is an ideology which has only dominated the rhetoric of the party since the election of Mrs. Thatcher as party leader.

Mrs. Thatcher's use of this laissez-faire ideology has been matched by a corresponding commitment to the long-standing Conservative beliefs in social order and authority. Since Disraeli, the party has presented itself as the party of order and the status quo. This 'one-nation' Toryism dominated the party from 1945 and led the party to accept in diluted form a social democratic ideology of a 'mixed economy' with a positive role for a state public sector. Nevertheless, their conception of social order remained based on a hierarchy of inequality, a hierarchy of statuses and of ranks. This paternalistic Toryism (as it is often referred to) continually stressed the values of authority and of a hierarchy of status in society.

The clue to the potential of an 'alliance' between these two tendencies is given in the fact that both are positioned on the same side of the grid that I drew up earlier - tending to a conception of society based on inequality. It will be remembered that it was suggested that a tendency towards inequality meant that the family was perceived as an independent social group seen as the basis of society. This 'alliance' of ideologies is based upon a perception, in political practice, of the family as the basis of social order - a feature we noted in the extract from the Manifesto.

3.1 The New Conservatism and the Family

In fact the 'individualism' of market liberalism is largely 'theoretical' and in practice we find a commitment to the family as the linchpin of society. What we find here is a commitment to a 'methodological familialism' (Morgan, 1985) in this 'new conservatism.' By the term 'new conservatism' I mean to refer to this alliance or coalition of distinct ideologies - economic liberalism and a traditional hierarchical view of society. It is the family that forges the link between personal independence and social order. Discussing the 'problems' of the inner cities, Norman Tebbit (then Chairman of the Conservative Party) told an audience in 1985 '...it is the values not just the housing which need restoration by bringing back personal responsibility (through ownership), security (through law and order) and stability (through strengthening the sense of personal obligations most notably within families) ...' (Tebbit, 1985)
Within this ‘new conservatism’ the state sets the agenda. It sets down the ‘rules of social order’ (the ‘rule of law’) whilst the family is the object of, and the creator of, a sense of personal responsibility. As Paul Johnson, a ‘new conservative’ intellectual, expressed it: ‘the sooner the family can “police” society then that society would be nearer the neo-conservative ideal’ (Fitzgerald, 1983, p 45). At the launch of the Conservative Family Campaign in 1986, the Chairman spoke on the theme of ‘Putting father back at the head of the table’.

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As you read through the following extract from that speech, jot down what you consider to be the most important points.

The Conservative Family Campaign aims to put father back at the head of the family table. He should be the breadwinner. He should be responsible for his children’s actions. He should be respected by those who teach his children. He should be upheld by social workers, doctors and others who may professionally come into contact with his children. Conservative Family Campaign believes we can reverse the trends of decades. We believe we must.

For a start, the social security and tax system should encourage families where mum stays at home by giving them the best income tax allowances, and not to two incomes households, and by putting resources behind benefits for families, such as Child Benefit and Family Credit, rather than other minority groupings.

Governments do have a morally persuasive role — to do what is right. It is wrong to use taxes to support homosexual and lesbian couplings. It is wrong to make it attractive to leave one’s family to depend on the state. It is right to encourage mum, dad and kids to stay together.

The state also is never neutral. Nor should it be. In schools we need to introduce morality into sex education. The importance of marriage and its joys need to be explained. (Press conference speech by Graham Webster-Gardiner, 14 March 1986)

I noted the following points:

- The speaker’s emphasis on the role of the father as head of the table. Here the speaker implies that the man should be regarded as head of the household as a whole, that he rather than the woman should be the main and even sole breadwinner. This is the idea of the patriarchal family. Notice how this idea is perceived by the speaker as based in the institution of marriage.

- The ‘moral’ role for the state is clear from the speaker’s value judgement that gays and lesbians should not be given state help or assistance. Implicit here is the idea of a single, non-problematic morality. We can only presume that the speaker perceives this morality as ‘natural’ or God-given.

- The speaker perceives the need for the government to use the social security and taxation systems to ‘secure’ this patriarchal form of the family.

- Finally, did you notice an implicit criticism of the actions of welfare workers? The demand that the ‘father’ should be upheld by social workers implies that he has not been so respected hitherto. Note the reference to ‘trends of decades’ that the speaker feels need to be reversed. This is a reference to the post-war welfare ‘consensus’ which is perceived by the new conservatism as a threat to family sanctity and privacy. We shall be looking further at the criticism of state welfare by the new conservatives.
It is important to recognize the extent to which this new conservatism insists in its rhetoric on the need for a single type of family. It sees any alternatives to the patriarchal family as "deviant". It is "concerned" at increasing rates of divorce as being a threat to social order. The new conservatism blames the policies of the post-war "consensus" governments for the rise of alternative life styles and the rise of dual-worker and single-parent families. In particular, single-parent families are taken to be a "sign" of immorality and promiscuity. Rhodes Boyson, a minister in the Conservative government of 1979-1983, perceived single-parent families as the 'worst evil' to society. Tony Green, a Wandsworth Councillor, told the 1986 Conservative Party Conference that single mothers had made a choice not to set up a conventional family and thus 'Having made that choice they should not expect automatic financial support from the rest of society' (reprinted in the Guardian, October 1986). This view of single, female parents being the result of individual choices is a curious one. It of course 'fits' with the new conservative idea of individuals as 'free' to make choices. This idea depends on the assumption that individuals are not constrained nor indeed restricted by social forces and divisions.

Q Can you think of any social 'circumstances' which might generate single-parent families?

My list would include

- Widowhood (as a result of war, perhaps)
- Divorce - a social phenomenon
- A pregnant, adolescent girl whose partner has not taken on the responsibility of fatherhood

The patriarchal family is the basic element of the ideal society for new conservatives such as George Gilder who perceive in its creation 'the essential capitalist act - parents are the ultimate entrepreneurs' (Gilder, 1982, p 82). For Gilder, single-parent families (and here he means single, female parents) produce 'familial anarchy'. Gilder points to the high percentage of such families amongst black and Hispanic communities in the United States, and suggests that it is the existence of these families which has created poverty and deprivation amongst such communities. Both Norman Tebbit and Paul Johnson have used this analysis to 'explain' the poverty and deprivation of inner-city areas in Britain as being the product of immorality. Single female-headed families undermine men's capacity to work and invest in the market-place because, without the family, men have little sense of achievement and power. Here the family is seen as the buttress to the competitive market.

3.2 Political rhetoric and public policy

The rhetoric of the new conservatism has as one of its central aims the creation and maintenance of the conditions necessary to secure and sustain the (patriarchal) family. It is perhaps important at this juncture of our analysis to examine the extent to which policies and actions of the new Conservative governments (1979-1987) have achieved this. Taking our cue from the Conservative Family Campaign we might address two areas of social policy which affect the family. These are, first, the area of welfare benefits and taxation, and, secondly, the Conservative policies regarding community/voluntary care. In the case of the former we might expect a system of benefits which help to enable families to be self-sufficient and to stay together in harmony, in the case of the latter it will be remembered that Mr Webster of the Conservative Family Campaign sought, in general, recognition of the value and responsibility of the family.

What is at stake here is the conception of taxation involved in new conservative ideology. Monetanists claim it to be a form of 'robbery' and 'coercion', because a
powerful state robs an individual of his/her earnings. Differentials in earnings—the
divide between a rich and a poor person—are perceived as an expression of market
forces and the initiative, or lack of it, within individuals. As we have noted, the new
conservatism identifies inequality as necessary, because it generates healthy
competition. Taxation dampens this competition (and thus wealth creation) because
it represses intuitive

The Thatcher government has done little to change the system of taxation it
inherited in 1979. The extract from the Conservative Party Manifesto cited above
made the claim that the new conservatives sought to reduce taxation in order to
increase personal independence and the self-sufficient family. Although in the 1987
Budget the Conservative government reduced direct taxation by two pence in the
pound in the standard rate, direct taxation is only a part of the burden of taxation on
an individual. Levels of indirect taxation also need to be considered. Indirect taxation
such as VAT has been increased by 7% since the Conservatives came to power in
1979. In fact, for the neo-conservative ideal family of a couple with two children
living on the average income of a single earner, the total tax burden— including both
direct and indirect taxes— has risen from 35% in 1978–9 to 38.5% in 1986–7 (Hills,
1987). In this situation the extent to which a family may be self-sufficient diminishes
rather than increases.

