

## **THE IMPACT OF MODERN LIFE ON THE FAMILY**

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It is an honor and a privilege to be invited to address this audience. I hope to make a contribution in the form of a brief presentation followed by a short exchange of questions and answers. Some of my remarks will parallel materials from the recent book Character and Identity: The Sociological Foundation of Literary and Historical Perspectives, Morton A Kaplan (ed.) St. Paul, Minn., PWPA, 2000. This excellent anthology contains eight articles about Socialization and the Family, including my "The Influence of the Family on the Formation of Selfhood" (pp.277-310). As a sociologist, I will discuss the 1) history of and the changes that have occurred in the modern (Western) family, 2) some of the forces that have caused these changes, and 3) the consequences of those changes for society and the individual.

### **1. Changes during the modern era**

That the Industrial Revolution has had the most profound impact on the family in Western Society is now an axiom every high school student can recite. All standard textbooks of marriage and family sociology discuss the major family changes that have occurred over the past two centuries (for a typical summary of these issues, see Kando, 1978). The list includes the family's (1) nuclearization, (2) its loss of such functions as the economic, religious and protective functions, (3) secularization and (4) the advent of a materialistic and hedonistic value system, *inter alia*.

Whereas the norm for pre-industrial society was the *extended family*, that of the modern era became the *nuclear family*.

For marriage, the pre-industrial norm was *life-long monogamy*. During the modern era, the divorce rate has increased steadily to the point where, in many sectors, *serial polygamy* became the dominant pattern. That is, marriage is a temporary arrangement, perhaps meant to last just long enough to raise the children, after which the partners can part and begin new lives with someone else. Of course, in a majority of cases divorce occurs long before the empty nest stage. But no matter how long marriage lasts, it is no longer necessarily viewed as a life-long institution.

### **2. Changes during the post-modern era**

The post-modern era extends and exacerbates the changes that were triggered by the industrial revolution. This is true of trends in economic life, culture, and family life:

While it is the age of industrialism which ushered the "tyranny of the clock," the time problem has become even more acute in recent decades. Sociologists note that modern and post-modern man increasingly suffer from "time famine" or from a *time bind* (see Hochschild, 1997).

The requirements of capitalism and of work become progressively more demanding, and occur at the expense of other spheres of life, including leisure, spiritual life and the family.

Culturally, western man becomes *hyper-individualistic*, making individual self-fulfillment his life-long quest and priority.

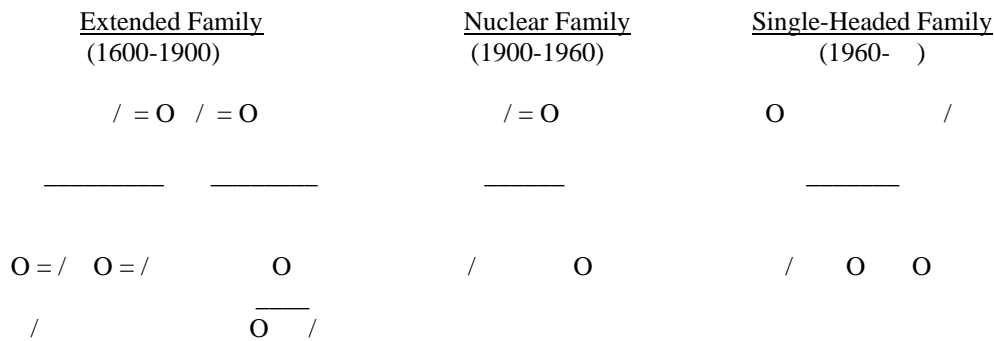
During this period, the down-sizing of the family proceeds further and the norm becomes increasingly that of the *single-headed household*.

With regard to marriage, *unwed parenthood* becomes increasingly normative. In practical terms, unwed parenthood almost invariably means *unwed motherhood*.

