FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLDS

Is the nuclear family universal?

Yes
Murdock
- Looked at 250 societies across the world and found that there were variations in family structure but the nuclear family was the most common.
- Defined the family as having a ‘common residence’, ‘two adults of both sexes’ and ‘one or more children’.

Evaluation:
- Murdock’s definition isn’t accurate as lone-parent families, gay couples and extended families all exist.
- ‘Families are universal but is a social construction.

No
- Cross cultural examples of family life has shown that the nuclear family is far from universal.
- The Nayar of India have women taking up to 11 husbands, they don’t live together and she is responsible for all childcare.

The pre-industrial family
Parsons: cottage industries
- Families were ‘cottage industries’ whereby roles were ascribed from birth and were largely extended as people depended on each other for survival.
- The family was multi-functional e.g. cared for sick, educated children.
- The modern family has lost these functions due to hospitals and schools and relationships are a matter of choice and not necessity.
- The need for the workforce to be geographically mobile means extended family ties are weaker.

Evaluation:
- Rather simplistic view as many find extended family ties very important e.g. British Asian families.

Brannen: beanpole families
- Extended family ties remain strong as with increasing life expectancy and lower birth rates the family becomes beanpole.
- The 5:2 relationship of being apart during the week due to work means couples only really see each other on the weekend which reflects the life course of postmodern society.

Giddens: the individualistic thesis
- Traditional roles within society have changed and individuals are free to choose their own life course.
- Same-sex couples show how relationships can exist in the absence of traditional norms.
- The availability of contraception has meant 'love' and 'sex' can be separated (plastic sexuality).
- Confluent love exists due to changing laws and values whereby pure relationships; based on love and intimacy alone can exist, which have more risk of breakdown and explain higher divorce rates.

Evaluation:
- 'Love and sex' still go hand in hand for many people.
- The negative label of 'sleeping around' still exists so societal actions are not so free.
- Traditional nuclear family still remains popular.

Beck: the negotiated family
- A change in the defining of couples has taken place due to greater choice.
- Roles have been re-negotiated shown by the rise of dual-earner couples.
- More choices result in more bad decisions and relationship breakdown is higher.

Evaluation:
- Overlooks the many happy marriages in postmodern society.

The personal life perspective: challenges Beck and Giddens
- Choices people make are still shaped by cultural views e.g. marriage and nuclear family are still the focus of most gov policies.
- Class, gender and ethnic inequalities still remain and limit these choices e.g. someone who is younger might find it easier to separate with a partner than someone who is older and has kids already.
- The 'connectedness thesis' suggests relationships are complex rather than individualistic as children ensure partners cannot go their separate ways, men are still the main breadwinners and many homosexuals feel as if they should hide it showing the controlling influence of society.
More men are taking a home-centred role and there has been an increase in the number of stay at home dads. Men are also increasingly showing their emotional side. Suggests a new man in touch with his feminine side is coming prevalent in society.

Evaluation:
+ The British Social Attitudes Survey supports this as in 1980s 50% agreed a man should be the breadwinner and a woman should look after home and family and in 2013 only 13% agreed.

The commercialisation of housework
- Advances in technology has made the housewife role almost redundant.
- Microwaves and fridge-freezers have reduced the amount of time spent on cooking.
- In the past whole days would be spent on washing, cleaning and ironing.

Evaluation:
- Feminists point out that despite technology housework is still a woman’s responsibility.
- Radical feminists claim technology advances try to convince women they are better off than women in the past.

Is true equality achievable?

Dunne
- Studied the nature of relationships in 37 lesbian-couple households and found that relationships were more equal.
- Housework, paid work and childcare were more equal due to the absence of gender scripts.
- True equality is not achievable as long as relationships are heterosexual.

Evaluation:
- Where one partner did more than the other household equality isn’t likely, the same as with heterosexual couples.

Other power issues in relationships

Domestic violence
- 1 in 4 women are likely to experience domestic violence.
- Victims face an average of 35 episodes before contacting police.
- 1 in 6 men experience it.
- Health, education and welfare policies have led to the development of the welfare state.
- Gov have cut back on welfare to encourage families to look after themselves e.g. elderly with £23,000 un assets must pay for care.

**Policies that undermine the nuclear family**

Divorce reform act 1969
- Easier for couples to seek a divorce.
- Increases lone-parent and reconstituted families.

Evaluation:
- Feminists would like as women can leave unhappy marriages.

Changes to adoption laws
- Unmarried couples, gay couples, single people are able to adopt.

Evaluation:
- Functionalists would see this as negative as bad for the socialisation of the children.

New labour deal
- Provide support for all families which shows recognition for family diversity.
- Helps lone-parents come off benefits as are required to attend 1 job interview a year to keep them.

Evaluation:
- New right claim it is too soft and won't work.

Gay marriage laws in 2014
- Gay couples now allowed to marry, reflecting the postmodern society.

**Sociological views of family government policies**

Fletcher: welfare state
- Introduction of health, education and housing policies has created a welfare state that supports the family.
- E.g. the NHS has doctors, nurses and hospitals which mean the family can better take care of the sick.