In order to examine the important changes to the benefits system contained
in the Social Security Act of 1987 passed by the Thatcher government you
need to read Chapter 7 in the Reader by Carol Smart, ‘Securing the family?
Rhetoric and policy in the field of social security’. If you have not the time to
read it all you should at least read the final section which discusses three of
the important changes to benefits— income support, Family Credit,
maternity payments.

To help focus your reading of these changes, consider the following
questions regarding each of the changes

1. Income support. What will be the likely implication for ordinary families
   of the new measures for the under twenty-fives?

2. Family Credit. Why was the suggestion to increase Child Benefit rejected
   by the government?

3. Maternity. What are the implications for women of the abolition of the
   Maternity Grant? Will this abolition secure family life?

Finally, when you get to the conclusion, you will find what appears to be a
paradox. Smart suggests that the new measures will not secure the family
and sustain it as a self-sufficient unit, yet she also says ‘the family is fast
becoming the main welfare agency in the 1980s’. Since Smart is not
contradicting herself, how does she explain this last point? (In fact to
appreciate this apparent paradox fully, it would be appropriate to read all of
the article. Why not, if there is one in your area, discuss the article in a self-
help group?)

I will leave you to answer the first three questions as there are clear answers to
them in the article. In answer to my last question I would ask you to focus on
Smart’s statement ‘The government appears to have assumed that
dependency is synonymous with stability’. In her discussion of the three changes to
benefits, Smart notes how they increase the dependency of the under twenty-fives,
and women in particular, on relatives and spouses and this dependency increases
the burden on families. As the number of dependants increases, and whilst there is no increase in numbers of breadwinners, the burden on the family will increase. In fact, the proposals place increased responsibility for its dependants on the family and absolve the state from the responsibility. Thus a shift is occurring in the means by which ‘welfare’ is provided – from the state to the family. The family in new conservatism is perceived as the provider and consumer of its own health and welfare needs.

The new conservatism has perceived the family as playing a central part in the provision of welfare and health needs in society. It sees the family as a self-sufficient private consumer of its own social and welfare needs, and links this to the idea of the family as the agent of moral responsibility which generates altruism and the voluntary spirit in individuals. This dual role for the family is based on the assumption that it should be a patriarchal family based on conventional relations between spouses and between parents and children.

Central to this concept of the patriarchal family is the assumption of a natural and necessary inequality between men and women. Here the sexual division of labour between husband and wife is seen as part of the natural order of things. As Patrick Jenkin, one-time Minister in a Thatcher government, famously expressed it: ‘Quite frankly I don’t think mothers have the same right to work as fathers. If the good Lord had intended us to have equal rights to go out to work he wouldn’t have created man and woman. These are biological facts’ (quoted in Fitzgerald, 1983, p 47).

The family, then, is a natural expression of human instincts and (‘God-given’) biological differences. In the speech from which the above quotation is taken, Jenkin went on to draw out the implications of his position: ‘We hear a lot today about social work. Perhaps the best social work is motherhood’.

The new conservative concept of a ‘natural’ division of labour between the sexes admits of no possibility of role reversal between spouses. Parenthood is motherhood, for fathers are defined by their place in the public sphere as breadwinners and at home are at ‘best’ perceived as the basis of discipline and authority. Here fathers cannot be perceived as the parent who ‘specializes’ in child care and child socialization, for this is the vocation, indeed the instinct, of the female. Instead the male breadwinner is ideally the responsible consumer of the ‘market’ in private health and welfare. Where governments of the post-war consensus perceived social welfare as based on the idea of a ‘mixed economy’ of welfare which combined a strong public state sector, with a marginal private sector and a limited role for the voluntary/community sector, the new conservatism seeks (ideally) a dominance of the private sector with a supporting voluntary sector and a minimal state sector as a ‘safety-net’ for those who cannot by their own efforts be self-sufficient. Yet this ideal cannot be realized in the short-term, if only because it has become evident that there is generalized support for (certain aspects of) the welfare state (Taylor-Gooby, 1985). Such popular support produced a shift in the political rhetoric of new conservatism: between the election of 1979 and 1983 prior to 1983 the new conservatives promised to expand the potential of the private sector, by 1983, however, the rhetoric claimed that the welfare state was safe in conservative ‘hands’. Nevertheless, the Conservative governments of the 1980s have made efforts to change the balance between the public and private sectors of welfare. They have privatized areas of the National Health Service, particularly cleaning and catering services, as well as assisting the development of private health insurance schemes and occupational pension schemes.

The public sector between 1979 and 1987 had its capacity to deal with increases in demand undermined, whilst the government placed greater stress on private health care and voluntary effort as ways of promoting greater individual choice. However, the reality of community care in the 1980s suggests that the policy has failed to
match the rhetoric. Published in December 1986, a report of the Audit Commission pointed to the increasing gap between the rate at which long-stay provision for the mentally ill, elderly and disabled is being run down (a process of 'deinstitutionalization' begun in the 1960s) and the rate at which local authority community-based services, such as half-way houses for the mentally ill and day centres for the elderly and disabled, are being expanded. Thus, between 1974 and 1985 the number of hospital beds fell by 25,000 whilst only 9000 new places were created in community-based services for the mentally ill. The Audit Commission points to the increasing burden on families, and states that, where relatives cannot help, 'it is likely that a significant proportion of the deinstitutionalized mentally ill will have been before the courts and will now be imprisoned'.

Families are increasingly finding that services for the elderly are being reduced, and they are called upon to act as informal carers. For example, in 1987 the DHSS published proposals to cut levels of benefits to hospital in-patients in order to save £7 million. It proposed to cut back the basic pension paid to in-patients after six weeks instead of eight weeks. Age Concern has suggested that more than half of those affected will be elderly people and the reduction in benefits will undermine their families' ability to give proper care. The Audit Commission report claims that community care is in disarray because of the government's lack of resolve to generate a positive community care policy. As many commentators have observed, care by the community is increasingly becoming care by the family, and care by the family means care by women (Finch and Groves, 1983, recall also Unit 4).

The Audit Commission report criticizes the increasing dominance of private sector establishments in communities. For with such a distinct aim – profitability – this is bound to dominate the policy of community care. The private sector is bound to generate an uneven level of provision across distant regions of the country. Seaside towns such as Eastbourne and Bournemouth have become well-provisioned havens for the elderly whilst many large cities may have little or no provision at all.

'Private' health and welfare cannot but accentuate the division between richer and poorer families. Critics have pointed to the extent to which a dominant private sector generates a two-tier system of 'welfare' with the public sector becoming a basic and 'residual' service (Loney, 1986).

### 3.3 Conclusion

1. The new conservatism admits of only a single form of the family as acceptable and legitimate – the patriarchal family. This is said to be a natural institution, and the reaffirmation of a single concept of morality: a morality of prudence, self-discipline and self-help. The new conservatism is a 'methodological familialism' in that it perceives the family as pre-social (natural) and private. The patriarchal family is seen as the basic unit of society. Unemployment, crime, hooliganism and so on are not social problems but the result of either the failure of the patriarchal family to assert itself or the existence of alternative (that is, deviant) family forms. Important here, then, is the premise that unemployment, crime and so on are symptoms of crisis in the family. New conservatism promises therefore to strengthen the family.

2. The Conservative Party has a strong commitment to lower inflation and reduction in taxes and both of these are seen as important in promoting (patriarchal) family life. Whilst the Conservative government have (at least up to 1987) reduced inflation, it can be noted that one effect of making inflation the priority problem of the economy has been the increase in the numbers of those who rely solely on state benefits to over twelve million people in 1987 (Field, 1987). Equally, it was noted that the policy of reducing direct taxation had helped families on above
average earnings to be more self-sufficient but at the cost of diminishing the capacity of poor families to be self-sufficient. Moreover the overall tax burden has in fact increased.