Blankenhorn's Fatherless America: Confronting our Most Urgent Social Problem (1995) is one of a growing list of sources alerting us to this problem. The facts are clear: 30 years ago, fatherlessness and illegitimacy were rare in America. Only in the black community was it significant, i.e. affecting between one-fourth and one-third of all families. Moynihan (1965) was one of the first to sound the alarm about this, linking black "matriarchy" to the growing rate of social pathology among blacks. However, his report was controversial, judged by many to be racist (see Ryan, quoted in Pearlstein, 1997). Today, the marriage rate among white parents is about the same as what it was among blacks a generation ago. Meanwhile, black parents have largely ceased to marry, i.e. only about one fourth of black children are born to two married parents. The curve for the rest of the population points in the same direction, only a generation later. At this rate, most American children will, within a generation, be born out of wedlock.

The evolution of the American family can be depicted as in Figure One:

Fig. 1: Evolution of the American Family



### 3. Causes during the modern era

The causes of family nuclearization after the onset of the Industrial Revolution are by now also part of the conventional wisdom. These can be summarized under the headings of 1) technological and economic factors, 2) demographic changes, 3) cultural shifts and 4) social and behavioral causes:

1) Four areas of technology and economy are particularly important: A) while in agricultural societies work occurs at home on the farm, Industrialization and the rise of the factory pulls work out of the home. There occurs a physical *separation between home/family life on the one hand, and work/economic life* on the other. The 9-to-5 job and commuting become the norm. B) Another technological factor of enormous impact on the family has been *medical progress*, which has provided the means to reduce both death and birth rates. C) Reaping the benefits of modern technology, the Western world became an *affluent* and overwhelmingly middle-class society. D) In this new world, *time became an increasingly scarce commodity on a par with money*, and sustained household affluence has increasingly relied, first, on the second income of the wife and, of late, even on that of teen-age

children.

2) Two demographic factors are worth noting -- one of near-universal importance, the other more anomalous: A) The **demographic transition**, which is a result of the medical progress just mentioned: Western societies experienced large declines in adult and infant mortality and a near doubling of life expectancy to nearly 80 years. At the same time or shortly thereafter, the birth rate began to decline, to the point where populations are once again stable or, in an increasing number of cases, even in incipient decline. In other words, many Western nations went from high birthrate combined with high death rate to low birthrate and low death rate. B) Some western countries are nevertheless faced with serious overpopulation and stretched public resources to deal with it, due to the afore-mentioned vast increase in life expectancy, as well as the flood of immigrants attracted by the West's affluence. The Netherlands, for example, have a population density of over 1200 per square mile, i.e. fifteen times higher than the US and nearly four times that of China.

3) Culture encompasses values, attitudes, the psychology inside people's minds and the ideologies influencing them from without. There are at least four modern value packages that have a great deal to do with the direction in which the family is moving. Most of these values are well known, and they are all the product of, or reflect, the technological, economic and demographic changes just discussed:

A) The industrial revolution and its aftermath produced, or occurred hand in hand with, the rise of the work ethic, the tyranny of the clock, the commodification of time. Work, rationalization, quantification, calculation, efficiency and productivity became both standards for behavior and goals pursued for their own value. Western man became **rational man**.

B) Relatedly, western man also became **economic man**. In a fascinating recent monograph, Margolis (1998) offers a typology of selves, including the exchanger self, the obligated self, the cosmic self, the reciprocating self, the called self and the civic self. In the 20th century, the exchanger self eclipses all other selves, as we increasingly commodify and sell our services, our time, our skills, our selves, reducing all interactions to **transactions**.

C) Similarly related to other core features of modern culture is the materialism/hedonism Apackage. Social criticism of this value package has been so frequent and pervasive as to give it cliché status. Yet, the problem is real. Notable among innumerable critics of Western materialism was the great Russian Sociologist Pitrim Sorokin, who worked at Harvard and at the University of Minnesota. Sorokin's concept of the **sensate culture** refers to a combination of materialism in the every-day sense of the word with the **philosophical materialism** characteristic of all modern, **reductionist** science. This attitude originated four centuries ago, during the Age of Reason, and it is, in essence, that of **modernity**. This has been a rallying point for authors as wide-ranging as Theodore Roszak, Herbert Marcuse, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Michel Foucault, and the postmodernists: The core of their analysis is this: modernity accentuates rationalization, industrialism, materialism, capitalism and scientific technocracy, while neglecting the spiritual, the intuitive, the non-material, the affective.

