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Title: New families? Tradition and change in partnering and relationships.

Publication year: 2008

Book title: British Social Attitudes: the 24th Report.

ISBN: 9781412947749

Publisher: SAGE Publications

Link to publisher's site:
http://www.uk.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book231969

Citation: Duncan, S. and Phillips, M. (2008). New families? Tradition and change in partnering and relationships. In: Park, A., Curtice, J., Thomson, K., Phillips, M., Johnson, M. C., Clery, E. (eds.) British Social Attitudes: the 24th Report. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

New families? Tradition and change in modern relationships

Simon Duncan and Miranda Phillips[*]

Family life is traditionally seen as central to the well-being of both individuals and society in general. As Gordon Brown put it, in announcing the creation of a new 'super-ministry' for Children, Schools and Families in June 2007, "children and families are the bedrock of our society".[1] In setting up this new ministry Brown was securing New Labour's continuing interest in families, formally expressed as early as 1998 in the Green Paper *Supporting Families*: "Family life is the foundation on which our communities, our society and our country are built" (Home Office, 1998: 2). At around the same time, the Conservatives restated their concerns about 'family breakdown' (Social Justice Policy Group, 2007).

This current political interest reflects the fact that contemporary understandings of family revolve around the themes of dramatic social change and flux. The bedrock of family, it is assumed, is rapidly shifting, perhaps even collapsing, and is being replaced by looser, and more individualised, arrangements for loving and caring. There are two contrasting poles in this debate: while some commentators describe a 'breakdown of the family' resulting in social and moral dislocation, others describe its resilience, albeit in different forms to before, and see its new forms as offering increasing opportunity for choice, tolerance and family democracy. Certainly there is a broad context of public disquiet, with close attention to family affairs, their rights and wrongs, and about how to 'do' family and relationships. This is supported by what MacLeod (2004) calls a 'burgeoning family industry' of family services, counselling, self-help and therapy, campaigning groups, policy and research.

At the heart of this debate are what social theorists like Beck (1992) and Giddens (1992) have called 'individualisation'; the notion that traditional social structures of class, gender, religion and family are withering away, so people no longer have pre-given life-worlds and life trajectories.[2] Instead, individuals are 'condemned to choose' their own biographies. Meanwhile, the 'project of self', with an emphasis on individual self-fulfilment and personal development, comes to replace collective, social aims. This has a profound impact upon the family, with modern society being seen as having dissolved "the social foundations of the nuclear family" (Beck, 1992: 153). We no longer need, or expect, to get engaged and marry as young adults, to acquire a given set of relatives, to have children and live together till death do us part. Of course, we still search for love and intimacy, and still need to give and receive care, but now this search is seen to lead to 'families of choice'. Caring and loving relationships are consciously developed and built up on the basis of what they do, rather than depending on a pre-given biological or kinship status. Gender is important here; according to individualisation theory it is women who often lead change, as they break away from traditional and 'undemocratic' relationships and seek fairer and more equal ones. At the same time, the significance of romantic coupling is lessened and friendships become more important. These developments contribute towards the 'decentring' of the married, co-resident, heterosexual couple. It no longer occupies the centre-ground statistically, normatively, or as a way of life (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). Rather, other ways of living – living alone, lone parenting, same-sex partnerships, or 'living apart together' – which in earlier periods were both relatively infrequent and seen as abnormal, become more common and are both experienced and perceived as equally valid. In summary, family life is no longer equated with the married couple.

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There is a glaring problem with this vision of how family life is developing: how far it exists in reality is largely uncertain (Jamieson, 1998). The individualisation theorists themselves are notorious for asserting their almost millenarian scenarios on the basis of sketchy evidence. Subsequent research in Britain has shown that other family forms can provide everyday alternatives to the married couple (see Williams, 2004). While these studies point to many of the issues covered in this survey, they largely rest on the evidence of small samples of particular social groups in particular places. We still need to assess how far this 'new family' extends throughout the population, and how far it is accepted as a 'normal' and valid way of partnering and parenting.