3 Policies on welfare benefits (see Smart) and community care were seen to overburden poor families and diminish their ability to be self-sufficient, especially as the concept of ‘childhood’ (and its dependent status) now appears to be extended to twenty-five years of age.

4 Finally we need to question the extent to which this methodological familism of new conservatism helps to repress the question of equality. For as a ‘natural institution’, the family’s inequalities can be presented as part of the natural order of things and therefore as impossible to change. Women and children are merely perceived as ‘dependents’ with no autonomous needs of their own. New conservatism’s ideology also represses the question of alternative lifestyles and sexual identities. The latter are merely considered to be deviant. An important question here is the extent to which such an ideology can be said to be acceptable in a pluralist society.

You should now be in a position to fill out the table (which appeared at the end of section 2) with a summary of Conservative rhetoric about and policy towards the family. Try to complete all four of the boxes in your own words (NB you will need to use this format but on your own paper there is insufficient space here.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Concept of the family</th>
<th>Welfare/community care policies</th>
<th>Welfare benefits policies</th>
<th>Likely effects on families</th>
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<td>Conservative</td>
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Like the Conservative Party, the Labour Party has produced a complex rhetoric about the family and its place in the social order. We will also be considering the relationship between its rhetoric and its policy proposals which most closely affect the family. However, at the time of writing, the Labour Party had not formed a government since 1979. So, in the first instance, we shall be looking briefly at the rhetoric and policies of Labour governments of the 1960s and ‘70s.

During his premiership between 1976 and 1979, Labour leader James Callaghan promoted the idea of a ‘Ministry of Marriage.’ The government had become alarmed at increasing rates of divorce during the 1970s and perceived these as a threat to the institution of marriage and to the traditional family. In 1978 he told a Labour Women’s Conference that there was a need for ‘the beneficial influence of the family as a whole to be preserved in this changing situation.’ That the Prime Minister had perceived the need to state this at a women’s conference indicates his commitment to a patriarchal notion of the family. This resurgence of interest in the plight of the family led the Callaghan government to set up a Department of Health and Social Security Working Party into the causes and remedies of marital breakdown. The idea of a Family Impact statement was raised. Such a ‘statement’ would examine the effects of a range of policy proposals and decisions on the family. It was also James Callaghan, along with the then Minister of Education Shirley Williams, who introduced the ‘Great Education Debate.’ Amongst other things, this ‘debate’ was to generate discussion of the need for parents to help determine children’s schooling and to stress the importance of ‘family morality’ as the basis of education.

However, this rhetoric of the family on the part of the Callaghan government represented a confusion in the Labour Party between the level of ideology and that of policy. In articulating a concern to maintain the traditional family, the Callaghan government was contradicting the intentions of legislation passed by the Wilson government of the 1960s. Particularly important here were the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts which sought to establish equality of opportunity for women in the public sphere of work. At the very least, this legislation implied that women had a dual function both at home and at ‘work.’ The Acts undermined the idea of women’s sole sphere as within the family. Equally the Wilson government had been responsible for legislation which had made divorce easier, which was in part a cause of rising divorce rates.

Clearly, these Acts had not been explicitly designed to undermine the family. Rather they were products of the egalitarian tendency within the Labour Party. As we noted earlier, such an egalitarianism has a tendency to ‘look inside the family’ and determine the needs and wishes of the individual members rather than assuming that those needs will be defined — and met — by their position in the family.

The Callaghan government’s new-found interest in the family represented a move away from the egalitarian strand within the party. In fact, Callaghan’s rhetoric can be seen as a response to the increasing dominance of the new conservatism in British politics in the late 1970s. We have already noted this dominance of the new conservatives and the extent to which they shaped the political agenda. Callaghan’s government accepted the terms of this agenda to such an extent that within months of becoming party leader and Prime Minister, Callaghan and his Chancellor — Denis Healey — told the Labour Party Conference in 1976 that they were now committed monetarists. Accepting the canicature of Keynesianism used by new conservatives, they denied Keynesian theory as a ‘spendthrift’ policy. This commitment to monetarism and its rejection of a positive role for the state clearly established the need for the family now to be considered as the resource for — rather than merely a recipient of — ‘welfare.’ In denying the validity of a ‘welfare state’, monetarism helped to establish a space for the family as the site of ‘welfare’.

Callaghan had found it relatively easy to adopt this rhetoric of the family because both he and the party leadership were part of the post-war Labourist (or ‘social democratic’) tradition which had always valued and sought to uphold the patriarchal
family. Since 1945 the Labour Party had aligned itself with this Labourist ideology which sought to establish social order, not so much by way of the ‘rule of law’ (so important to new conservatives), but by the creation and maintenance of social consensus a consensus based upon the idea of a ‘mixed economy’ and ‘citizenship’.

In aligning itself with the Beverdige proposals from 1945 onwards, the party sought to make the idea of a ‘welfare state’ the basis of this consensus. The Beverdige proposals implied a centralization of welfare and health services. The Beverdige proposals also contained the idea of a strong patriarchal family to which the statutory services of the welfare state could be addressed. This Labourist ideology may be seen as resting upon a functionalist conception of social order. It perceives society as analogous to a biological organism. Society is like an organism constituted of parts whose main function is to maintain the organism as a whole. The family is considered to be just such a functionally necessary part of society. Important here is the identification of the conventional patriarchal family as the ideal form of the family which is said to ‘fit’ most appropriately to the needs of the economy and the state. With Beverdige’s optimism regarding full employment, men were reaffirmed as breadwinners for a self-sufficient family, within which women found their proper place as the mothers and informal carers so important to the efficient running of the ‘welfare state’.

At one level there is a similarity between this perception of the family and that of the new conservatives. Clearly, both argue that the patriarchal family is the ideal and norm of family life. However, it is also important to note that for Labourism the family is perceived as a social institution which not only interrelates with other social institutions but is itself part of social consensus. In new conservatism the emphasis is on the family as a natural and private institution, which is seen as pre-social. The new conservatives lay stress on the family as a ‘private’ consumer of goods and services produced by a ‘free’ market economy. Questions of child care, education, health work and so on are ideally seen as the province of prudent parents, the family is the calculator and arbiter of its own needs. New conservatism ideally recognizes no social responsibility on the part of the state to enable families to possess the ability to be self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency is a result of individual effort and initiative.

Labourism, on the other hand, perceived the family as a part of the social whole. If the family is required to perform functions for social consensus, then the state has an equal responsibility to assist the family in these tasks. Labourism argued that, if left to its own devices, the market economy, far from generating self-sufficiency, will lead to inequalities between families. Consequently, Labourism saw the state as having a positive role in equalizing opportunities for all through a mixed economy. From this idea of the state working for the ‘common good’, it follows that questions of ‘child care’, ‘education’, and the ‘health’ of particular families are considered to be social issues the responsibility of the state and society at large.

At this point, you might want to look back at the grid in Figure 3 and think about where this ‘Labourism’ might fit.

Clearly this idea of an interventionist state social democracy means we cannot place this ideology within Box number 4 along with market liberalism. Yet there might be something of a similarity between social democracy and one-nation Conservatism, for both suggest a positive role for the state. Indeed, Conservative governments of the post-war period largely accepted the idea of a consensus based upon a mixed economy. So should we place the Labourism of the Labour Party in Box number 3 along with the Conservatives?

In fact, we should not, because of the emphasis within the Labour Party on equality. Although one-nation Conservatives sought a social consensus based upon a ‘mixed economy’, this consensus also sought to maintain a hierarchy of inequality. The Labour Party, on the other hand, aligned itself with the search for equality and the concept of citizenship, even if progress has always been slow and the level of
commitment sometimes merely rhetorical (Le Grand, 1982) So I would suggest that we place social democracy in Box number 1 because of its identification with a positive role for the state and the search for equality

4.1 Labour in the 1980s

In the 1980s the Labour Party has argued that the policies and actions of the Thatcher governments have eroded any development of greater equality achieved in the 1960s and 70s and intensified inequality. Pressure groups concerned to influence Labour Party policy such as the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) and the National Council for Single Parent Families have pointed to the increasing numbers of poor families in Britain. In opposition the rhetoric of the party has moved again to questions of equality.