D) Modern economic and demographic conditions cause, or go hand in hand with, a further value orientation that undermines the traditional family: Anti-natalism, i.e. the devaluation of children. In fact, it is the sacro-sanctity of life itself that is questioned -- at both ends of life. Birth control -- including abortion -- attests to the much lower value we place on children than did our ancestors. At the other end of life, modern society displays an increasingly permissive attitude towards euthanasia. It cannot be a coincidence that Holland, which has just legalized euthanasia, suffers from one of the highest population densities in the world and faces insurmountable costs for the care of its growing elder population.

4) Finally, let me mention four social-behavioral factors that undermine the traditional family:

A) One of the basic distinctions made by sociologists is that between the **primary** and the **secondary** group (see Cooley: 1902; 1909). The former is the small, intimate, **affective** group exemplified by the family and dominant in pre-industrial society. The latter is the large-scale, depersonalized, rational organization illustrated by the modern corporation and the modern state. Modernization is, essentially, the progressive rationalization of society and the gradual eclipse of primary relationships by secondary ones. In this respect, modern societies with planned economies do no differ from those based on free enterprise. Both bourgeois capitalism and socialism are dominated by secondary groups and relationships. Consequently, both systems have anti-natalist ideologies, low birthrates, high rates of divorce and abortion and a weak family institution.

B) At the same time there is, even in bourgeois society, a drive to move private issues over to the realm of public policy. That is, deviant behavior, personal relationships, family life and other areas of life formerly deemed private now become objects of state concern and state involvement. As will be seen in a moment, the "war over the family" (see Berger and Berger, 1984) is, above all else, a clash between the private and the public.

C) A third behavioral cause of a weakening family system in modern society has already been alluded to,

and it stems from the growth of *individualism*. Modern man behaves in ways that are increasingly individualistic, rather than group-centered.

D) As a result of medical technology, demographic trends and the materialistic/hedonistic value system of modern society, *sexual behavior* becomes less a procreative activity and more a *recreational* activity.

#### 4. Causes during the post-modern era

I classify causes of family change in the post-modern era, again, under the following four headings: 1) technological and economic factors, 2) demographic changes, 3) cultural shifts and 4) social and behavioral causes:

1) Under technology and the economy, the following factors can be discerned: A) The "virtual" revolution: From Marshall McLuhan to Bill Gates, America and other post-industrial societies have undergone an electronic transformation whereby *information* -- and misinformation -- are transmitted with increasing speed to increasing numbers of people, and where the nature of human communication assumes qualitatively new dimensions. B) The level of affluence already reached in industrial society is surpassed factorially during the next phase of history -- in the sense that people now acquire gadgets, objects and artifacts vastly in excess of their needs.

2) Demographically, the trends under way in industrial society are accentuated to the point of incipient population decline in a growing number of countries, including Japan, Italy, Germany, several Northern European and Scandinavian countries, and most of Eastern Europe (although the latter region can hardly be called post-modern, and its demographics are not driven by the same dynamics as those of the affluent West).

3) In the realm of values, the following transformations occur: A) The Cultural and ideological elite of the post-modern world shifts its attention from old-fashioned economic politics to the new *identity politics*: Union membership languishes and declines, and socialism -- both bread-and-butter labor unions in the West and militant Marxism in the East -- withers. Instead, social movements pursue psychological and cultural objectives such as gay pride and politically correct language. Feminism's goals increasingly combine economic equality and cultural equality. Post-modernists celebrate *cultural diversity* and "*the other*," i.e. people of color, women, gays, and all those who pursue alternative, non-traditional lifestyles, including singlehood, childlessness, group marriage, unwed parenthood, etc. Inspired by Foucault (1978), post-modernism *deconstructs* the traditional, bourgeois, heterosexual, monogamous family as *Eurocentric*, *heterosexist* and oppressive to women.

B) *Anti-natalism* remains the dominant demographic value, continuing a trend set under way in industrial society. However, there is now a new twist: For its ideological justification, anti-natalism reaches out to the *environmental* movement, pointing to the increasing devastation of the planet caused by over-population.

C). The search for self-fulfillment now assumes the forms of New Age religious, environmental and communal movements. Here, we see perhaps the first *renaissance* of a quest for spirituality and transcendence -- Margolis' (1998) *cosmic self*.

