

AQA A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY
REVISION FLASHCARDS

**FAMILIES &
HOUSEHOLDS**

TALCOTT PARSONS



In 1951, Parsons updated Murdock's theory arguing that, in Western societies, families really have **two** functions:

Primary socialisation

In a similar way to Murdock's educational role, Parsons agreed that families teach children social norms and values. However, he argued that they specifically teach children the norms and values associated with their family and/or community, while other institutions, such as schools, the media, religion, etc. teach children the universal norms and values of wider society. Parsons called this first process primary socialisation and the latter secondary socialisation.

Stabilisation of adult personalities

Parsons also argued that families help to prevent adults from behaving in disruptive or dysfunctional ways, instead encouraging them to conform to social norms, especially at times of stress. The family provides emotional support to its members.

Parsons famously described this in his warm bath theory. This is the idea that when a man comes home from a hard day at work, he can relax into his family life like a warm bath, taking away the stress and refreshing him for the next day's work.

EVALUATING THE MARCH OF PROGRESS

- The part of this theory that got the most attention was the concept of the symmetrical family which received a lot of criticism from a range of feminists (especially **Ann Oakley**).
- There is also criticism that the idea of a “march of progress” proposes that some family structures are superior to others.
- It also suggests that all families change over time, whereas in fact there was some family **diversity** before and after industrialisation, just as rural economies and ways of life continued to exist during and after the industrial revolution too.
- Both of these are considered to be outdated theories; there have been significant economic and social changes since they were written that have had profound effects on family life.

CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENTS, 1979-97



The conservative governments of **Margaret Thatcher** and **John Major** were greatly influenced by **New Right** thinkers. In relation to families, this means they:

- Had a preference for nuclear families.
- Encouraged individual and parental responsibility.
- Encouraged mothers to stay at home.
- Were concerned that the welfare system might encourage non-traditional family forms and irresponsible behaviour.

Thatcher described the family as “the building block of society”. Policies included:

- **The Children Act 1989** – Outlined the rights of children.
- **The Child Support Agency, 1993** – Ensured absent fathers paid maintenance for their children.
- **Married Men's Tax Allowance** – Lowered taxes for men whose wives do not work (to encourage stay-at-home mothers).
- **Divorce reform** – Planned to introduce a one-year “cooling off” period before people could divorce (never actually introduced).
- **Section 28** – Law restricting education about gay relationships.
- **“Back to Basics”** – John Major began a back to basics campaign to encourage “Victorian family values” (there wasn't much in terms of concrete policies, and it caused problems for the government after a string of high-profile “sex scandals”).

FAMILY DIVERSITY (1)



Sociologists identify a wide range of family types that exist in contemporary society, such as:

Traditional nuclear family	A married couple with their own children (2 or 3 of them) where the husband goes out to work and the wife looks after most of the domestic duties, with clear segregated roles.
Symmetrical family	Women and men both going out to work and sharing the housework.
Nuclear family with house husband or "new man"	The female adult in the family is the "breadwinner" and the husband does most of the domestic work.
Extended family	Can be either: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vertical: Multiple generations living together.• Horizontal: Aunts, uncles and cousins.
Beanpole family	This is a multi-generational, extended family where each generation has few siblings.
Matrifocal lone-parent family	Lone-parent family, headed by the mother.
Patrifocal lone-parent family	A family headed by a single father.

RAPPOPORT & RAPPOPORT



In 1983, Rappoport & Rappoport suggested 5 ways in which the modern family was now (then?) diverse:

Organisational diversity	Families are organised in a range of ways in terms of the roles people perform and the structures they take.
Cultural diversity	<p>A more cultural diverse society does lead to a diversity of family types, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• African-Caribbean families are more likely to be matrifocal• Some Asian households are more likely to include extended family members.
Social class diversity	Family structure and child-rearing practices are influenced by social class. For example, statistics show that divorce is more common among those on lower incomes (for a variety of reasons).
Life stage diversity	People living in a range of different family forms throughout their lives. They might be born into a nuclear family, live on their own, share with housemates, become a cohabiting couple, become a nuclear family, get divorced, form a reconstituted family, etc.
Generational diversity	Different generations have different attitudes to family life. For example, older generations might be more traditional, preferring the nuclear family.