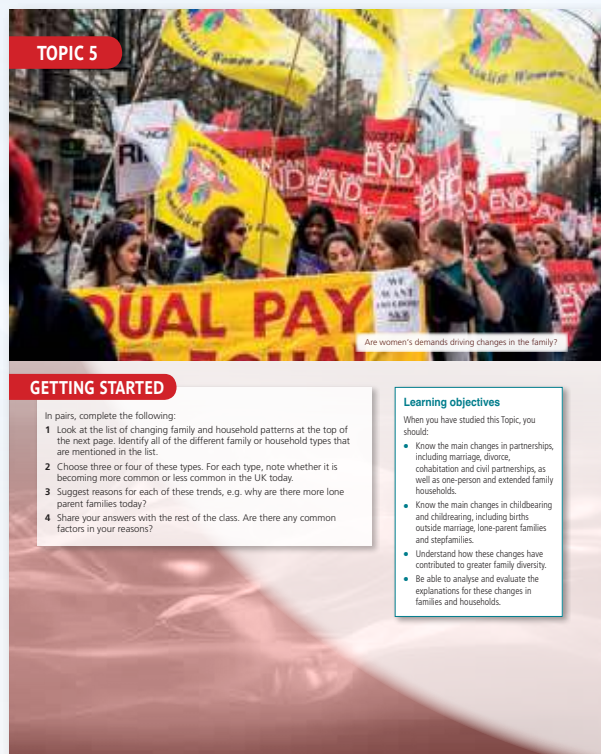# Tour of the book's features

Before you start to use the book, we invite you to come on a quick tour to show you the book's features and help you get the most out of it.



## ▲ Topic pages

Each chapter is divided into manageable sized topics, each covering a separate issue in sociology. The topic page also has a Getting Started activity to get you thinking, and Learning Objectives that spell out what you are going to learn in that topic.

**The AQA Specification**

The specification is the syllabus produced by the exam board, telling you what you have to study. The AQA specification for Education requires you to examine the following:

- The role and functions of the education system, including its relationship to the economy and to class structure.
- Differential educational achievement of social groups by social class, gender and ethnicity in contemporary society.
- Relationships and processes within schools, with particular reference to teacher/pupil relationships, pupil identities and subcultures, the hidden curriculum, and the organisation of teaching and learning.

## ▲ The AQA specification

This is the syllabus produced by the exam board that tells you what you are required to study for the exam. It appears at the start of each chapters.

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| Activity | Research |
| --- | --- |

Cannibalism as a norm

...go to www.sociology.uk.net

## ▲ Activities

These develop your knowledge, understanding and skills by giving you a task to carry out, on your own or with your classmates. Some involve research outside class, carrying out small surveys or researching on the internet. Most of the activities can be found at this book's own dedicated website at www.sociology.uk.net.

**Analysis and Evaluation**

What problems might there be in using evidence such as paintings and diaries, as Ariès does, to understand childhood or family life in the past?

## ▲ Question panels

In each topic, there are short questions for you to answer on your own or with others. These can be either Application questions or Analysis and Evaluation questions; both types are designed to help you develop your exam skills.

## ▼ Boxes

These contain extra information, such as examples, details of important sociological ideas or studies, or relevant laws and policies. Some have questions to get you thinking further.

| Box 7 | Postmodern society and the family |
| --- | --- |

Postmodernists argue that since the late 20th century, society has entered a new 'postmodern' phase. Postmodern society has two key characteristics:

Diversity and fragmentation: Society today is increasingly fragmented, with an ever greater diversity of cultures and lifestyles - more a collection of subcultures than a single culture shared by all. People can 'pick and mix', creating their identities and lifestyles from a wide range of choices. For example, different ethnic and youth subcultures, sexual preferences, and social movements such as environmentalism, all offer sources of identity.

Rapid social change: New technology and the electronic media have dissolved old barriers of time and space, transformed our patterns of work and leisure, and accelerated the pace of change. One effect of this rapid change is to make life less predictable.

## ◀ Investigating education

These special boxes appear in Chapter 3 *Education.* They help you to understand the issues involved in researching topics in education.

## ◀ Theory and methods boxes

These special boxes appear in Chapter 4 *Research methods.* They help you to understand some important theoretical issues linked to the research methods that sociologists use.

## Methods in context ▲

A key feature of the AS and A level exams is that you have to apply research methods to topics in education. These special sections in Chapter 4 help you do just that. They also include practice questions and the examiner's advice on how to tackle them.