4) An important sociological/behavioral transformation in the post-modern era is the *reversal of home and work* in people's lives and priorities (See Hochschild, 1997): The time bind in which people find themselves causes the demands of work and those of parenting to clash. What happens next is that the *home becomes the arena of stress, and work the haven* to which parents escape so as to socialize with friends and colleagues: Work -- historically a survival necessity -- is now turned into a good. Vice becomes virtue, negative turns into positive. This is not a reiteration of the work ethic, which first arose four centuries ago in conjunction with the rise of Capitalism and the (Protestant) bourgeoisie. The early Calvinists were masochists. To them, pain was good. Today's attitude is different: unlike the Protestant work ethic, the new attitude loves the work place because it is fun, relaxing, sociable, stress free, the opposite of home.

It is the modern woman who has fallen into this trap most conspicuously. To her, a job is not something to put up with, but something desired -- a mark of liberation, a source of identity, meaning and self-esteem. Pay is a secondary consideration. Young mothers can't wait to complete their short (2-3 month) maternity leaves and return to the office and to their friends. Being cooped up at home with babies and diapers is viewed as torture and oppression. This is the final phase and ultimate victory of corporate Capitalism. The corporation has now gained over the allegiance of the working class, and triumphed finally over the family, the home, and the private sphere.

Coontz (2001) typifies this attitude. Taking on those of us who worry about the changing family, she avers that families in the past were in worse shape than they are now. Most of her diatribe is aimed at preserving what so many women cherish as a hard-won victory, i.e. the opportunity to have a job outside the home, regardless of financial need.

## 5. Consequences for individual and society

When reality changes, humans have no choice but to re-define it. Leon Festinger(1957) explained long ago, with cognitive dissonance theory, that people can either change their behavior, or they can change their attitudes. When they cannot change their behavior, they must try to change their attitudes, their rhetoric, their laws. Legalizing various forms of deviant behavior is invariably the strategy taken by liberal society to adapt to changes it cannot control -- since it cannot beat them, it joins them. Pragmatic countries such as the US and the Netherlands have a long history of doing this, ranging from the repeal of prohibition to the legalization of various drugs, prostitution and other activities that, to be sure, must first be re-defined as "victimless" (See Moynihan, 1995).

A case in point, then, are current efforts at redefining the family: Because marriage is the only non-consanguineous way to establish a family, re-definitions of marriage are proposed by those who want to water down the meaning of the concept of family to denote anything their political agenda dictates. For example, if two people of the same sex can be married, they become a family. Similarly, if a dozen fraternity brothers were to become legally married to each other, they would then constitute a family.

However, such revisionism has not been very successful, because societies remain aware of the inseparable link between the family and biology. Human beings are both social and biological creatures. As functionalist social scientists from Murdock (1949) to Parsons (1968) have demonstrated, the family is an irreplaceable institution because it performs both social and biological functions. Humans are both cultural and biological creatures. The error of utopian reformers has always been to ignore the latter and to assume that our species is entirely free to construct its institutions as it chooses.

But even the most liberal-pragmatic societies cannot escape the responsibility of assessing the behavioral and cultural changes they experience. The fundamental question is whether the evolution depicted in Figure I is *good or bad*.

There are optimists who welcome the trend. These include the postmodernists, for example. Optimists can point to Iceland, Sweden and possibly some other countries where illegitimacy rates have been higher and marriage rates lower than in the US for a long time, without dire consequences.

Another optimist (but by no means a postmodernist) is Dana Mack (1997), who writes that "Americans haven't stopped loving their kids," i.e. traditional family values are alive and well. Mack disagrees with Hochschild (1997) and the previously mentioned notion of work-home reversal, whereby many Americans now escape the stress of family life to enjoy social life, fun and relaxation at the office.

Another optimistic voice is found in Anderson's new anthology on the family (1997): Jerry Pournelle's article offers the refreshing possibility of a grassroots revival of family values, prompted by the computer revolution and the democratization of knowledge.

Coontz (2001), too is among the optimists. Her argument is familiar among progressive family sociologists: Those of us who see deterioration in family life are guilty of romanticizing a past that was never so. Pre-industrial families, according to authors such as Coontz, in fact suffered from more severe pathologies than does the modern evolving family, including child abuse, domestic violence and marital rape. No question about it: the patriarchal family of the past was not kind to all of its members.