In a discussion paper on party policy, Michael Mann (1985) has attempted to illustrate the consequences of Conservative policies for families and to identify the policies a future Labour government would need to provide in order to address the needs of these families. In particular, Mann identifies the growing numbers of poor families who typically live in council housing and are dependent upon state benefits. Where these families do have a breadwinner it is usual that he/she will be employed in low-paid, low-status work with few rights. Many, for example, will be women in part-time work. Included within this group of poor families are the increasing numbers of single-parent families. With low levels of nursery provision, single mothers find it hard to obtain work and often come to rely solely on state benefits. These families, Mann suggests, are ‘humiliated’ and ‘depressed’ by the effects of Conservative policies and have become cynical about conventional political solutions to their plight. Thus, whilst many may have been traditional supporters of the Labour Party, it is likely that they are now non-voters.

Mann suggests that the party should commit itself to a full and extended concept of citizenship, which would ‘guarantee adequate participation in economic and cultural life’. Such a concept would commit the party to universal benefits ‘with no test of worth or morality’ such as underlies means-tested benefits. Here Mann is pointing to the problem of stigma which attaches to means-tested benefits. This tends to result in a low take-up rate which means they do not reach all of those in need. This concept of citizenship must extend to women in order to allow them full participation in public life and paid employment. Thus, child care and nursery provision should be made universal, for example.

Mann’s analysis is based upon a view of the family as a social institution affected by public and political policies which is, in turn, a determinant of its members’ ‘life chances’ within the labour market. This latter point is established explicitly by Mann when he refers to the manner in which extended family relations and neighbourhoods act as social networks and are used by individuals as the source of information regarding employment possibilities. The problem for poor families is that, clustered together (and for many local authorities it is an explicit policy to put the poor and the single-parent families into a single neighbourhood), their social networks will be of little help. Mann cites the importance of the growing trend towards decentralization in local authority provision, arguing that this decentralization might usefully regenerate these communities by providing resources (Mann, 1985).

Mann is referring to an important and growing political force within the Labour Party. Since the 1960s there has been developing a ‘libertarian’ socialism which has distanced itself from the centralist state – a cornerstone of traditional Labourism. It emphasizes rather the need for the democratization and decentralization of services in order that these should be based upon locally defined needs, and it argues that their implementation should be locally accountable. The state, whether national or local, is still considered important, but much more emphasis is given to its ability to
empower communities by giving them resources and the political power to control them.

This political development is of interest here partly because of its critique of the centralized state and its role in the economy. Not only have the libertarian socialists criticized the welfare state for being centralized, dominated by a bureaucratic and professional elite, and, perhaps most importantly, for being unaccountable and undemocratic, but they are also less persuaded of the benefits of nationalization policies and state corporations than their Labourist colleagues. They would prefer to see a socialism based upon co-operatives and co-operative enterprise oriented around neighbourhoods and communities. This contains an implicit critique of the family because of the manner in which it isolates and ‘privatizes’ individuals. Equally, the family is criticized for its inefficient use of economic and social resources. Whilst it clearly suits a market economy to maintain a situation in which individual households act as separate consumers, a more efficient use of resources could be achieved by less privatized and ‘isolated’ forms of household consumption (as in communal facilities).

This group tends toward a view of the state as decentralized, and thus puts them in the bottom half of our state–anti-state continuum. However, they would not be placed in Box number 4 along with market liberalism because of their commitment to equality. Indeed, this commitment is far more extensive than that of labourism, and does not merely refer to family and economic equality but also to equality of status between lifestyles, sexual identities and moralities. Indeed, these ‘libertarian’ socialists argue that only such a full and complete notion of equality can be the basis of a truly pluralist society.

This involves a rejection of any ideal family and certainly that of the patriarchal family. By contrast, the family is perceived as a social group of unequal statuses and containing distinct and divergent social interests. The critique of the family developed by feminists has been an important influence on libertarian socialism. Libertarian socialists reject the idea of the ‘family’ as the basic unit of society, ‘natural’ and ‘private’, and point to the family as a product of distinct political and social forces in society. Thus, the division between men and women in the family is not the result of ‘natural’ needs or ‘private’ relations but of the wider sexual division of labour. In this regard, libertarian socialists would seek to disaggregate the family and identify the needs and interests of its individual members.

Thus, libertarian socialism, because of its commitment to both equality and a decentralized state empowering communities, should be placed within Box number 2 in Figure 3. In the 1980s this political force is an important part of the Labour Party even if somewhat marginalized. Perhaps the classic example of the grouping is the work of the Greater London Council, under Ken Livingstone, which was abolished in 1986. Livingstone’s ideal was a decentralized set of services that would empower dispossessed communities. Advocating an ‘alliance of the dispossessed’, he included in this group the poor, ethnic minorities, gay groups and women.

The Labour Party, then, contains at least two sets of ideas: a dominant Labourism based on assumptions of a centralized state and limited equality which perceives the patriarchal family as necessary to social order, and a libertarian socialism which seeks to disaggregate the family.

4.2 The 1987 election campaign: Labour and the family

In October 1986 the Observer had reported that the campaign team for Labour in the 1987 General Election had decided to present Neil and Glenys Kirkwood as the ideal couple, the head of an ideal family. In the Guardian in November 1986, the Party’s General Secretary, Larry Whitty, referred to the implicit dilemma in the party’s attempt to portray itself as the party of the family: ‘Our projection of the family is not a monolithic one. But the fact is the family is still a potent symbol.
The family is still a fair chunk of the population even though many people may not be organized that way. Whitty went on to suggest the influence of feminism and gay rights groups on his ideas and pointed out the party's commitments to such groups. In the election campaign of 1987 the Labour Party not only used the potent symbol of the family but did so to a greater extent than even the Conservative Party.

On the page opposite I have reproduced one item of campaign material which exemplifies the use made of 'the family' as a political symbol. As you examine the 'leaflet' jot down whether or not it portrays the patriarchal family.

I noted the following points:

- Remembering that the leaflet would be folded and the first part of it to be seen would be the 'Family Album' title page, it is evident that 'the family' was the important symbol here. The photograph reinforces that symbol.

- Once inside the leaflet (and the family) we are introduced to individual members of the family. In a limited sense, 'disaggregation' occurs since we are informed of the 'needs' of each member. However, this disaggregation is only partial, for the particular statuses and needs of the individuals are defined in terms of conventional family roles, as 'father' and 'mother'. Moreover there is a tendency to reaffirm the mother as the informal carer, since she is equated with the National Health Service, not with employment. Equally we are told that Diane is (always?) 'thinking about her baby'. In fact, with father as the only breadwinner, I felt this to be an image of the patriarchal family.

- However, it is important to recognize that this 'family' would probably not have been used by the Conservative Party because of the presence of Diane, who is clearly a single mother and as such considered to be the 'worst evil' by some Conservatives. The presence of Diane implicitly raises issues of marriage and illegitimacy.

This latter point then may serve to confirm Whitty's argument that the party's idea of the family is not totally monolithic, yet it is also noteworthy that the leaflet does not address the issue of poverty and poor families (the Joneses may be 'ordinary' but are relatively secure compared to many), nor does it address the needs of women to enter the labour force, much less the needs of those in alternative forms of relationships. Finally, the leaflet does little to reflect the fact that Britain is a multicultural society with a diversity of ethnic groups and family forms.

The rhetoric of the party, then, in 1987 was one which suggested that Labour was staking a claim to being the party of the family. Since his election as party leader in 1983 Neil Kinnock has repeatedly denied the Conservative Party's claim to be the traditional and natural party of the family. To the 1985 Conference he put the following rhetorical question: 'How does the "party of the family" cut child benefit and housing benefit, reduce nursery schooling? How does the party of the family contrive the lowest number of public housing starts in post-war history?' In mocking the Conservative Party as 'the party of the family', Kinnock implicitly claimed the mantle for Labour.