## Key concepts ▲

This is a list of essential terms you need to know, defined briefly and clearly, often with links to other concepts to help you develop your understanding. Use it as a quick reference section to check the meaning of key terms. Also good when revising for the exams!

# Topic summary

Participant observation (PO) involves joining in with a group to gain **insight**, and can be overt or covert. Research goes through three phases: getting in, staying in and getting out. **Covert** PO may produce more **valid** data, but is **ethically** questionable and faces practical problems of maintaining one's cover.

## ▲ Summaries

Each topic ends with a summary that picks out the most important points. This at-a-glance overview helps you to consolidate what you have learned and revise for the exam.

## Preparing for the exams

| Tackling the AS sociology exam     000

## ▲ Preparing for the exams

This is a special chapter dedicated to helping you succeed in the exams. It explains what the exam papers cover, the different types of question and how to tackle them. It also includes practice questions for both AS and A level.

## ▼ QuickCheck Questions

These test-yourself questions come at the end of each topic to test your understanding of what you have read and to reinforce your knowledge of key ideas. You can check your answers at our website.

## Questions to try ▶

At the end of each topic, there is a set of practice questions to help you prepare for the exams. At the end of each chapter there is a full set of questions for both AS and A level.

## The examiner's advice ▶

These give you advice and guidance, and help you plan your answers to the essay questions.

A growing gender gap in educational achievement.

# GETTING STARTED

Look at Figure 2.6. Some sociologists argue that girls achieve better results because they are more conscientious and better organised than boys. Use the following questionnaire to test this claim. You might want to add some additional questions of your own.

Give the questionnaire out in your school/college. Try to ask an equal number of boys and girls to fill it in.

**1.** What is your gender?                    Male        Female

**2.** What age are you?

**3.** How much time do you spend on average on homework per week?

Less than 1 hour    1-2 hours    3-4 hours    5-6 hours      more than 6 hours

**4.** Do you take pride in your schoolwork?

Never        rarely        sometimes        often        always

**5.** How often do you read a book for pleasure?

Never        rarely        sometimes        often        always

**6.** How often are you late for school?

Never        rarely        sometimes        often        always

**7.** How often do you miss school without a good reason?

Never        rarely        sometimes        often        always

**8.** Do you mess about in class?

Never        rarely        sometimes        often        always

**a.** Collate your results as a class. What do your class results tell you about the behaviour and attitudes of boys and girls?

**b.** If there are gender differences, how do you think these may affect achievement in education?

**c.** Write a paragraph to summarise your findings.

## Learning objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Be able to describe the patterns of gender differences in educational achievement.
- Understand and be able to evaluate the explanations for these differences.
- Understand and be able to evaluate the explanations for gender differences in subject choice.
- Understand the effect of school experiences in shaping gender identities.

Along with social class and ethnicity, gender has a major impact on our experience of education. In recent years, there have been some important changes in this area. In particular, while both sexes have raised their level of achievement, girls have now overtaken boys.

On the other hand, one area where gender patterns have been slower to change is in subject choice, with boys and girls often opting to study traditional 'sex-typed' subjects and courses. Similarly, there is also evidence that schooling continues to reinforce differences in gender identity between boys and girls.

The main questions that interest sociologists in the study of gender differences in education are:

- Why do girls now generally achieve better results than boys?
- Why do girls and boys opt to study different subjects?
- How does schooling help to reinforce gender identities?

This Topic examines some of the answers that sociologists have given to these questions.

# The gender gap in achievement

Official statistics provide evidence of differences in the achievements of girls and boys at several important stages of their education:

- **On starting school** In 2013, teacher assessments of pupils at the end of year one showed girls ahead of boys by between 7 and 17 percentage points in all seven areas of learning assessed (including literacy, language, maths, and personal, social and emotional development). Girls were also better than boys at concentrating. A DfE (2013) study found that in state primary schools, boys were two and a half times more likely than girls to have statements of special educational needs.
- **At Key Stages 1 to 3,** girls do consistently better than boys. This is especially so in English, where the gender gap steadily widens with age. In science and maths the gap is much narrower, but girls still do better.
- **At GCSE**, as Figure 2.6 shows, the gender gap stands at around 10 percentage points.
- **At AS and A-level** girls are more likely to sit, pass and get higher grades than boys, though the gap is much narrower than at GCSE. In 2013, for example, 46.8% of girls gained A or B grades at A-level, but only 42.2% of boys. Even in so-called 'boys" subjects such as maths and physics, girls were more likely than boys to get grades A to C.
- **On vocational courses** preparing students for a career, results show a similar pattern. A larger proportion of girls achieve distinctions in every subject, including those such as engineering and construction where girls are a tiny minority of the students.