On the other side of the argument are the pessimists. Those who see Figure One as bad news include University of Chicago Political Scientist Morton Kaplan and the always illuminating Irving Kristol. In his writings on moral philosophy, professor Kaplan (1995; 1995) touches, among other things, upon our culture's excessive emphasis on individual freedom of choice and its concomitant neglect of social responsibility -- an attitude which has its roots in the doctrines of John Stuart Mills. This attitude is a major cause of the decline of the American family.

But since I am myself one of the pessimists, I now turn to a systematic list of some of the *negative* consequences of recent family changes in Western society.

1) Consequences for the Children: The most direct consequence of this change is often financial: When there is no male breadwinner in the picture, single mothers and their children often descend into severe poverty (see Weitzman, 1985). More generally and perhaps more importantly, one parent's time, energy and resources are always more limited than those of two parents, especially for the task of socializing the children. Large amounts of empirical data show that the rates of delinquency, maladjustment, mental and emotional instability and other pathologies are significantly higher among the children of divorced parents and single parents than among those raised in dual-parent families (for a review of the literature, see Bynum and Thompson, 1998).

Sociologists distinguish between primary and secondary socialization (e.g. Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Secondary socialization means more or less the same thing as learning. It occurs in college, on the job, in any organization an adult may join, and where he or she must learn specific skills and knowledge. It is by and large a cognitive process.

Primary socialization is a different matter: It includes sentiment. Cooley (1902) was the first to explore this crucial component of the self. Self development means not only the formation of a cognitive apparatus, but -- more importantly -- the formation of an emotional component as well.

the socialization of youngsters at the hands of their families is by and large primary. The parents and other significant others with whom the children identify are not only responsible for the children's acquisition of cognitive skills and knowledge, but -- most importantly -- their sentiments, i.e. their "character" as well.

It is within the family, then, that the self develops in its totality, including both its cognitive and its affective dimensions, both its positive and its negative aspects. Not only is the family the wellspring of an individual's mental and emotional health, but also of his or her pathologies (see Kando, 1973; 1977).

Thus, it is entirely understandable that children who grow up in single-parent homes or in foster care exhibit far greater rates of delinquency, neglect, abuse, educational handicap, loneliness, physical and mental illness, suicide, poverty and stunted self development.

Our society is schizophrenic in its attitude towards marriage, the family and children: On the one hand, "progressives" frown on any suggestion to turn back the clock towards a more child-centered value system, more pro-natalist policies, a more critical attitude towards abortion, a reduction in the divorce rate, the revival of parenthood and dedication to home life as noble endeavors rather than chores. On the other hand, the helping professions, the media and the Universities insist on the need to expand forever the social services and institutions aimed at helping, treating or punishing the ever increasing number of juveniles deemed to be in need. In sum, our society pays lip service to the plight of youngsters, and pretends that it desperately wishes to save the children. In reality, however, most adults do not really like children very much, and they increasingly relegate responsibility for them to *secondary institutions* that range from child care facilities to group homes, from foster homes to prisons.

The negative consequences are obvious, and it is sociologists who have demonstrated them empirically. For example, Stanton (2001) reviews Judith Wallerstein's famous pioneering work which shows the long-term problems caused by divorce for the children, including depression, relational problems, poor performance, poor health and addiction problems. Wallerstein's work has been criticized a great deal. It is not politically correct. However, Stanton demonstrates that her data are solid and that her detractors are wrong.

2) Consequences for the Mothers: Unwed mothers are generally in dire economic straits, and a divorce causes a mother a steep decline in income, even when she receives reasonable child support payments (see Weitzman, 1985). In addition, the physical and mental health of divorced and unwed mothers is significantly worse than that of married mothers. The same goes for all other health, well-being and behavioral statistics, including crime rates, drug and alcohol addiction rates, suicide rates and psychological measurements of happiness. Recent empirical evidence can be found in Linda Waite's The Case for Marriage (1999)

3) Consequences for the Fathers: Unmarried men are far worse off than married men. Again, all health and well-being statistics attest to this. Without the partnership that marriage represents, without the care of a spouse, without the motivation, inspiration, direction and meaning that responsibility for a family represents, men become drifters. Their life expectancy and physical and mental health decline. Their income is lower. They drink more, use more drugs, commit more crimes, commit suicide in larger numbers. They are less happy.