We need to examine some of the major policy proposals that the Labour Party has committed itself to in order to discover whether or not, and to what extent, these proposals secure the family. As you examine the proposals you might like to compare and contrast these proposals of Labour with the policies of the Conservative Party, as discussed by Carol Smart in Chapter 7 of the Course Reader.
Family Album

This is the Jones family. They’re worried about what’s to become of them. And that’s not surprising, faced with the threat of thirteen years of Thatcher government.

Grandma is worried about her pension. Mrs Thatcher abolished the link between pensions and average earnings of peers. A single pensioner has lost out by £120 a week, and couples by £1140.

Father is anxious over his job. Two million jobs have been lost in industry, and one million people have been unemployed for over a year. If you lose your job in your 50s, you’re unlikely ever to work again.

Mother is concerned for her health. Cervical cancer kills over 2,000 women a year. But the NHS still doesn’t have a national recall service to screen women for cancer. Mrs Thatcher says we can’t afford it.

Peer wants somehow to learn a skill. Young people can’t get jobs without proper training. And Britain needs skilled workers to compete. But we train far fewer young people than any other major industrial nation.

Young Sandra ought to be getting on in school. But too many children are taught in classes of over 30. There aren’t enough textbooks or computers. And without trained maths and science teachers, children can’t learn.

And Diane is thinking about her baby. Mrs Thatcher abolished the maternity grant this year. She’s cut the real value of child benefit. And she’s left most of Britain’s toddlers to manage without nursery education or care.
- **Welfare benefits**  The Labour Party was committed to increasing pensions and reintroducing a State Earnings Related Pension. In the longer term the party proposed to shift all benefits to a universal basis of payment. Equally, Child Benefit was to be increased and to be kept in line with inflation. Moreover, mothers who wished to use it would be provided with nursery provision for all three- and four-year-olds. The party also proposed to pay women in their role as informal carers.

- **National Health Service**  An important aspect of the party’s image is its association with the NHS. Not surprisingly, it promised to increase spending here and, with a particular view to women, promised a national system of Well Woman clinics and the development of a National Cervical Cancer recall service.

- **Community care**  Radical proposals were made for community care and the voluntary sector intended to ‘enhance, optimize and not unduly burden family support which will always remain the backbone of community care’ (Meacher, 1986). The party’s proposals included the use of pilot studies to determine the needs of key client groups, such as the poor, the disabled, the mentally ill and so on, and the establishment of ‘community-based assessment teams’ made up of social workers, community nurses and other professionals as well as local groups. An important aspect of such plans would be to offer respite to informal carers – mainly women – of the elderly, the disabled etc.

- **The Ministry of Women**  At the 1986 Labour Party Conference a motion was passed which committed a future Labour government to the establishment of a Ministry of Women. The motion included, much to the annoyance of the leadership, full Cabinet status for the Minister of the new department. This motion had been the result of a long struggle by women in the party who, with experience of Women’s Committees in Labour-controlled local authorities, had sought to convince the leadership of the party that a national extension of these local committees was necessary in order to consolidate and co-ordinate policies for women. A future Labour government would have given the Ministry its own budget and staff of around three hundred. The national office of the Ministry would have been complemented by a number of regional offices. It was proposed that the Ministry should assess the implications of the policy proposals of other Ministries on the lives of women as well as generating its own specific policy proposals. These specific policies would be based upon a number of objectives defined for the Ministry:

  - to establish a responsive Ministry which communicates with women and acts upon their needs,
  - to give positive backing to the Equal Opportunities Commission – the body set up to oversee the implementation of the Equal Pay and Sexual Discrimination Acts – in its task of eradicating sexual inequality in the workplace,
  - ensuring that local authorities would provide services to help parents – especially mothers – combine paid work and the needs of their families,
  - to ensure that all government departments as employers improve the conditions and prospects for women employees within the public sector. Such initiatives would establish an example for private enterprise.

Conservatives in Britain have criticized Labour’s ideas. Emma Nicholson, leader of the Conservative Party’s Women’s Unit, described any future Minister of such a department thus: ‘She would be like a gadfly irritating everyone. drawing blood and leaving no mark’ (Sunday Express, February 1987). Criticisms of the Ministry also came from the Alliance. Mrs Shirley Williams, President of the Council for Social Democracy, has suggested that the Ministry for Women would simply place women’s needs in a ‘ghetto’, with powerful and leading departments of state, such as the
Treasury, using their established power to override any new demands of the Ministry. This is a criticism with some force since even the most established departments, such as the DHSS, have often been compelled to cut their spending proposals by a dominant Treasury.

However, this proposal was clearly based on an attempt to *disaggregate* the family unit and generate formal and substantive equality for women. The proposal is based upon the assumption that full *equality* and citizenship rights should be given to women and that real equality might be created between the genders.

You should now consider whether or not these proposals secure the family. Compare them with the discussion of Conservative Party proposals in section 3 and with Carol Smart’s discussion in her Reader article.

<table>
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<th>Party</th>
<th>Concept of the family</th>
<th>Welfare/community care policies</th>
<th>Welfare benefits policies</th>
<th>Likely effects on families</th>
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The Alliance is a difficult phenomenon to comprehend as a single entity since it was composed of two separate parties at the time of the 1987 General Election. Within each party distinct interests and inflections of ideology co-existed. Formed in 1982, the Alliance is a coalition between the long-established Liberal Party and the then newly-formed Social Democratic Party. The latter had been established with the Limehouse Declaration of 1981 by four prominent ex-members of the Labour Party, Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams – the last three being prominent members of the Callaghan government between 1976 and 1979. This new party intended to offer the people a ‘centre politics’ which, it argued, the Labour and Conservative Parties had abandoned.

It is important to recognize that a potential ‘alliance’ always existed between the SDP and the Liberal Party for both ideological and ‘personal’ reasons. The SDP wished to establish as its own the Labourist or social democratic tradition, arguing that ‘Labour’ had abandoned it. But how, we might ask, could this tradition find a correspondence with the Liberal Party? It must be realized that the name ‘Liberal Party’ is something of a misnomer. By the turn of the century the Liberal Party had dropped its commitment to the traditional forms of liberalism – *laissez-faire* ideology. This ideology, which formed much of its thinking in the nineteenth century, was abandoned for a more collectivist approach in the Liberal governments of the early twentieth century. These governments were in fact responsible for planting the seeds of a more interventionist policy by the state in both the economy and social welfare. These were the foundations of the ‘mixed economy’ which was to become the basis of the Labourist or social democratic tradition in post-war Britain. Indeed, the main architects of this tradition were Liberals such as William Beveridge and John Maynard Keynes. The Liberal Party of the 1980s is dominated, then, by this social democratic ideology, notwithstanding the existence within the party of a significant ‘radical’ wing (see, for instance, Dodds, 1987). Ideologically, then, there is a great deal of convergence between the two parties. Such an ideological similarity is what permitted the Lib-Lab pact of the late 1970s between the Callaghan government and the Liberal Party. Indeed, it was this pact which was to sow the seeds for a degree of personal rapport between the future party leaders of the ‘Alliance’.

Any attempt to situate the political rhetoric of the Alliance within the grid in Figure 3 would need to recognize the general similarity between the ideology of the Alliance and that of the Labourist tradition in the Labour Party. A commitment to a managerial state and formal equality puts the Alliance in Box number 1.

Yet it is also noteworthy that within the Alliance there is a ‘social market’ ideology (commonly associated with Dr Owen). Such an ideology tends to give less emphasis to equality and thus such an ideology might be placed in Box number 3.