Although results for both sexes have improved at all levels over the years, the girls' rate of improvement has been more rapid and a significant gap has opened up, particularly at GCSE.

**Figure 2.6:** Percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-C or equivalent, 1986 to 2013: by gender

Key
- male
- female
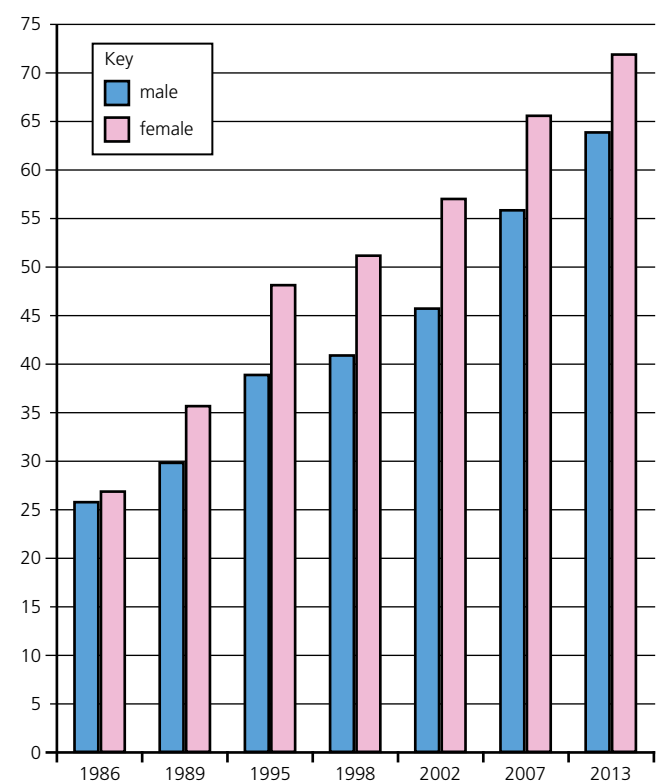
Source: DfES (2007), JCQ (2013)

## 3   Gender identity and peer pressure

Subject choice can be influenced by peer pressure. Other boys and girls may apply pressure to an individual if they disapprove of his or her choice. For example, boys tend to opt out of music and dance because such activities fall outside their gender domain and so are likely to attract a negative response from peers.

Carrie Paechter (1998) found that because pupils see sport as mainly within the male gender domain, girls who are 'sporty' have to cope with an image that contradicts the conventional female stereotype. This may explain why girls are more likely than boys to opt out of sport.

Similarly, a study of American college students by Alison Dewar (1990) found that male students would call girls 'lesbian' or 'butch' if they appeared to be interested in sport.

The same may be true of some science subjects, especially in mixed schools. For example, as the Institute of Physics found, "There is something about doing physics as a girl in a mixed setting that is particularly off-putting." Peer pressure is a powerful influence on gender identity and how pupils see themselves in relation to particular subjects. In mixed schools, peers police one another's subject choices so that girls and boys adopt an appropriate gender identity, with girls pressured to avoid subjects such as physics.

By contrast, an absence of peer pressure from the opposite sex may explain why girls in single-sex schools are more likely to choose traditional boys' subjects. The absence of boys may mean there is less pressure on girls to conform to restrictive stereotypes of what subjects they can study.

## 4   Gendered career opportunities

An important reason for differences in subject choice is the fact that employment is highly gendered: jobs tend to be sex-typed as 'men's' or 'women's'. Women's jobs often involve work similar to that performed by housewives, such as childcare and nursing. Women are concentrated in a narrow range of occupations. Over half of all women's employment falls within only four categories: clerical, secretarial, personal services and occupations such as cleaning.

This sex-typing of occupations affects boys' and girls' ideas about what kinds of job are possible or acceptable. Thus for example, if boys get the message that nursery nurses are female, they will be less likely to opt for a course in childcare.

This also helps to explain why vocational courses are much more gender-specific than academic courses, since vocational studies are by definition more closely linked to students' career plans.

### Gender, vocational choice and class

There is a social class dimension to choice of vocational course. Working-class pupils in particular may make decisions about vocational courses that are based on a traditional sense of gender identity. For example, most of the working-class girls studied by Carol Fuller (2011) had ambitions to go into jobs such as child care or hair and beauty. This reflected their working-class habitus – their sense of what is a realistic expectation for 'people like us'.

