

## Relative strangers? The family and households in modern British society

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**Start date** 7 July 2017**End date** 9 July 2017**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge**Tutor** Dr Nigel Kettley**Course code** 1617NRX086**Director of Programmes**

Emma Jennings

**For further information on this course, please contact**Public Programme Coordinator, Clare Kerr  
[clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk) or 01223 746237**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

Nigel has had a wide ranging teaching and research career in the fields of sociology, education studies, research methods and initial teacher education. Before joining the Institute of Continuing Education in 2007, he was a Research Associate in the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, and earlier still an MPhil and PhD student at Wolfson College. He is an active researcher in the areas of widening participation, educational attainment and lifelong learning more generally with a particular focus on issues of gender, social stratification and theory formation. Nigel teaches on a variety of courses for the Institute, supervises MSt. and PhD students, and is Senior Lecturer and Academic Director for Education and Social Science courses at the Institute. His major publications include *Educational Attainment and Society* (2007, Continuum) and *Theory Building in Educational Research* (2010/2012, Continuum). He is also a Governing Body Fellow at Wolfson College, Cambridge and a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.

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## Course programme

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### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 – 22:00 Session 1 *Relative strangers: Households, families and patterns of modern living* Tutor: Dr Nigel Kettley

In this session, we will explore the distinction between the idea of a household and a family, critically assess competing definitions of the family and examine data from the Office for National Statistics (2013, 2014) related to actual living arrangements in modern Britain. The session provides a critical appraisal of mid-twentieth century definitions of the family, such as that provided by Murdock (1949, pp. 1-2), arguing that such definitions are value-laden and based on methodologically unsound research. As a result, it is argued that the nuclear family cannot be viewed as the 'bedrock' of society, nor can the idea that the family is a universal institution be sustained. The session will also introduce you to different forms of the family – extended, polygamous, reconstituted and symmetrical – and briefly examine those historical processes which may have altered family arrangements in modern British society.

22:00 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 – 10:30 Session 2 *The family and cultural reproduction: Gender identity formation and family life* Tutor Dr Nigel Kettley

Whilst sociologists find it difficult to agree on a definition of the family, most acknowledge the significant role of household and family arrangements in the reproduction and, occasionally, the transformation of culture and society. The family is, therefore, ascribed a key role in the intergenerational transmission of norms, values and socio-economic resources. In this session, we will begin by defining cultural reproduction and cultural transformation from two theoretical perspectives (the 'consensus' and 'conflict' traditions in sociology) before proceeding to examine how family life impacts on the formation of a person's gender identity. A variety of research related to gender identity formation will be considered and evaluated including the works of Bandura and Walters (1963), Kohlberg (1966, 1969) and Bem (1981).

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30	<p><i>Session 3 The family and cultural transformation: Gender identity, social class and educational attainment</i> Tutor Dr Nigel Kettley</p> <p>This session examines how variations in modern family life (both culturally and economically) may contribute to differential educational attainment by gender. We will begin by exploring how the family shapes students' knowledge of gender, their gender identities and their study habits and skills. Subsequently, we will trace changes in differential attainment at GCSE and A level – the reversal of the 'gender gap' since the 1960s (Arnot et al. 1999) – and consider if the family is responsible for transforming young people's gender identity and patterns of educational attainment by gender. Evidence that challenges the 'closure' of the gender gap thesis, the work of Gorard (2000) and Kettley (2007), will also be reviewed. This will enable an assessment of the role the family plays in gender identity formation and cultural transformation.</p>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	<p><i>Session 4 The mid-twentieth century and beyond: Anthropological, functionalist and historical approaches to the family</i> Tutor Dr Nigel Kettley</p> <p>In this session, we will revisit the anthropological research of Murdock (1949) to introduce functionalist approaches to family life which developed in the USA in the mid-twentieth century (Parsons 1959). The position of functionalists emphasised the irreducible purposes of the family, primary socialisation and the stabilisation of the adult personality, and explored the contribution of the family to the reproduction of values and consensus. This optimistic view of family life tended to ignore psychological and physical abuse in the family, gender exploitation in the family and the dysfunctions of family life. A critical appraisal of the functionalist position will be provided drawing on psychological, feminist and Marxist research. Finally, this session explores historical evidence related to the changing functions and structure of the family in British society to debunk functionalist approaches.</p>
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	<p><i>Session 5 Critical approaches to the family: Marxism, feminism and psychological approaches</i> Tutor Dr Nigel Kettley</p> <p>Whilst functionalists have been charged with perpetuating a white, middle-class and 'malestream' vision of the family in the mid-twentieth century, other sociologists have offered more critical interpretations of the role of the family in society (Abbott and Wallace 1997, p. 1). In this session, we will begin by exploring the classical Marxist view of the family in capitalism, drawing on the work of Engels (1884), and proceed to examine feminist and critical psychological approaches to the family (Friedan 1963, Laing 1976, Delphy and Leonard 1992, Beechey 1987). The session seeks to assess critical theories of family life and explore their potential relevance, if any, for understanding household and family</p>

arrangements in modern Britain.