The Alliance, then, was likely to inherit the idea of the family as a functional part of social order and social consensus from the tradition of Labourism. The party’s ‘philosophy’ and rhetoric stresses the importance of *fraternity* in the construction of a ‘new’ social order. During the 1987 General Election the Alliance criticized the other two major parties for the way they promoted division within society. ‘The two-party system has broken down because it is rooted in outdated battles of class and ideology.’ (Alliance Manifesto, 1987) Two significant points stand out here. Firstly, the Alliance did not perceive divisions of class etc as ‘real’ so much as ‘prejudices’ or ‘beliefs’ which undermine what is seen as the *essential* consensus in British society. Secondly, the Alliance claimed for its own ‘philosophy’ and programme the status of a ‘rationality’ above and beyond what are said to be the ideologies of the other parties. They implied that the other parties’ programmes were based on prejudices determined by sectional interests whilst their own programme was non-ideological and based on a non-sectional ‘national interest’.

They argued that a future Alliance government would be based on techniques of administration which were above politics and based on efficiency. Such an Alliance government would use the state to foster fraternal relations between all citizens, and
this new sense of fraternity would be the foundation of social order. As David Steel
told an audience during the 1987 election campaign: 'For fraternity is the link
between liberty and equality, only fraternity can lead the country.' The Alliance
stands for fraternity' (emphasis added). By fraternity is meant 'the sense of
fellowship, co-operation, neighbourliness, community and citizenship' (Williams, 1981,
p37). The Alliance presented a model of politics in which social order is based on
the establishment of 'open' channels of communication between individuals and
communities. The family provides an essential aspect of this social order based upon
fraternal relations. For example, Williams argued that technological 'progress' can be
linked to the role of the family - the new technologies may revive working at
home. Inexpensive computer terminals can be installed in a home [and thus] the
decentralization of work and decision-making ceases to be a dream. Human beings
can be made whole again - living and working in the same community.
Microelectronics offers the opportunity of reuniting the family and making
commuting an obsolete activity' (Williams, 1981, p 69).

This 'optimism' regarding progress and the family corresponds to a tradition within
the mainstream British sociology of the family, which developed through the 1960s
and 1960s. The work of Elizabeth Bott and the studies by Willmott and Young are
central to this tradition (in fact, Michael Young has been a leading member of the
SDP since its inception). These authors identify the family as part of what they see
as the egalitarian trends within society. Important here is the idea of the
'symmetrical family', by which is meant a family which is becoming egalitarian in
terms of the roles and relationships within it. The family is here seen as part of the
'march of progress'.

Modern formulations of this tradition are to be found in the work of the Rapoports
(Rapoport et al., 1982). Unlike the new conservatism, this tradition is optimistic,
seeing what it terms 'family diversity', that is a range of distinct family types,
ranging from single parents to the 'dual-career' family. This family diversity is said to
be the expression of the increasing choice and freedom of a pluralist society. This
choice and freedom are the product of technological progress. 'Every time there is a
change in the technical order, families are called upon to make transitions as well'
(Rapoport et al., 1982, p 475). Technological change is perceived here as
unambiguously a 'good thing' ('progress') and is seen as determining the scope of
family life. Although it is a minority form at present, the dual-career family is seen
as an 'ideal' which has successfully negotiated the changes brought about by
Technology. The dual-career family is a middle-class professional family in which
both adults follow a career and their roles and relations are based upon
egalitarianism. They make joint decisions and share household tasks. We are told
that their relations are based upon 'high' ideals of fraternity and self-realization. It is
these motives which generate equality. This family is contrasted with a dual-worker
family (typically, working-class) in which though both adults work there is no
equality between them because their motives are 'economic'. However, the
dual-career family acts as an ideal to which this dual-worker family can aspire. This
tradition appears, then, to proffer a largely 'middle-class' model of the family. Thus
'middle-class' theme is clear in the quotation from Williams, cited above, which
implies a family headed by a professional, and able to take advantage of new
technology to work at home.

The Rapoports' work is heavily policy-oriented, and they are linked to such groups as
the Study Commission on the Family, a policy unit which publishes research and
policy on the family. The Rapoports are also concerned to establish a commitment
government to the idea of a 'family impact statement' which would analyse the
implications of a range of policies of state on the family. They argue that there is a
'lag' between the state and the changes which have occurred in the family, thus
rendering many state policies redundant for new forms of family. This tradition seeks
a new partnership between the state and the family, one which researches this new
diversity of family life and develops policies to support the family. The Rapoports
also want the state to promote forms of advocacy, such as 'marriage guidance' and
counselling, in order to assist families to adapt to social change. This is based on a concern regarding the increases in rates of divorce.

While there is no necessary correspondence between this tradition and the Alliance 'Party', many of the themes correspond to the underlying assumptions of Alliance philosophy and policy. Thus the Alliance is concerned to establish that family diversity is a significant issue and, like the Rapoports, seeks a stake in a new partnership between the state and family life. Equally, the Alliance is concerned with rising divorce and with generating a resolution of this 'problem.' Thus an SDP policy document (SDP, 1986c), perceives the need for Social Services Departments to devise more 'marriage guidance' services and to build on the new 'conciliation services' in order to support families. Such a proposal emphasizes the Alliance's concern to generate consensus and to resolve 'problems' and 'conflict' by way of a 'human relations' approach (i.e., by facilitating and improving communication between people). Thus the 'problem' is here perceived as generated by a failure of communication between individuals (problems are the result of interpersonal relations), and so their resolution is to (re-)open these channels.

This 'human relations' approach can be seen to underlie the SDP proposal to establish a Family Court which would not restrict itself to divorce alone, but deal with the full gamut of 'family' problems and issues including adoption and child abuse. The SDP complained that the present (1987) system gave a two-tier service, whereby the poor were confined to the Magistrate Courts. A policy document complains 'that both 'tiers' are based on the adversarial procedure which requires a 'winner' and a 'loser' rather than a compromise in which both sides can agree' (SDP, 1986c, p 14). Co-operation and compromise are the linchpins of this policy. This critique of the two-tier system reminds us of the Alliance's critique of British politics.

5.1 Rhetoric and policy

The concept of fraternity, then, is the basis for social consensus, and as such it was one of the underlying assumptions of policy and style of the Alliance in 1987. Below I want to discuss two areas of Alliance policy and their relationship to the family. The first of these relates to proposals for community care. Linked to this will be the Alliance's view of economic policy, as well as the question of policy towards women, since they are central aspects of community care. Secondly, I want to discuss the Alliance's proposals for welfare benefits and their attempt, if any, to redistribute wealth so as to equalize incomes between families.

Our purpose here is to answer the question: does the programme of the Alliance Parties promote and secure the family?

Community care

'If new needs are going to be met a new deal between the statutory and voluntary sector and a new spirit of partnership is needed' (SDP, 1986b, p 13). The Alliance recognizes the extent to which the family is responsible for much of the voluntary work and community care that is done. Its proposals have the stated aim of assisting the family in this task and indeed relieving the family of many of its burdens.

An important aspect of Alliance policy is based on the SDP policy to set up a National Community Volunteer Service Scheme (NCVSS). A major aim of this scheme is to 'recreate communities and the spirit that binds them' (SDP, 1986b, p 4). The NCVSS would be run by a government agency whose director and leading staff would be appointed by a board. The board would be made up of individuals appointed by government, representing voluntary organizations, young people, statutory services, trade unions and professionals. The board would be responsible to a government minister. The agency would offer guidelines and funds to voluntary organizations as well as possessing funds to operate its own schemes. The agency would also promote the idea amongst working people that they take a 'sabbatical'
and do voluntary work. It is suggested that these ‘volunteers’ should be given tax concessions and some remuneration.

One concrete example of this attempt to rekindle the community spirit is the proposal to develop ‘Family Centres’ organized by local authority Social Services Departments but staffed by volunteers. Such centres would give mothers ‘a few hours’ respite from their charges and offer centres for mothers to get together. Recognizing the importance of women as informal carers, the Alliance offers them a ‘carers’ charter’ (Manifesto, 1987) which would give them a cash benefit and what is referred to as ‘negotiating muscle’ as consumers, although the nature of this ‘muscle’ is never specified.