These ambitions may arise out of work experience placements, which are often gendered and classed. For example, Fuller found that placements in feminine, working-class jobs such as nursery nursing and retail work were overwhelmingly the norm for the girls in her study. Fuller concludes that the school was implicitly steering girls towards certain types of job – and hence certain types of vocational course – through the work experience placements it offered them.

| Activity | Research |
| --- | --- |

Gender and subject choice

...go to www.sociology.uk.net

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# Pupils' sexual and gender identities

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We have seen how socialisation into a gender identity strongly influences pupils' achievements and their subject preferences. Here we examine some of the different ways in which pupils' experiences in school help to construct and reinforce their gender and sexual identities.

These experiences may all contribute to reinforcing what Bob Connell (1995) calls 'hegemonic masculinity' – the dominance of heterosexual masculine identity and the subordination of female and gay identities.

## 1   Double standards

A double standard exists when we apply one set of moral standards to one group but a different set to another group. In the case of gender identity, Sue Lees (1993) identifies a double standard of sexual morality in which boys boast about their own sexual exploits, but call a girl a 'slag' if she doesn't have a steady boyfriend or if she dresses and speaks in a certain way. Sexual conquest is approved of and given

## Fragmented centralisation

Ball (2011) argues that promoting academies and free schools has led to both increased fragmentation and increased centralisation of control over educational provision in England.

- **Fragmentation** The comprehensive system is being replaced by a patchwork of diverse provision, much of it involving private providers, that leads to greater inequality in opportunities.
- **Centralisation of control** Central government alone has the power to allow or require schools to become academies or allow free schools to be set up. These schools are funded directly by central government. Their rapid growth has greatly reduced the role of elected local authorities in education.

## Coalition policies and inequality

While the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition's marketisation policies are said to have increased inequality, they also introduced policies aimed at reducing it. These included:

- **Free school meals** for all children in reception, year one and year two.
- **The Pupil Premium** – money that schools receive for each pupil from a disadvantaged background.

However, Ofsted (2012) found that in many cases the Pupil Premium is not spent on those it is supposed to help. Only one in ten head teachers said that it had significantly changed how they supported pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Furthermore, as part of the coalition government's 'austerity' programme, spending on many areas of education has been cut: spending on school buildings was cut by 60%, many Sure Start centres were closed, the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was abolished and university tuition fees tripled to £9,000 a year.

Critics argue that cutting Sure Start and the EMA has reduced opportunities for working-class pupils. Similarly, increased university fees may discourage them from entering higher education (see Topic 1).

# The privatisation of education

Privatisation involves the transfer of public assets such as schools to private companies. In recent years, there has been a trend towards the privatisation of important aspects of education, both in the UK and globally. In the process, education becomes a source of profit for capitalists in what Ball calls the 'education services industry' or ESI.

Private companies in the ESI are involved in an ever increasing range of activities in education, including building schools; providing supply teachers, work-based learning, careers advice and Ofsted inspection services; and even running entire local education authorities.

Large-scale school building projects often involve public-private partnerships (PPPs), in which private sector companies provide capital to design, build, finance and operate educational services. Typically, such contracts last for 25 years or more, during which time the local council pays a monthly lease and a management fee out of public funds.

Many of these activities are very profitable. According to Ball (2007), companies involved in such work expect to make up to ten times as much profit as they do on other contracts. However, local authorities are often obliged to enter into these agreements as the only way of building new schools because of a lack of funding by central government.

| **Activity** | **Media** |
| --- | --- |
| Sponsored academies — a public-private partnership | |
| | ...go to www.sociology.uk.net |

## Blurring the public/private boundary

Many senior officials in the public sector, such as directors of local authorities and head teachers, now leave to set up or work for private sector education businesses. These companies then bid for contracts to provide services to schools and local authorities. For example, two companies set up in this way hold four of the five national contracts for school inspection services.

As Allyson Pollack (2004) notes, this flow of personnel allows companies to buy 'insider knowledge' to help win contracts, as well as side-stepping local authority democracy.

## Privatisation and the globalisation of education policy

Many private companies in the education services industry are foreign-owned. The exam board Edexcel is owned by the US educational publishing and testing giant Pearson,

A captive population – but the researcher may find it difficult to gain access.

# GETTING STARTED

**A** Imagine you are going to conduct research into bullying in a school.

  **1** Whose permission would you need to carry out your research?

  **2** How is the school day organised? What restrictions and opportunities might this create for your research?

  **3** In what ways could the age of the pupils affect your research?

  **4** How might teachers feel about a researcher being in their classroom or staffroom? How might this affect your research?