In sum, the break-up of the family victimizes three categories -- the children, the mothers and the fathers. The single mother descends into poverty and welfare dependency, at best tenuously making ends meet and raising her children with great difficulty. The children raised by single parents are far more often delinquent, abused, neglected and otherwise the victims of social pathologies. The single male, finally, also does poorly: far from enjoying his freedom and added buying power, he tends to drift, becoming less healthy, less productive and less successful.

But it is not only on practical grounds that the collapse of the traditional nuclear family should be deplored: At its best, it has been a partnership between (1)man, and (2)woman for the benefit of (3) the children. When this team is dissolved, all three parties are pitted against each other as three distinct political interest groups. Do we want to live in a future society in which children, men and women view each other with suspicion?

4) Consequences for Society: I shall discuss three societal consequences of family decline: A) The rise of mass society, B) the iatrogenic consequences of the rise of the nanny state, and C) the decline of civility.

A) As the quintessential primary group, the family is uniquely positioned to mediate between society and the individual, the macro and the micro, the secondary and the primary, the public and the private, the State and the

citizen, the institutional and the sentimental.

Social scientists from DeTocqueville (1945) to Kornhauser (1959) have discussed the tension referred to in the previous paragraph. De Tocqueville noted that the strength of American democracy lies in our country's vigorous intermediate-level group life, i.e. the numerous voluntary associations and other primary groups to which so many Americans (a "nation of joiners") belong. The French observer must have been prescient, writing as he did during the first half of the 19th century. At that time, the Orwellian excesses of twentieth-century mass society still lay far in the future. The massification of culture, the depersonalization and bureaucratization of modern life, the rise of totalitarian states and dictatorships buttressed by mass propaganda and mass media -- all these threats to and erosions of individual autonomy were yet to materialize. But de Tocqueville knew that a healthy society requires the buffer of mediating structures between the State and the individual. The erosion of these middle-level institutions produces the mass society. Such a society is polarized between a mass of atomized and alienated individuals on the one hand, and an overbearing State on the other. In mass societies, individuals pay allegiance only to themselves and to their Nation State -- nothing in between. The masses can easily be swept up into nationalistic frenzies and wars. There are no alternative bonds and allegiances to deflect and mitigate the dominance of the State over the individual.

Throughout history, the family has been the single most important primary institution commanding the attachment of individuals and thus preventing the excesses of both atomized individualism and massified group life.

These two excesses have become especially visible in the twentieth century: on the one hand, there is the possibility of total Statism, whereby the citizen becomes a robotlike automaton, a brainwashed conformist, merely the sum total of his or her institutional roles. Such a total role-player is a sociopath. A sociopath has no true self. He is merely a role-player. He always does what is expected of him. He is the perfect company man; the proverbial Nazi executioner -- just obeying orders, just doing his job. There is no core identity guiding his behavior. He is pure "me", without an "I." Like an onion, peeling away the layers does not reveal a core self.

At the opposite extreme lies the possibility of total individualism and anarchy. Here, people are ruled by their impulses only. They are psychopaths. The psychopath has no self either. The "I" dominates -- id impulses, Freudians would say. But self-control is lacking, as is concern for others.

These two excesses may also go hand in hand. It is, for example, in this sense that many observers worry about the decline of the family in contemporary America (see for example Anderson, 1997).

As the family declines, two things happen: One, the "Nanny State" takes over, i.e. the functions formerly performed by the family are increasingly performed by the State in loco parentis. Two, individuals are increasingly driven by the frantic search for the immediate gratification of hedonistic impulses, a characteristic of Sorokin's sensate society (See Sorokin, 1928; 1956).

As the Bergers note in their brilliant The War over the Family (1984), the conflict is between the public and the private spheres. In the twentieth century, it is the former which has been on the march and which has encroached ever more deeply on the latter.

