

Issues of Families and Parenting

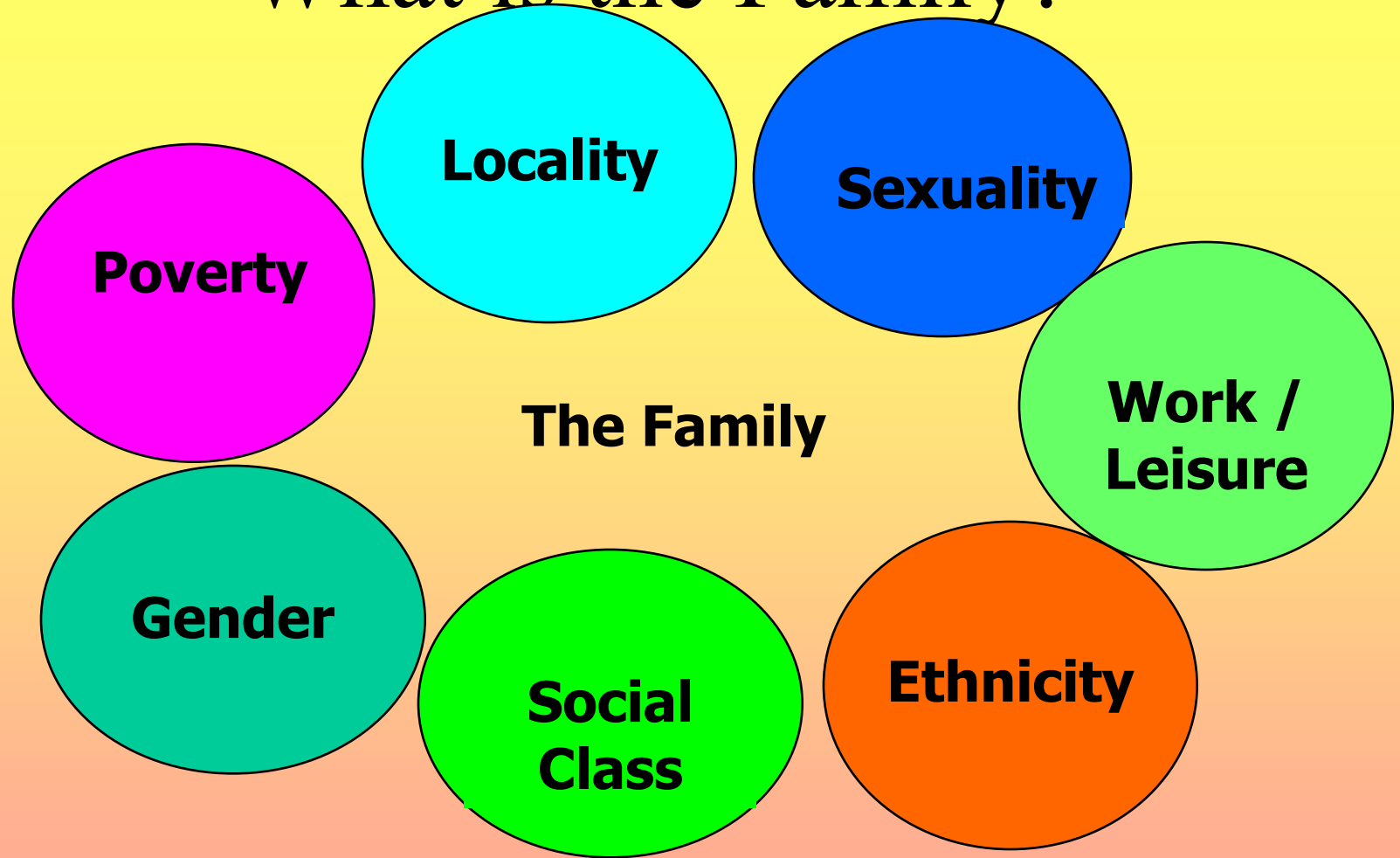
Troubles of Youth

Monday, 15 December 2008

Lecture Outline

- The Family: patterns, problems, ideologies and theories
- The Family
 - as the cause of crime
 - as a site of crime
 - as a solution to crime

What is the Family?