  **5** Given that you are researching bullying, do you think parents would be willing to let you carry out research with their children? Give your reasons.

  **6** Do you think the parents themselves would be likely to participate in your research? Give your reasons.

**B** What problems might you face in trying to study pupils when they are not in a school setting?



Going on a school trip.

## Learning objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

- Know the main characteristics of education as a context for sociological research.
- Understand some of the problems and opportunities that researching educational issues presents for sociologists.
- Be aware of some of the research strategies sociologists use to investigate education.

As we saw in Chapter 2, sociologists study many different issues in education, such as classroom interaction, pupil subcultures, teacher labelling, parental choice and so on.

In studying educational issues such as these, sociologists need to be aware of the particular characteristics of education, since these will affect their choice of research method and its effectiveness. For example:

- In studying pupil subcultures, there might be problems using covert participant observation, simply because it would prove very difficult for a researcher to pass themselves off as a pupil.
- Similarly, in studying parental attitudes to schooling, there may be difficulties in using written questionnaires to discover the opinions of parents who are illiterate.

In this Topic, we examine some of the key features or research characteristics of education as an area of investigation for sociologists and we look at the kinds of opportunities and problems that these research characteristics can present for the sociologist.

From this, you will be able to see the kinds of issues that you need to take account of when using different methods to research educational topics.

This will help you prepare for the *Methods in Context* questions in the AS and A level exams, where you are required to apply a given research method to a particular issue in education, such as gender and subject choice, racism in schools, material deprivation and underachievement, and so on.

# Research characteristics

Throughout the rest of this chapter, we will be applying each of the different research methods that we look at to the study of education. We will deal with this in the special *Methods in Context* sections at the end of Topics 3 to 7.

We can identify five main groups and settings in education whose distinctive characteristics may make them easy or difficult to study.

1 Pupils
2 Teachers
3 Parents
4 Classrooms
5 Schools

Each of these presents particular problems and opportunities for the sociologist in choosing a suitable method to use. We shall examine each of these groups and settings in turn.

We also need to take into account the researcher's own personal characteristics, such as their own experience of education, which may make researching certain educational topics easier or more difficult.

## 1 Researching pupils

In education, many of the people that sociologists study are children and young people – pupils and students. Malcolm Hill (2005) suggests that there are three major differences between studying young people and studying adults:

- power and status
- ability and understanding
- vulnerability.

These differences raise particular practical, ethical and theoretical issues that researchers need to take into account when researching pupils. We shall now examine each of the three differences identified by Hill, together with the laws and guidelines that affect research with pupils.

### *power and status*

Children and young people generally have less power and status than adults. This makes it more difficult for them to state their attitudes and views openly, especially if they challenge those of adults.

This is particularly true of schools, because they are hierarchical institutions that give teachers higher status and power over pupils. Teachers may sometimes even be able to use this power to influence which pupils are selected for research, for example in order to promote a good image of themselves or the school.

Formal research methods such as structured interviews or questionnaires tend to reinforce power differences. This is because it is the researcher and not the young person who determines what questions are asked and how answers should be formulated.

Sociologists therefore need to consider ways in which they can overcome the power and status differences between adult researchers and young participants. For example, group interviews rather than formal one-to-one interviews may be a good way of doing this. However, it is likely that whatever research methods are used, some power and status differences between researchers and pupils will remain.

Pupils' attitudes towards the power and status differences between themselves and their teachers are also likely to

## EXAMINING QUESTIONNAIRES IN CONTEXT

### Question to try

For both the AS and the A level exams, you must answer a Methods in Context question.

Item A

Investigating material deprivation in pupils' home backgrounds

Material deprivation is a widespread problem throughout the United Kingdom today. Some pupils experience material deprivation in their home background and this can have a negative effect on their educational achievement. For example, a lack of income with which to buy educational resources, or having to live in cramped conditions, can affect academic performance. Some parents may feel that they have failed if they cannot provide adequate income for their family.

Sociologists may use questionnaires to investigate material deprivation in pupils' home backgrounds. To use questionnaires effectively, sociologists need to identify and gain responses from parents, but accessing a suitable database of contacts may prove difficult. Parents may also not be willing to discuss such a sensitive issue as material deprivation. On the other hand, substantial quantitative data may be generated by using questionnaires, allowing sociologists to identify patterns and draw comparisons.