At the same time, it is in the State's interest to minimize strong, lasting, loving, monogamous, personal attachments such as marriages. The worst crime committed by Orwell's Winston Smith was to fall in love (see Orwell, 1949). In Huxley's Brave New World (1932), the masses are ordered to engage in periodic orgies and drug fests. Marcuse (1962; 1964) coined the concept of repressive desublimation to denote, again, the compulsory nature of sexual consumption in mass society.

Foucault's (1978) insights regarding the role of sexuality in modern society are equally compelling, and they lead to the same conclusions as the other authors just mentioned: In order for the modern State to increase its control over the populace, it must neutralize deep, profound,

lasting primary attachments (love) and the institution based upon it, i.e. the family. It must appropriate sexuality and render it a harmless recreational commodity, a consumption good. It is in this light that "sex education" and the massive dispensation of condoms to children in our public schools make the most sense.

Thus it is the family, more than any other institution, which stands in the way of the totalitarianization and massification of society. Thanks to the family, most citizens do not become psychopaths or sociopaths. Instead, they develop healthy selves.

B) The iatrogenic consequences of the rise of the nanny-state: In the war over the family, the postmodernists' position is simple: the status quo has to go. And the status quo is embodied, most of all, by the bourgeois family, i.e. the traditional life-long, monogamous, heterosexual couple raising its own biological offspring (See for example Stacey's In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age (1996)).

The reason that the bourgeois family should be abolished is that it has been oppressive to women and to children, i.e. it is patriarchal.

Alternatives to the bourgeois family are to be accepted or encouraged, including divorce, working mothers,

childlessness, singlehood, single parenthood (which generally boils down to single motherhood), unwed motherhood, adoption, abortion, homosexual marriage and various forms of polygamy. The promotion of alternative lifestyles is takes place under the banner of freedom of choice and diversity.

The solution? Enter the Nanny State, i.e. the State as substitute father, parens patriae, in loco parentis. Thus, the attack upon the bourgeois family is carried out by a diverse alliance. The first component of this alliance consists of postmodernist theorists. These are academicians who are busy elaborating a new paradigm based on the writings of such men as Foucault (1978), a paradigm which puts into question such traditional dichotomies as male-female, heterosexual-homosexual, parent-child, mental health-mental illness and normal-deviant.

A second element of the alliance consists of the helping professions, i.e. social workers, family counselors, sex counselors, psychologists, school counselors and assorted other such professionals, many of whom are public employees. It also includes elements of the juvenile justice system, such as group home managers and probation officers. These groups tend to magnify the family's pathological tendencies; they exaggerate the frequency of family dysfunction; they see themselves as the solution to these problems; they are eager to intervene or even to replace natural parents at the first signs of trouble. Such "benevolent pastoral" intervention (Foucault's term), incidentally, occurs most often in lower class families, which are least able to defend their autonomy.

A final force arrayed against the traditional family is the dominant media culture, which misses no opportunity to document family mishaps. The news is replete with stories about family violence, spousal abuse, child abuse, child molestation, rape and delinquency. While the increased public attention to these issues is a mark of progress, it would be illogical to assert that they now occur more often than in the past. Surely there is now a lot less murder, rape, beating and abuse within families than fifty years ago. Therefore, the agenda is political: the traditional private family is perceived as an oppressive, sexist and patriarchal institution, dysfunctional and traumatic to its members, especially to women and children. Its dissolution is often the best remedy, coupled with government intervention and assistance.

An *iatrogenic* problem is a problem that is caused by (medical) intervention. The cure is worse than the illness. You go to the doctor to be cured of strep throat and his prescription kills you because he neglected the fact that you are allergic to antibiotic. Similarly, many social interventions aggravate the social problems they are intended to cure.

To what extent professional intervention helps or harms has been a central theme in the Sociology of Deviance, which has long emphasized that the medicalization of deviance can lead to its magnification. Social scientists ever since Foucault have noted the enormously increased attention which modern society devotes to such areas of human behavior as sexuality. Furthermore, this attention takes a pseudo-scientific form, replacing a former moral vocabulary with a medical one. It engages in an elaborate labeling process by devising an ever richer taxonomy of disease entities. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic Statistical Manual is the best example of this. The diagnostic labels and concepts developed by psychologists do not represent existing diseases, but rather create issues which then warrant control and intervention under a medical guise. Think of such DSM entries as Oppositional Defiant Syndrome, Attention Deficit Syndrome or Nicotine Dependence Syndrome.