The locus of the range of sociological influences

- is the “family” simply a short-hand for society, or is it an influence in its own right?

Functionalist theories of the family

- Talcott Parsons
- nuclear family: functional adaptation to the requirements of industrial society
- “a haven in a heartless world”
- Socialisation of children
- Emotional and physical support for the (male) breadwinner

Marxist theories of the family

- Agreement that the family is a key institution in the maintenance of (capitalist) society
 - Reproduction of the workforce, on a daily and generational basis
 - Individual identity lost in the harsh world of work
 - New family became a ‘real sphere of personal freedom and independence’ (Zaretsky)

Feminist theories of the family

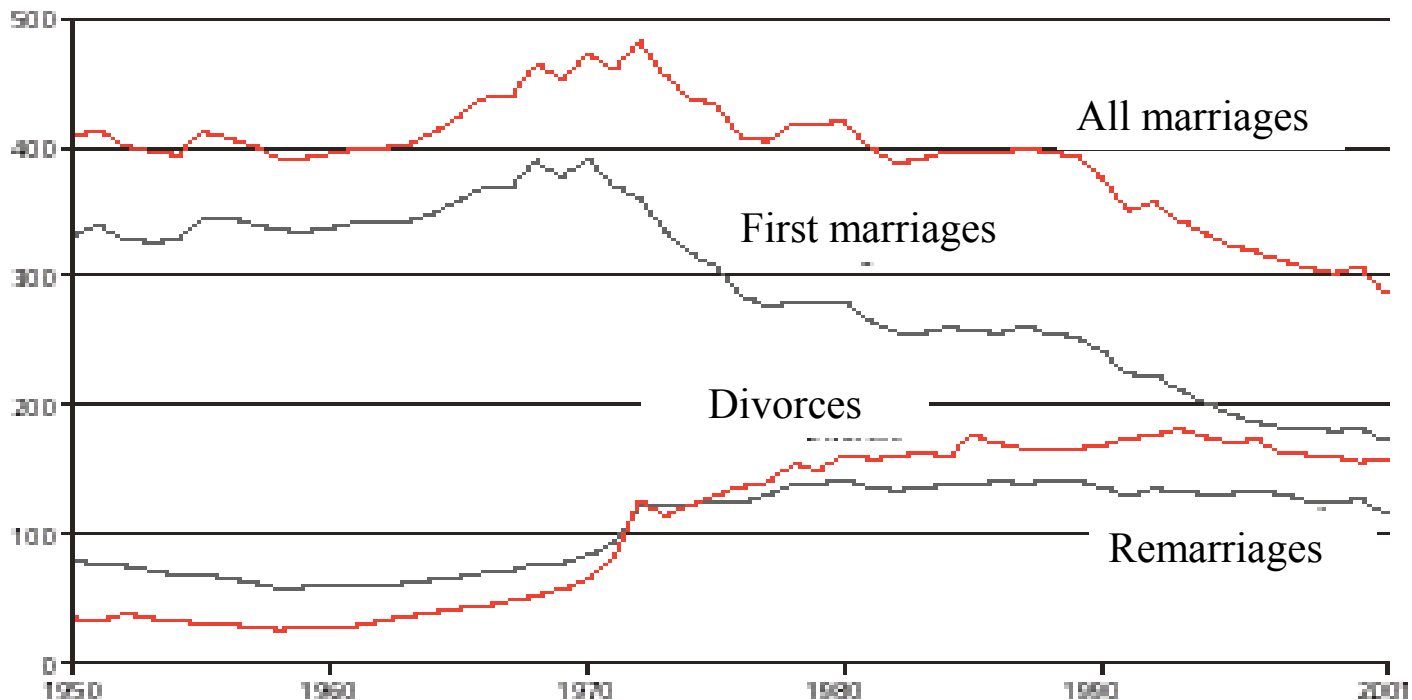
- The family is a key institution in maintaining patriarchy
 - Women's housework: vital to the economy, but unpaid
 - Men given control over women's sexuality and fertility
 - Reinforces separate gender identities
 - Key institution socialising gender roles
 - Separation of public and private spheres

Family life in decline?