AS and A level question

1 Applying material from Item A and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of questionnaires for the study of material deprivation in pupils' home backgrounds.                    (20 marks)

### The Examiner's Advice

Q1 Spend about 30 minutes on this question. It requires you to apply your knowledge of questionnaires to the study of the particular issue of material deprivation in pupils' home backgrounds. It is not enough simply to discuss the strengths and limitations of questionnaires in general. Use Item A to help you. For example, it suggests that one research characteristic of material deprivation in pupils' home backgrounds is that parents may feel that they have failed if they cannot provide adequate income for their family. As a result, they may not be entirely honest in their answers and may exaggerate their real level of income, or play down its effects on their children's education. With a self-completion questionnaire, the researcher cannot check the accuracy and validity of their responses. You should link other research characteristics of material deprivation in pupils' home backgrounds to the strengths and limitations of questionnaires. For example, there are some clear indicators of a family's material wealth – income, possessions, eligibility for free school meals, type of house etc – and these are fairly easy to operationalise in written questionnaires. Other research characteristics include the literacy capabilities of different groups of parents, the usefulness of the school in distributing questionnaires, concerns over the intentions behind the questionnaire etc. You should link these to particular strengths or limitations of the method.

### An example

In your answer you should connect the strengths and limitations of questionnaires to the research characteristics of material deprivation and underachievement. Here's an example paragraph.

> 'Item A suggests that this is a society-wide issue. Written questionnaires therefore seem like a good method to use because they can be mailed out to a large, geographically dispersed sample. However, questionnaires often lack representativeness because only certain types of parent return them. For example, parents in materially deprived households may feel that acknowledging their poverty in writing reflects badly on themselves as parents and so they may not respond. However, using questionnaires to research material deprivation and achievement can bring a high response rate if poor parents think their children will benefit, and also because they are used to filling in forms from school.'

Are women's demands driving changes in the family?

## GETTING STARTED

In pairs, complete the following:

1 Look at the list of changing family and household patterns at the top of the next page. Identify all of the different family or household types that are mentioned in the list.

2 Choose three or four of these types. For each type, note whether it is becoming more common or less common in the UK today.

3 Suggest reasons for each of these trends, e.g. why are there more lone-parent families today?

4 Share your answers with the rest of the class. Are there any common factors in your reasons?

### Learning objectives

After studying this Topic, you should:

● Know the main changes in partnerships, including marriage, divorce, cohabitation and civil partnerships, as well as one-person and extended family households.

● Know the main changes in childbearing and childrearing, including births outside marriage, lone-parent families and stepfamilies.

● Understand how these changes have contributed to greater family diversity.

● Be able to analyse and evaluate the explanations for these changes in families and households.

# CHANGING FAMILY PATTERNS

In the past 40 or 50 years there have been some major changes in family and household patterns. For example:

- The number of traditional nuclear family households – a married couple with their dependent children – has fallen.
- Divorce rates have increased.
- There are fewer first marriages, but more re-marriages.
- People are marrying later in life.
- More couples are cohabiting.
- Same-sex relationships can be legally recognised through civil partnerships or marriages.

- Women are having fewer children and having them later.
- There are more births outside marriage.
- There are more lone-parent families.
- More people live alone.
- There are more stepfamilies, and more couples without children.

In this Topic, we examine the changes in patterns of family life in Britain and the reasons for them. These changes include marriage, cohabitation and divorce. Such changes are contributing to greater family diversity, and we examine how sociologists have interpreted them.

# Divorce

We look first at divorce because divorce is a major cause of changing family patterns and greater family diversity. For example, most re-marriages involve a divorcee, and divorce creates both lone-parent families and one-person households.

## Changing patterns of divorce

Since the 1960s, there has been a great increase in the number of divorces in the United Kingdom, as Figure 4.4 shows. The number of divorces doubled between 1961 and 1969, and doubled again by 1972. The upward trend continued, peaking in 1993 at 165,000.

Since then, numbers have fallen somewhat, but still stood at 118,000 in 2012 – about six times higher than in 1961. This rate means that about 40% of all marriages will end in divorce.

One reason for the fall in the number of divorces since the 1990s is that fewer people are marrying in the first place and are choosing to cohabit instead.

About 65% of petitions (applications) for divorce now come from women. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in the past. For example, in 1946, only 37% of petitions came from women – barely half today's

figure. The commonest reason for a woman to be granted a divorce is the unreasonable behaviour of her husband.

Some couples are more likely than others to divorce. Couples whose marriages are at greatest risk include those who marry young, have a child before they marry or cohabit before marriage, and those where one or both partners have been married before.