The Alliance suggested that the NCVSS scheme would create a new kind of partnership between state and community and not one based upon the ‘old corporatist model’. By ‘corporatist’ they mean the state–community relations existing into the 1970s whereby a centralized state determined and limited the freedoms of the voluntary sector. Whilst it is clear that, at least since the 1940s, the state has been the dominant partner in the state–voluntary/community relation, it is not clear that the idea of a NCVSS would do anything to change that relationship. Indeed it may in fact increase the level of state power by virtue of the way this proposal sees the state as co-ordinating activity which can so easily become the same thing as centralizing. Note, for example, that the government-appointed individuals on the board are picked because they represent interests in the area, however, the proposals state that these individuals ‘would not be appointed by or accountable to those interests’ (SDP, 1986b, p 14). More significantly, while the individuals represent organizations, there remains the problem of who or what would serve the interests of the family. Families are not organized into ‘blocks’ of interest. Mothers as informal carers are rarely part of rigorously defined organizations. If this policy is to decentralize, it would need to seek out the expression of their interests and needs.

That one centralized agency should hold all the potential state funds for voluntary effort would concentrate power, and the power to hold the purse strings is an important one. With such a single and unified body, decisions regarding allocation of resources may be based on state interests and not on those of the community. A major dilemma here is that in attempting to rekindle ‘community spirit’ (fraternal relations), these proposals are merely allocating all the responsibility of community care to the family and voluntary organizations without giving them any power. The proposals are ambiguous and appear to rest on a romanticized notion of a once-existent community identity (‘to recreate community spirit’).

Whilst the NCVSS would be funded by government, the Alliance perceived the private sector of industry and business as the long-term and primary source of funds for ‘community care’ policies. Essential here is the Alliance’s particular understanding of the idea of a ‘mixed economy’ between public and private sectors, for it is one that bears heavily on a strong private sector. ‘Our aim is to move towards greater co-operation between the public and private sectors, to maximize the advantages of the latter whilst so managing its relationship with the public sector as to minimize the risk of damage to the NHS’ (SDP, 1986b, p 33). Not simply the voluntary sector, but the NHS as well, are part of a ‘mixed economy’ in which the ‘rules’ and practices of the private sector predominate.

This conception of the relationship between the economy and the state sees a managerial state which co-exists with a strong private sector in setting the agenda of social relations. Such an idea would largely recognize the necessity of substantive inequalities even if it did also perceive the need for greater formal equalities. Such an ideal has implications for family life. It is difficult to perceive how inequalities between families would be eradicated or abated. Thus families in inner-city areas might not appear to be an ‘attractive’ proposition to big business, perhaps because a correct ‘community spirit’ was felt to be lacking. Equally, to leave such families and communities to the work of charitable enterprise leaves them open to the vagaries of that enterprise. In such a situation, the state would have to take responsibility for maximizing their life chances.
Women

Since women are primarily those who are given the responsibility of informal care, it is pertinent to examine the Alliance proposals for women. Published in 1986, the document *Freedom and Choice for Women* set out the major proposals to amalgamate the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and the Race Relations Board into a Human Rights Commission, a proposal which fits in with the general objective to establish a Bill of Rights.

Other proposals included 'contract' compliance (whereby government departments would allocate projects and schemes to those companies with a record of equal opportunities for women) and the proposal to make the maintenance orders awarded by the courts legally binding. Also significant is the objective of the Alliance to 'promote' measures which allow employees to take parental or family leave. Even though this proposal is vaguely defined, it is one which if implemented would help establish conditions for fathers to take their parental child-care responsibilities seriously, as the proposal applied to both female and male employees. The problem with such a proposal, however, is that it depends on the 'good will' of the employer to an important extent, and it may only scratch the surface of the substantive inequality of opportunity for women based on the sexual division of labour.

Welfare benefits

From virtually its inception up to 1986, the Alliance was closely associated with radical proposals to integrate the taxation and social security systems. Such a proposal would have raised the possibility of a direct and conscious strategy to erase anomalies and to focus on the needs of, and thus support, the family. However, by the election campaign of 1987 this proposal was dropped. If the earlier scheme had been based on a national income for all which was then increased or reduced according to income and wealth, the 'new' proposals in the Alliance Manifesto of 1987 referred to a 'basic benefit', which would be paid to the unemployed and the low paid. This basic benefit would replace the Conservative Party proposals of 'income support' and 'family credit'. Since this basic benefit was 'targeted', it would thereby be means-tested, thus failing to alleviate problems of stigma and low take-up rates, although this would, of course, make it a less costly benefit to the state! Thus, many poor families would not actually receive the benefit in whole or part.

Yet the Alliance remains committed to the idea of the welfare state as a caring contribution 'from the cradle to the grave' and would commit itself to both Maternity Grant and Death Grant, benefits which clearly help to support family life and for many poorer families may mean the difference between debt and self-sufficiency. Noteworthy is the long-term proposal of the Alliance to end the married man's tax allowance in order to fund increases in Child Benefit. In its 1987 Manifesto this became a specific policy to 'freeze' the married man's tax allowance and to increase Child Benefit. This shift of state help from the male (breadwinner?) to the woman of the household is held to be important in eradicating secondary poverty (that is, poverty which occurs as a consequence of the unequal distribution of income within a household).

5.2 Towards an assessment

We need now to answer the question which was posed at the outset of this brief examination of Alliance policies: Do the Alliance policies secure and support the family?

We noted firstly the primacy given in Alliance proposals to increased marriage guidance and counselling services. Clearly these services could be an effective set of policies for helping and assisting families to reunite and base their reunification on more appropriate sets of relations. However, it is necessary to note the implications of such 'services' for they are not 'neutral' (non-ideological) either in their aims or in their implementation.
First, we might note the extent to which such counselling and advocacy might have the consequence (however unintended on the part of the counsellor) of conceptualizing problems as simply ‘private’ and ‘personal’ and as being based on interpersonal failures of communication. It is clear that many tensions which occur within families are in fact the product of wider social processes which have the effect of constraining and limiting individual development. Thus a family which lives in an area of high unemployment and high social deprivation may suffer these problems through its interpersonal relations. Even if counsellors are aware of the need to consider the effects of such social factors, it is not at all clear what they as individuals might do to resolve these causes. Counselling, then, has the general effect of reinforcing the family as ‘private’ and ‘personal’, indeed it may actively advocate such a notion in its aims (Morgan, 1985). There may be an inability to perceive the family as part of the public sphere.

Secondly, there is evidence to suggest that counselling ‘literature’, which originated in the United States and has witnessed a proliferation since the mid 1970s, is based upon underlying assumptions that the traditional form of the family is the ‘ideal’ around which counsellors should work. Thus there is a tendency to perceive ‘normal’ relations between spouses in a conventional sense – men as primarily breadwinners, women as carers – and to reaffirm traditional perceptions of the parent–child authority relation (Morgan, 1985). Indeed, analysis of these texts which inform the practice of counselling usually presuppose such terms as ‘family’, ‘marital’, ‘love’ and so on with little attempt to define and clarify them. In fact they are used as if conventional definition sufficed, thus carrying with them the values of these conventional definitions.

Such counselling services and skills may well secure the family, but would operate to secure a fairly conventional form of the family, one which might contradict the belief on the part of the Alliance in the egalitarian family, much less would such services be able to secure the relations of alternative forms of association, including those based upon distinct and different sexual identities. It is important to recognize here the extent to which such counselling services may reflect middle-class values and norms.

We need now to move to an evaluation of the policies for community care and the welfare state of the Alliance. In the context of the late 1980s, it is likely that, due to the tendency on the part of the Alliance to emphasize the private sector, this would have the effect of consolidating existing inequalities between families. For it seems unlikely that the increases in the numbers of poor families and poverty in general would be stemmed by a reliance on private charity.

We noted the proposal for a NCVSS and the aim of the Alliance to decentralize and devolve state powers. Clearly it is always welcome news to voluntary organizations to learn of a party proposal to take their work seriously. Yet implicitly, the proposals appeared to decentralize power. Clearly, they decentralize responsibility, but perhaps that is something voluntary workers and informal carers already possess. There is here a decentralization of responsibility but not of power. The NCVSS retains financial and supervisory power. Indeed there is a further potential danger in this proposal. Given the reliance on ‘fraternal’ relations, on ‘community spirit’, it could possibly occur that decisions made by the National Agency as to whom and what to fund, would be based on the question of what form the fraternal relations should take in a community. Thus a gay group might apply for resources and be denied such resources because it is gay. The central difficulty is what ‘fraternity’ means as a description of social and political order.