Marriages and divorces¹

United Kingdom

Thousands



¹ For both partners.

² Includes annulments. Data for 1950 to 1970 are for Great Britain only.

³ For one or both partners.

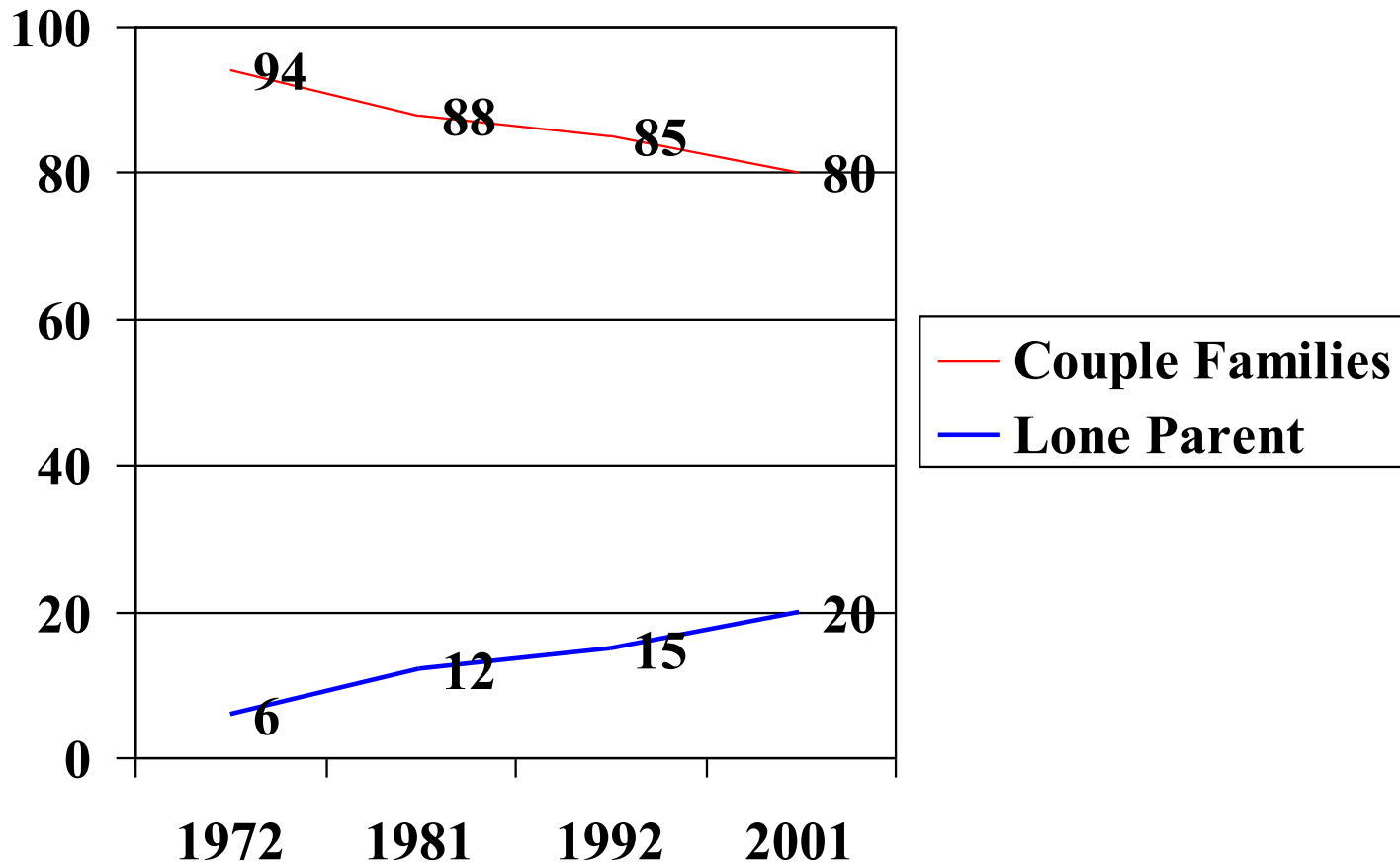
Source: Office for National Statistics; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Average age at first marriage and divorce