Figure 4.4: Marriages and divorces: England and Wales, 1932-2012

Source: ONS

### Application

Study Figure 4.4 and answer the following questions:

1 Approximately how many divorces were there in 1972?

2 Approximately how many marriages were there in 2012?

3 Suggest three reasons why the total number of marriages has been declining.

- **Women reproduce the labour force** through their unpaid domestic labour, by socialising the next generation of workers and maintaining and servicing the current one.
- **Women absorb anger** that would otherwise be directed at capitalism. Fran Ansley (1972) describes wives as 'takers of shit' who soak up the frustration their husbands feel because of the alienation and exploitation they suffer at work. For Marxists, this explains male domestic violence against women.
- **Women are a reserve army of cheap labour** that can be taken on when extra workers are needed. When no longer needed, employers can 'let them go' to return to their primary role as unpaid domestic labour.

Marxist feminists see the oppression of women in the family as linked to the exploitation of the working class. They argue that the family must be abolished at the same time as a socialist revolution replaces capitalism with a classless society.

## 3   Radical feminism

Radical feminists argue that all societies have been founded on patriarchy – rule by men. For radical feminists, the key division in society is between men and women:

- **Men are the enemy:** they are the source of women's oppression and exploitation.
- **The family and marriage are the key institutions** in patriarchal society. Men benefit from women's unpaid domestic labour and from their sexual services, and they dominate women through domestic and sexual violence or the threat of it.

For radical feminists, the patriarchal system needs to be overturned. In particular, the family, which they see as the root of women's oppression, must be abolished. They argue that the only way to achieve this is through *separatism* – women must organise themselves to live independently of men.

Many radical feminists argue for 'political lesbianism' – the idea that heterosexual relationships are inevitably oppressive because they involve 'sleeping with the enemy'. Similarly, Germaine Greer (2000) argues for the creation of all-

female or 'matrilocal' households as an alternative to the heterosexual family.

However, for liberal feminists such as Jenny Somerville (2000), radical feminists fail to recognise that women's position has improved considerably – with better access to divorce, better job opportunities, control over their own fertility, and the ability to choose whether to marry or cohabit.

Somerville also argues that heterosexual attraction makes it unlikely that separatism would work.

However, Somerville does recognise that women have yet to achieve full equality. She argues that there is a need for 'family friendly' policies, such as more flexible working, to promote greater equality between partners.

## 4   Difference feminism

The feminist approaches we have considered so far all tend to assume that most women live in conventional nuclear families and that they share a similar experience of family life.

However, difference feminists argue that we cannot generalise about women's experiences. They argue that lesbian and heterosexual women, white and black women, middle-class and working-class women, have very different experiences of the family from one another.

For example, by regarding the family purely negatively, white feminists neglect black women's experience of racial oppression. Instead, black feminists view the black family positively as a source of support and resistance against racism.

However, other feminists argue that difference feminism neglects the fact that all women share many of the same experiences. For example, they all face a risk of domestic violence and sexual assault, low pay and so on.

> **Analysis and Evaluation**
> Which of the four feminist perspectives do you find most convincing? Give reasons for your answer.

# The personal life perspective on families

As we have seen, there are major differences between functionalist, Marxist and feminist theories of the family. However, the personal life perspective argues that they all suffer from two weaknesses:

**1   They tend to assume that the traditional nuclear family is the dominant family type.** This ignores the

increased diversity of families today. Compared with 50 years ago, many more people now live in other families, such as lone-parent families, stepfamilies and so on. We examine family diversity in Topic 5.

**2   They are all structural theories.** That is, they assume that families and their members are simply passive puppets

# The Examiner's Advice

This section contains advice on how to tackle the AS and A level practice papers in this chapter and the *Examining* questions that you will find at the end of Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

## Examining education

The following advice is for the *Examining* questions on education that you will find on page 86.

### AS question 4

Spend about 15 minutes on this question. Divide your time fairly equally between each factor. You don't need a separate introduction; just start on your first factor. Possible factors include the impact of feminism, changes in family structure, legal changes, employment opportunities, girls' changed ambitions, globalisation and the decline of traditional men's jobs, and development of laddish subcultures.

Describe each factor in some detail, explaining how it leads to gender differences in achievement. Do this by creating a chain of reasoning (see page 248). For example, equal opportunities legislation has increased job opportunities for women, enabling some women to break through the 'glass ceiling'. This raises girls' ambitions and gives them role models, encouraging them to work harder. This in turn is likely to lead to better exam performance. Use concepts such as those above and studies such as McRobbie, Sharpe, Francis and Epstein.

### AS question 5

Spend about 30 minutes on this question. Identify the social groups concerned – class, gender and ethnicity. Refer to all three of these in your answer. Distinguish between the different internal factors that affect achievement, including labelling, self-fulfilling prophecy, streaming, the curriculum, and pupil identities and subcultures. Explain how each may affect achievement.