In an important paper, Ann Phillips (1965) has indicated the need for a new concept of fraternity, one which does not presuppose ‘fellowship’, brotherhood, one, in other words, that does not rest on a patriarchal form of human association and one that includes women and their interests. Clearly, though, the Alliance does attend to what it perceives as the needs of women. Does it then move towards a disaggregation of the family? The proposal for a Human Rights Commission would
increase formal equality of opportunity for women. In strengthening the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Alliance would generate greater possibilities for women in the realm of paid work. Measures towards contract compliance (an idea ‘borrowed’ from the GLC under Ken Livingstone) would similarly assist women. Equally, a shift towards child benefit and away from the married man’s tax allowance would benefit women.

Yet it could be argued that these are all attempts to improve formal equalities for women—that is, equality before the law. We need to assess the degree to which formal equality can eradicate substantive (or maternal) inequalities. One such substantive inequality is the sexual division of labour—the basis of the home (women) and work (men) divide. To what extent can formal equality affect the sexual division of labour? Secondly, is substantive inequality created and maintained by the ideology of ‘femininity’ (and its ‘opposite’ masculinity)? ‘Femininity’ presupposes passivity and a role of caring motherhood. Formal equality ‘works’ predominantly for those with the knowledge and capacity to claim their rights and in general these are middle-class ‘skills’. Alliance proposals may go a limited way towards generating equality between the genders, the extent to which they do achieve this would depend on the force of the substantive inequalities around them.

Finally, you should now complete the table about rhetoric and policy for the Alliance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Concept of the family</th>
<th>Welfare/community care policies</th>
<th>Welfare benefits policies</th>
<th>Likely effects on families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the conclusion, I shall be using my version of these summary tables to draw out some of the main points of comparison between the parties.
In this section, we shall be looking back over the unit and comparing the different orientations of the three main parties in Britain towards the family. I want to start by returning to Figure 3, where I constructed a grid from two different axes (state/anti-state and equality/anti-equality) to provide a preliminary identification of the parties. My completed version is shown in Figure 4.

I suggested earlier that this table had only limited value. One of the main reasons for this is that the political parties each contain more than one ideological position or 'tendency.' As you can see from my version of the chart, each of the parties involves two different quadrants of the grid, highlighting the different ideologies which are represented in the parties.

I argued that this sort of classification of political ideologies provided a useful starting-point, but that the complexities of party ideologies and party policies meant that this classification involved some over-simplification. I then suggested a different sort of table which you could complete for each of the parties at the end of the relevant section. Set out overleaf is my version of the completed table. You may wish to look back over yours, and compare them with my summaries of the parties.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Concept of the family</th>
<th>Welfare/community care policies</th>
<th>Welfare benefits policies</th>
<th>Likely effects on families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Family as ‘natural’ basis of social order. Patristic family as ideals. Family as consumers linked to free market</td>
<td>Emphasis on ‘private’ solutions, via private sector, voluntary sector and stress on ‘choice’ and ‘self-help’</td>
<td>Tendency towards greater ‘selectivity’ through means-testing. Idea of welfare state as minimal and residual ‘safety-net’</td>
<td>Policies intended to strengthen the ideal family, but may have contradictory effects, especially on poor families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>Family as functionally related to social order, but also tendency towards ‘disaggregation’ of family interests</td>
<td>‘Partnership’ between state and family. Recognition of women as informal carers. Some policies seek to respond to women's needs 'Ministry of Women'</td>
<td>Emphasis on 'universalism'. Expanded idea of 'citizenship' to include women</td>
<td>Policies tend to support the family, especially amid poor families. But also potential for 'disaggregation' of family, and acceptance of diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>Family as basis of ‘fraternal’ relations of social consensus</td>
<td>Aim to rekindle spirit, with stress on voluntary sector. Recognition of women as informal carers</td>
<td>Integration of tax and benefit systems could be radical, though less so if means-tested benefits predominate. Possible greater recognition of women's roles and interests, even possible encouragement for role reversal</td>
<td>Effects of policies unclear, because they are, to some extent, contradictory. Most likely to support the conventional family form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is an attempt to illustrate the significant features of the three major parties' policies on community care and welfare benefits, together with the working concept of the family proffered and the consequence of each set of policies on the family.

There is a double line separating the Conservative Party from the other two. This is to signify the major distinction between the Conservative Party and its concept of the family as ideologically separate from the public world of the 'social.' To varying degrees the other parties are more likely to perceive the family as interrelated with social forces and institutions. In general, the dominant theme of these parties is to perceive the family as functional to social order and social consensus. Whilst there is little doubt that the Conservative Party desires the necessity of social order, again it is an order of a qualitatively distinct type. It is one dominated by the 'rule of law' and where the family is the linchpin of a 'moral' market economy. Where social democracy seeks 'consensus' based upon equality, the new conservatism seeks ideally a basic inequality to establish a competitive order.
Thus we might view new conservatism as an ideology which seeks to establish the family as the consumer of its own health, welfare and economic needs. It should ideally generate the means of meeting these needs from its own resources, if they cannot, such families should rely on charitable effort. The new conservative claim to support and secure family life is at odds with the reality of the effects of their policies. Indeed, such policies in fact place a great strain on the family and may serve to undermine it. Moreover, its claim to be 'rolling back the state' may appear inappropriate to those families who have to rely on state benefits for their existence.

The Alliance is certainly proposing policies which may do more to secure family life. Clearly, it is more committed to the 'welfare state' because of its insistence on social order as social consensus. The Alliance wishes to rekindle our community spirit. It wishes, as Shirley Williams said, to 'reunite the family'. The family is the basis of the social order. Yet it is clear that there are contradictory forces at work here. Conciliation services, which may reaffirm the conventional family, co-exist with unconventional ideas of familial equality. At best this set of policies can only begin to 'disaggregate' middle-class families. But it may be that the Alliance, like the Rapoports, believes that the 'middle class' will act as an 'ideal' to which the 'working class' will aspire.

Problems abound with such a perception. The use of class, for example, is crude and simplistic in this view of the family. It fails to account for significant differences of family practice within classes. Moreover, the idea of the 'middle class' being perceived as an ideal presupposes that the members of the 'working class' are to a certain extent empty and void of their own cultures and that they simply wait passively for enlightened others to show them the way to live in families. Finally, recent research has cast doubt on the supposed existence of egalitarian trends within the family, especially in terms of the sharing of domestic labours (Oakley, 1981).

The Labour Party, like the Alliance, has been dominated by a social democratic ideology of social order as consensus. Yet there is (in the late 1980s) less of a concern with 'fraternity' and more of a concern for a state to enable families to support themselves by the creation of positive rights. Presently, these are mere promises and part of a rhetoric, and contain contradictions between the 'party of the family' and a commitment to the support of alternative lifestyles, forms of household, etc. This more 'libertarian' commitment to social and cultural pluralism has led to the Labour Party in the 1980s being attacked for 'undermining' the family and traditional morality. The concern to 'disaggregate' the family and recognize the different needs and interests of its members has raised the possibility of finding new ways of supporting households which do not assume they are all conventional and patriarchal in form.

In the following units, you will have the opportunity to pursue some of the issues which have been raised in the course of studying this unit. In particular, you will be able to consider the relationship between ideas of the conventional family and traditional morality, and some of the social changes which have been taking place in the social roles of men and women in modern British society.

Unit 6 introduced some of the problems associated with studying the family and, in particular, the significance of the ideology of the 'conventional' or 'normal' family. In this unit, we have considered the way in which that ideology of the family plays a central role in British politics. We have seen that all the main political parties address the 'question of the family', both rhetorically and in their policy proposals. Although they differ in their conceptions of the family, and in how they proposals intend to 'support' families, none of them can avoid the centrality of the family in the idea of social order.
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Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources for permission to use material in this unit.

**Text**


**Cartoon**

p 52  Bryan McAllister