

HAPPY FAMILIES?
VARIETIES OF FAMILY LIFE IN ENGLISH
HISTORY

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- The 'traditional British family?
- Two parents in life-long partnership.
- Fathers good role-models.
- Disrupted by the 'permissive sixties'
- Then more divorce, cohabitation, unmarried parenthood, complex families.
- Unprecedented patterns?

- Real changes since 1960s. Important to understand them
- But long-run story more complicated.
- Historical diversity across countries of the UK in marriage, divorce, illegitimacy.
- Focus on England and Wales

Marriage

- Until World War 2, large numbers did not marry.
- 1930s: 15% women, 9% men never married.
- Mainly because female majority in population, pre-dating deaths in WW1.
- Post 1945, marriage almost universal. More even sex ratio. Higher living standards.
- Mean ages at marriages fell from: men c 27, women 25 over previous 300 years; to 22/24 in 1971.

- C1945- c.1970 long-lasting marriages: longer life expectancy; divorce hard to get.
- Happy marriages?
- Early 1970s on, rising age of marriage
- 2007: men: 32, women 30.
- Women delaying marriage to get established in careers.
- Fewer marriages.

Cohabitation

- 1970s on: less marriage ,more cohabitation, often raising children.
- 1971- 3% adult women cohabited
- 1997-13%.
- Early 20th c Scotland: 12%.England and Wales: no statistics until 1970s.
- Cohabitation in 19th c London- survey evidence.

Cohabitation and the law

Cohabitation recognized in :

- Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, 1894.
- Workman's Compensation Act, 1906.
- World War 1, allowances to 'unmarried wives' of servicemen.
- Further legislation 1920s and 30s.
- Recognized social fact. Numbers unknown until 1970s.

Divorce

- Main reason for cohabitation, restrictive divorce laws.
- First divorce law in E&W, 1857.
- Sexual double standard: man could divorce wife for adultery. Woman had to prove an additional fault, e.g., cruelty, bestiality, sodomy.
- Scotland: equal divorce law , 1643.

Divorce law reform

- Fathers had automatic custody of children aged over 7 until 1925.
- 1878 : women could gain separation orders, with maintenance and possibility of custody. Could not remarry
- Demands divorce reform from 19th c because: discriminated against poor people (expensive) and women (double standard).

Divorce law reform-2

- 1909-12, Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce recommended reform to uphold marriage and stop cohabitation.
- 1937 law equalized divorce rights between sexes and extended grounds to include desertion for 3 years. Consent of both partners required. For 'the true support of marriage, protection of children...reduction of illicit unions...'

Divorce reform -3

- Divorce still expensive until legal aid 1949.
- Still stigmatized for women.
- Partners' consent still required.
- Cumbersome procedures.
- Campaigns for change until 1969 Divorce Reform Act.
- 1969 Act expected to reduce cohabitation. Increased.

Domestic violence

- Domestic violence a reason for marriage break-up
- No statistics until 1970s. Police reluctant to intervene
- Feminist campaigns from 1860s
- Led to intro of legal separation, 1879.
- Feminist campaigns 1920s, 1930s. Policewomen appointed.
- Feminist campaigns post 1968 brought it, and rape, into open: established refuges. 1976, Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act.

Child Abuse

- Serious problem shown in late 19th c.
- Foundation of NSPCC, 1883.
- 1889 Prevention of Cruelty and Protection of Children Act.
- First law against cruelty to cattle: 1822.
- Cruelty to animals, 1835.

Death

- The main cause of marriage disruption until early 20th c.
- More widows than widowers: women lived longer.
- Remarriage and complex families.
- Widows less likely to remarry.
- Marriages broken by death 1820s = marriages broken by divorce 1980s.

Births

- Falling family size- c. 2 per family, 1930s.
- Born early in marriage.
- Premarital pregnancies: 1938/9, 30 % first births.
- Similar levels to 1960s.
- Then fall because fewer marriages, more cohabitation.
- 1992: 10% first births within marriage.

‘Illegitimate’ births

- Low level early 20th c compared with 19th c.
- Rose in both world wars : moral panics.
- Reason: not more sex, marriages delayed by absence of father.
- World War 2 official statistics: rise in ‘illegitimacy’= decline in pregnant brides.

‘Illegitimacy’-3

- Continued high levels 1950s. Higher still 1960s-1980s.
- 1993, one –third births outside marriage.78% registered by both parents.
- Reasons for unmarried motherhood before 1960s: cohabitation; mistakes/ deception by married men; man moved away.
- 1950s, one-third unmarried mothers cohabited with father.
- One-third lived with mothers’ parents.
- Remainder lived alone or in hostels.
- No access to council housing until 1977.

Parenting

- Rare before WW2 for mothers to give full-time care.
- After WW2, pressure on mothers to give full-time care, esp for under-5s. And to be at home after school and in holidays.
- Fear of 'juvenile delinquency' due to inadequate parenting, 1930s-60s. So pressure to improve parenting.
- Influence of psychology.
- New emphasis on fatherhood. Important role models for sons, ensuring discipline and hard work.

Parenting- 2

- 1920s, fears that boys more 'delinquent' than girls because fathers absent, or too busy at work to give enough care.
- Fathers in 1950s wanted to be better at fathering than their fathers.
- Easier in 1950s because better incomes, better homes, more time, paid holidays (introduced 1938).
- 1940s-60s, stable two parent family the solution to 'juvenile delinquency', assumed rise in teenage pregnancy, 'latch-key kids'. Bad parenting (married or not) blamed for problems.

Lone parenthood

- Increased lone parenthood, mostly motherhood, 1970s, 80s because increased divorce, separation.
- Lone parents blamed for youth crime, low educational performance.
- Same problems as before. Different focus of blame.

What changed from the sixties?

- Increased divorce, most initiated by women.
- More cohabitation. Caution about marriage among younger generation.
- Less stigma around divorce, separation, cohabitation.
- Less secrecy, greater openness about sexual matters, violence, mental illness, death.
- Why? International cultural change in societies that better off- better educated, less deferential. The pill: sex without fear of pregnancy.
- But families not all stable throughout history.