Do this by creating a chain of reasoning (see page 248). For example, teacher labelling of pupils from a particular class can create a self-fulfilling prophecy in which pupils internalise the label and, if it is negative, lose self-esteem and work less hard, resulting in underachievement.

Use evidence from studies such as Becker, Gillborn and Youdell, Sewell, Fuller, Ball, Francis and Archer, and develop the points noted in Item A. Evaluate the importance of these factors, making criticisms of each factor as you go, rather than separately at the end. Identify the connections between external and internal factors. For example, racism in school may mirror racism in wider society.

## A level question 3

Spend about 15 minutes on this question. Divide your time fairly equally between the two processes. You don't need a separate introduction; just start on your first process. It's essential to take two points from the Item and show through a chain of reasoning (see page 248) how each leads to ethnic differences in achievement. (It's a good idea to quote from the Item for each factor.)

You could use role of parents, how far education is valued by families and community, or disadvantage resulting from racism. For example, some ethnic groups value educational success and encourage their children to respect teachers and work hard. This encourages positive responses from teachers, creating a cycle of success.

Use concepts such as racism in wider society, cultural deprivation, material deprivation and family structure, and studies such as Gillborn and Youdell, Sewell, Mirza and Flaherty. Include some brief evaluation, e.g. some explanations seem to simply reflect stereotypical images of different ethnic groups.

## Examining research methods

The following advice is for the *Examining* question on research methods that you will find on page 160.

### AS question 2

Spend about 25 minutes on this question. Keep the focus on unstructured interviews; avoid drifting into structured interviews. The question requires you to evaluate the reasons why some sociologists use unstructured interviews, so your main focus should be on their strengths.

These include rapport, sensitivity, insight, depth, flexibility, interviewees being able to set the agenda, checking understanding, opening up new topic areas, reducing power inequalities between interviewer and interviewee and greater validity. Ethical strengths may come from the closer rapport with trust and confidentiality being established. Use concepts such as those above and examples of studies such as Labov and Dean and Taylor-Gooby. Explain why interpretivists and feminists tend to see unstructured interviews as having many advantages.

Evaluate these strengths as you go through each one rather than offer a list of limitations in a separate section at the end. For example, when discussing the flexibility of unstructured interviews, evaluate this by explaining that flexibility can result in lack of reliability.

# A level practice papers

The papers below test those parts of the two-year A level course that you should have completed by the end of year one. The timings of the papers reflect this.

**A level Paper 1 Education with Methods in Context**

**Answer all questions.**
**Time allowed: 1 hour 45 minutes**

### Item A

Some teachers attach negative labels to pupils from certain ethnic backgrounds. These can reflect teachers' stereotypical views and may lead them to treat pupils differently. Sociologists have investigated the different ways in which pupils respond to these labels. For example, some responses involve pupils seeking to manage the contradictory demands of school and peer groups. Other responses are based on trying to avoid racism.

### Item B

For Marxist sociologists, capitalism needs a workforce that it is readily exploitable and willing to take low-paid working-class jobs. In their view, it is a key function of the education system to persuade the working class to accept their subordinate position. Some Marxists argue that working-class pupils passively accept ideologies such as the myth of meritocracy. However, others argue that the process also involves resistance to school and its ideology.

### Item C

### Investigating pupil anti-school subcultures

Some pupils, particularly those placed in lower streams, develop an anti-school subculture as an alternative way of gaining status among their peers. Pupils with anti-school attitudes are more likely to truant and be uncooperative with those in authority.

Sociologists may use unstructured interviews to investigate pupil anti-school subcultures. This method allows the researchers to establish rapport and gain the trust ot the pupils. The presence of an interviewer can also be helpful in terms of prompting responses. However, the results from this method are often unrepresentative and difficult to quantify.

### Education

1 Outline **two** reasons why boys and girls may opt to study different subjects when given the choice. (4 marks)
2 Outline **three** reasons why parents of working-class pupils may be less likely than parents of middle-class pupils to attend events at their children's school. (6 marks)
3 Applying material from **Item A**, analyse **two** responses by pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds to negative labelling by teachers. (10 marks)
4 Applying material from **Item B** and your knowledge, evaluate Marxist views of the role of the education system. (30 marks)

### Methods in Context

5 Applying material from **Item C** and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of unstructured interviews for studying pupil anti-school subcultures. (20 marks)

The examiner's advice can be found at the end of this chapter.