

WEEK 8: FAMILY LIFE 1

1. Learning objectives. This week you will be able to:

- Explain why family life is important for sociology.
- Outline the historical emergence of a distinctly 'modern' form of family life.
- Summarize the key sociological perspectives on family life, including Marxism, Weber's approach to the family, functionalism and feminist approaches.
- Discuss the distinctive character of Aboriginal family life and family values and structures in a selection of migrant families.

2. List the key concepts/terms and define them

Nuclear family	Family as a social unit made up of parents and children. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents = Male & Female
Symmetrical family	A term used by Young and Wilmott to capture a family structure where conjugal roles, although organised around a division between men's work and women's work, still ensure a high degree of sharing of tasks and an equivalence between the contribution each spouse makes to the running of the household.
Functionalism	A theory of society that explains society in terms of the role of culture in establishing consensus between social groups and the contribution each component of society makes to the functioning of the whole.
Anti-social family <i>Key Thinkers:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michele Barrett 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critique of the functionalist view => Has poor effects on people rather than beneficial functional effects 'The idealisation of family life has made the outside world cold and friendless, and made it harder to maintain relationships of security and trust, except with kin. Caring, sharing and loving would all be more widespread If the family did not claim them for its own' –Michele Barrett & Mary McIntosh Domestic violence = increasing problem <p>Potential Reasons: for Domestic Violence & Increased Divorce</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Increased objectification of women in media (film, tv, pornography, social media) Unrealistic portrayals of relationships through the media (People expect what they cannot, in reality, experience) Increased consumeristic & individualistic attitude to life (drawing people to do evil and commit acts of violence due to selfishness and intrinsic anger) Lack of objective social values (Lack of tradition/grounding) Lack of purpose and direction (People are confused)
Stolen generations	The Stolen Generations (also known as Stolen Children) were the children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who were removed from their families by the Australian Federal and State government agencies and church missions, under acts of their respective parliaments.
Endogamy	Endogamy is the practice of marrying within a specific ethnic group, class, or social group, rejecting others on such a basis as being unsuitable for marriage or for other close personal relationships. Endogamy is common in many cultures and ethnic groups.

Family diversity	In a more contemporary view, family diversity refers to a broad range of characteristics or dimensions on which families vary, along with a recognition that there are a multitude of different family types that function effectively.
------------------	--

3. Reflection questions

a) In what ways is the analysis of family life significant for understanding how Australian society works?

- Family is the building block of society. The way we perceive the family will impact every area of social, economic, cultural, and political life
 - Traditional view of marriage vs. contemporary liberal definitions
- Originally Australia had a colonial family life system which was characterised by being male dominated and was heavily associated with domestic violence. However by the end of the 19th century family life began changing as Australia came to the realisation that women can play an important role in the workplace and relieve some of the burden being placed on the economy. This change in perspective led to women being less dependent and as a result having more control in the family home.

b) How has ‘the family’ been understood throughout history? In what ways has it changed, and how has it stay roughly the same?

- Family has always been seen as between a man and a woman, up until now in western civilisation, where the definition of marriage has been changed. While it is true that polygamy has been practiced in the past, the male-female dynamic of marriage has always existed up until the 20th century
- Family has, and still is seen, as a place where children are raised
- In pre-industrial society there were higher birth rates as society relied greatly on the free labour of children. During this period the concept of childhood and adolescence were non-existent. During that period men held patriarchal power and were considered the ‘breadwinners’ in the household. However over time family life has gradually changed with women beginning to play a greater role in the workforce they have been able to gain independence and choice in regards to pursuing a career or settling down to have a family. The ability for women to choose to pursue a career has led to structural changes in the family. Examples of these changes include decreased fertility rates as well as a decline in household size.

c) In what ways has White Australian society influenced changes to the Aboriginal family structure and practice of marriage? What are the consequences of these changes for Aboriginal communities?

- Indigenous Culture: Polygamy = normal
- European Australians: Marriage = between one man and one woman
 - Modern left-wing advocates insist that marriage is not restricted to the traditional definition
- White Australian society has forced the concept of the ‘nuclear family’ onto Aboriginal families. The influence of Christian missionaries in the 19th and 20th century altered their marriage practices which were usually characterised by polygyny and the organisation and control of marriage by extended family. Women in Aboriginal society now have greater freedom

to choose their partners and are more influenced by the notion of love as the basis of marriage. The consequences of such changes has been recognised by the increased rates of intermarriage, declining marriage rate and changes in household structure by Aboriginals living in urban areas. Aboriginal people that participate in schooling in today's society now have opportunities to converse with the opposite sex away from parental supervision and are also more influenced by their peer groups rather than family.

d) How has the emergence of diverse ethnic, racial and religious groups within Australian society altered dominant conceptions of what constitutes 'the family'?

- Due to multiculturalism, there have been a melting-pot of ideas debated and discussed to help formulate a definition for what marriage really is:
 - Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Aboriginal Culture, Left-wing advocates, Right-wing advocates

Generally those who migrate to Australia tend to retain their 'core culture' irrespective of the norms in Australia. The characteristics associated with these family structures often tie in with the traditional patriarchal family. For instance:

- Extended kinship network
- Strong influence over marriage
- High fertility rates

This leads to various distinct conceptions of the family. Many Mediterranean migrant families maintain relatively high rates of endogamy, experience lower rates of divorce and tend to marry earlier.

Similarly to Greek families, Lebanese Muslim families are characterised by serving economic, social and welfare purposes however they too have been heavily influenced by Australian society and over time their family structure has tend to become more individualistic but at the same time still able to maintain many core characteristics which differ to the Australian family conception.

Key Questions

- Will migrant groups sustain their values regarding family values as they face the various economic and social institutions which continue to challenge the basis of their respective family identities?