Source: ONS

	First marriage		Divorce	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
1971	24.6	22.6	39.4	36.8
1981	25.4	23.1	37.7	35.2
1991	27.5	25.5	38.6	36.0
2001	30.6	28.4	41.5	39.1

Increasing single parenthood



Percentage of children brought up in different family types
(Source: GHS, Census, ONS)

Political approaches to the family

- Conservative
 - “The nation’s spiritual leaders should unashamedly extol the virtues of normal family life”
 - Nuclear families form the bedrock of society
 - Other forms are deviant, unstable and unworkable
- Labour
 - Largely in agreement, but some recognition of diversity of family types, and the need for policy to respond to social change

The family as a cause of crime

- Familial causes of crime
 - Genetic explanations
 - Differential Association
 - Family as a criminal structure

Dysfunctional families as a cause of crime

- “Families without Fatherhood”
 - George Erdos / Norman Dennis
 - The lack of an appropriate male role model is resulting in a weakening of moral consensus and a resultant rise in crime

National Survey of Health and Development

- Factors associated with delinquency
 - Parent's social status
 - Family size
 - Child's birth order
 - Parent's split up <5

	Predicted as delinquent	Predicted as non-delinquent
Actually delinquent	136	50
Actually non-delinquent	711	915

i.e. 42% correct prediction

“Broken homes”

- “the topic of broken homes has been a central part of delinquency theory since the emergence of criminology” Wells and Rankin (1001)
- Unsatisfactory term (Juby and Farrington)
 - Broken or intact; 2-parent or 1 parent; reasons for disruption; timing of disruption, level of conflict

Juby and Farrington (2001)

- Consistent relationship between family structure and delinquency – Why?
- Trauma Theories – loss of a parent has an damaging effect on children (e.g. Bowlby's attachment theory)
- Life-course Theories – a long process of separation – no single event
- Selection theories – disrupted families are associated with delinquency because of a third common factor (e.g. poverty) which causes both.

Juby and Farrington

- Key findings
 - Disruption - conflict > death
 - Loss of mother > loss of father
 - High conflict families predict similar rates to disrupted families
 - Disrupted families predict higher delinquency independent of other predictors
- Life course theories appear most convincing

Gottredson and Hirschi

Parenting Styles and Low Self-Control

- Ineffective parenting fails to develop self-control in child
 - Failure to monitor child's behaviour
 - Fail to recognise deviant behaviour
 - Inconsistent or proportionate punishment
- Low Self-control -> risky behaviour -> short-termism
- Debate – is this sufficient?
 - Some argue that ineffective parenting has an additional effect on delinquency over and above low-self control

Differential Association / Social Learning

Children learning aggressive attitudes

- Parenting (like many other influences) can offer an interpretation of wrong-doing that encourages deviance
- Can result from overly lenient and overly harsh parenting styles
 - Lack of punishment of aggression
 - Rewards for aggression
 - Physical punishment for wrong-doing

The family as a solution to crime? – The “Parenting Deficit”

- Families placed as central to the maintenance of secure communities
- Dysfunctional families seen as a major problem (ignores wider social causes)
- Benefits withdrawn from parents
 - Welfare to Work
- Parenting Orders / fines
- Parenting contracts
- Desistance:
 - Familial responsibilities
 - Moral and social support for avoiding offending – Family Group Conferences