21:30 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

## **Sunday**

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 – 10:30 Session 6 *The family, politics and social policy* Dr Nigel Kettley

In this session, we will explore the link between the family, political ideology and social policy in modern British society. The session begins by defining key terms such as social policy, social policy research and political ideology (Thatcherism and New Labour ideology). Subsequently, the session examines the role ascribed to the family in society by Thatcherite and New Labour politicians in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. We will also examine how governments have altered family, education and welfare policies as a mechanism to achieve their macro-economic policy objectives. It is argued that household and family arrangements continue to represent an essentially contested aspect of politics.

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 Session 7 *Relative strangers? Summary, discussion and evaluation of sociological research into the family in modern Britain* Dr Nigel Kettley

In this final session, we will review and discuss the strands of the sociology of the family considered in Sessions 1 to 6. In particular, we will reflect on how sociological research has contributed to our understanding of modern family life and, potentially, how it may have informed social policy. We will also consider the limitations of the sociology of the family in the last half of the twentieth century and explore ways in which the area is developing in the early twenty first century (see Chambers 2012, Chapter 2, pp. 34-53).

12:45 Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

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## Course syllabus

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### Aims:

1. To define the terms household and family, to explore types of living arrangement in modern Britain and to assess the idea that the nuclear family is a 'universal' institution;
2. To examine the role of the family in the reproduction and transformation of culture with reference to the issues of gender identity formation and differential educational attainment;
3. To evaluate sociological research and theory related to the role, purpose and functions of the family in modern British society;
4. To critically explore how politicians of different ideological persuasions have conceptualised family life in modern Britain (for example Thatcherism and New Labour) and to examine how social policy has been used to shape aspects of modern family life and achieve governments' wider policy objectives.

### Content:

Social commentators, politicians and academics often consider the family to be the 'bedrock' of society given its role in biological reproduction, socialisation and the support of adults. In this course, you will explore sociological approaches to the household and family life in Britain since 1945 as a means of critically examining this view. Topics covered will include definitions of the family, changing family types and the causes of change in household relationships. The link between the family, identity formation and cultural reproduction/transformation will also be examined by reference to the issues of gender identity formation and differential educational attainment. We will then evaluate how sociologists have studied family life and the theoretical models they have developed to explain the purpose of the family. The course concludes by examining how social policy has been used in government efforts to shape aspects of family life and to achieve their wider objectives. The course seeks to debunk everyday assumptions about family life, frequently manifest in social and political commentary, and introduce you to sociological thinking related to the forms of household arrangements in modern Britain. Does the reality of modern family life coincide with our everyday experience, or is it something relatively strange?

### Presentation of the course:

A variety of teaching and learning strategies will be used throughout the course including: formal lectures using visual presentations; interactive lectures and presentations incorporating extensive discussion sessions; activity based sessions where students work in small groups to solve problems; the provision of detailed handouts and reading lists enabling students to conduct independent reading; and independent learning activities which students can complete after the residential course to extend their knowledge and understanding of contemporary debates related to family life in modern Britain.

### As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. identify and explain the distinction between the terms household and family, critically appraise competing definitions of the family and critically assess mid-twentieth century claims related to the universality of the nuclear family;
2. explain the strengths and weaknesses of a range of empirical research and evidence related to the forms, quality and purpose of family life in modern Britain;
3. critically assess competing social scientific explanations (theories) of the role, purpose and functions of the family in modern British society;
4. understand and critically explore the relationship between political ideology, family policy and governments' wider social policy objectives.

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

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Author	Title	Publisher and date
Abbott, P. and Wallace, C.	<i>An Introduction to Sociology: Feminist Perspectives</i> . Second Edition. Chapter 6.	London: Routledge. 2005
Allan, G.	<i>The Sociology of the Family: A Reader</i> .	Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 1999
*Chamber, D.	<i>A Sociology of Family Life: Change and Diversity in Intimate Relations</i> . Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 14-53	Cambridge: Polity. 2012
Engels, F.	<i>The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State</i> .	Harmondsworth: Penguin. [1884] 1972
Finch, J. and Mason, J.	<i>Negotiating Family Responsibilities</i> .	London: Tavistock/Routledge. 1993
Gittins, D.	<i>The Family in Question: Changing Households and Family Ideologies</i> .	Basingstoke: Macmillan. 1993
Kettley, N.	<i>Educational Attainment and Society</i> .	London: Continuum. 2007
Newman, D. M. and Grauerholz, L.	<i>Sociology of Families</i> . Second Edition.	London: Sage. 2002

### \* Recommended reading

### Website addresses: None

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of:* 10 November 2016