Irving Kristol has published many diatribes about the issue at hand. A recent article is entitled The Welfare State's Spiritual Crisis (1997). The author's point is simple: The Welfare State is not the solution to family dysfunction, but its cause: "Fifty years ago, no advocate of the welfare state could imagine that it might be destructive of that most fundamental social institution, the family. But it has been, with a poisonous flowering of those very social pathologies -- crime, illegitimacy, drugs, divorce, sexual promiscuity -- that it was assumed the welfare state would curb if not eliminate."

C. The decline of civility: The quality of an individual's self depends on the quality of his or her socialization. Levels of self-awareness and degrees of self-control vary. The more highly developed someone's self is, the higher his or her level of morality. Building on Stanley Milgram's pioneering work (see Milgram, 1965), Harvard Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1969; 1981 ) identified six stages of moral development. These range from blind obedience to authority, to the highest degree of moral awareness guided by autonomous thinking and by altruistic concern for the good of others rather than by individual selfishness. The author's theory is illustrated through examples such as Ghandi.

Kohlberg stresses the correlation between stages of moral development and chronological age. In other words, young children tend to be less moral than mature adults.

There is no guarantee that a person will develop a mature self and reach the higher stages of moral development. The absence of effective socializing agents will produce a stunted self. According to Kohlberg, the typical American college student is stuck somewhere between the third and fourth stages of moral development. It could be worse.

Today, large segments of our population are characterized by a collapsing family structure. "Dysfunctional families" is the catch-all expression referring to a host of social pathologies that include broken



homes, unwed motherhood, single-headed households and parents who are criminal, alcoholic, addicted, mentally ill, abusive or neglectful. From such families come disproportionate numbers of delinquents and maladjusted children. Their actions are captured in the daily headlines, treating us to a parade of youngsters who either commit unspeakable atrocities upon others without the slightest remorse, or who themselves are the victims of various tragedies.

Both situations -- juveniles as predators and juveniles as victims -- are rooted in the same generic conditions, viz. inadequate self development. Dysfunctional families produce stunted selves because they fail to do their job, which is the socialization of the next generation. The person grows old, but not up. The self remains less conscious of itself, more impulsive, less able to empathize with others, more selfish, less self-controlled, more animal-like, less deliberate, more primitive.

The quality of selves also varies between cultures. There is no guarantee that the American people will always remain as generous, giving, humane and caring as they have been historically. Like individuals, societies vary in their character. The same society can change from a benign and civilized one to one that is ruthless, brutal and psychopathic. Examples of such metamorphoses range from the African tribes to Nazi Germany.

The role of the family may be as pivotal in fashioning the selves of nations as those of individuals. For example, some scholars (e.g. Lewin, 1948) have argued plausibly that traditional German socialization patterns paved the way for that country's descent into fascism in the 20th century.

In America, we see a decline in civility and the simultaneous decline of the family. Surely the latter is a major cause of the former. The fact that the highest rates of crime and other pathologies are found precisely among the groups which have suffered from the most severe family decline makes the causal connection inescapable. Simply, as more families disintegrate, more and more individuals grow up with malformed, stunted, under-developed selves and a primitive moral sense in the Kohlbergian sense.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the family is at a crossroads. Its traditional form is under attack and criticism, deemed by its critics to be patriarchal. Those who welcome the changes claim that the family is evolving into new forms that are more equitable and less oppressive to its members. Others are concerned that the changes lead to the marginalization of men, who are increasingly excluded from the socialization of the next generation.

As mentioned earlier, there is much evidence showing that the absence of a father is often detrimental to the children's upbringing, especially boys, who need discipline and male role models.

The causes of family decline are deeply rooted in major social, cultural, economic and technological trends that have been under way for several centuries. Therefore, reversing the decline will be difficult and time-consuming. However, recent statistics suggest a slight upswing in various family health indicators, including declines in the rates of divorce and illegitimacy and a rise in the marriage rate. Although I have characterized myself as one of the pessimists, that is only in the sense that I view most of the changes in family life over the past century as unhealthy. However, I am hopeful and optimistic that the trend can and will be reversed.

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