True, we know a lot about statistical changes. For example, heterosexual married or cohabiting couples accounted for 57 per cent of British households in 2006, a decrease of 13 percentage points since 1971. Conversely, one person households increased by 10 points from 18 per cent in 1971 to 28 per cent in 2006 (Office for National Statistics, 2007). More and more couples cohabit outside marriage (accounting for 25 per cent of adults under 60 by 2005 – double the 1986 rate), divorce is at record levels, and by 2007 the number of marriages have declined to the lowest figures since 1896 – although weddings have become all the more fashionable, ornate and expensive. Over four in ten (43 per cent) births in 2005 were outside marriage, compared to just 12 per cent in 1980, most of which were to cohabiting couples (*ibid.*). But what do trends like these actually mean for the nature of family life? Are they evidence that it is breaking down into individualised 'projects'? Or do they suggest a continuing commitment to family life, if often expressed in different, and perhaps more democratic, forms than before?

In this chapter we will tackle this question by assessing whether, and how far, the public's views of family, partnering, parenting and friendships show that the 'traditional' centre of 'the family' – the married, co-resident, heterosexual couple – is no longer central, and how far alternative family models are seen as equally valid. Put simply: is marriage seen as the best form of relationship for partnering and parenting, or are other family forms seen as being equivalent? To assess this, we focus on public attitudes towards four key areas: heterosexual partnering; divorce and separation; non-conventional partnering and solo living; and friendship. This allows us to address a range of issues. What, for instance, does marriage mean to people, and is it much different to living together unmarried? Does marital breakdown mean tragedy, or can it be seen as a positive step forward? Are non-conventional forms of relationship seen as being just as good as heterosexual, co-residential partnerships when it comes to commitment and parenting? And are chosen friends seen as a replacement for given family?

Where relevant, we examine the extent to which views vary between different social groups. A number of characteristics are of interest here. Age is likely to be important, as we are assessing a social issue that has changed notably in recent decades, and therefore we might expect to find that older people are more traditional in their views. Gender also matters, as individualisation theory stresses the role that women can have in leading change as they break away from traditional homemaker roles through careers and divorce. In contrast, individualisation theory sees religion as prescribing a traditionally determined and 'externally imposed' moral code for social behaviour, particularly in relation to sexual relations, marriage and parenting. Social class may also be of interest, for while professional groups can be liberal on some social issues (and individualisation theorists often imply they form a vanguard for change), they can display more traditional behaviour when it comes to family practices (Duncan and Smith, 2006). Because some of these characteristics are themselves interrelated (for example, older people are more likely than younger ones to be religious), we also report where necessary on multivariate analysis that allows us to assess the importance of each of the characteristics while taking others into account.

Marriage and cohabitation

Marriage has traditionally been the socially accepted, legally sanctioned and religiously sanctified means of having sex, at least since the triumph of 'Victorian values' in the mid-nineteenth century. In contrast, sex outside marriage has normatively been perceived as both risky and deviant, however common it might have been in practice.

The *British Social Attitudes* survey has asked about this over a number of years:

> *Now I would like to ask you some questions about sexual relationships. If a man and woman have sexual relations before marriage, what would your general opinion be?*
>
> *What about a **married person** having sexual relations with someone other than his or her partner?*
>
> *[Always/Mostly/Sometimes/Rarely wrong/Not wrong at all]*

Table 1.1 shows how this 'traditional' view is both changing and stable. On the one hand, there is a developing consensus that marriage is not a prerequisite for legitimate sex. The proportion who think that pre-marital sex is "rarely wrong" or "not wrong at all" increased from 48 per cent in 1984 to 70 per cent by 2006 (and the proportion thinking it was "always wrong" shrank from 15 per cent to just six per cent). But on the other hand, opinion about extra-marital sex has barely changed over the last two decades, with around 85 per cent thinking this "mostly" or "always wrong" (and around 55 per cent going so far as to judge this "always wrong").

Table 1.1 Views on sex and marriage, 1984–2006

% who think that …	1984	1989	2000	2006
Pre-marital sex is rarely or not wrong at all	48	55	71	70
Extra-marital sex is mostly or always wrong	85	84	85	84
Base	*1675*	*1513*	*3426*	*1093*

These figures immediately indicate what will become a theme throughout this chapter. In some respects there is no longer much commitment to the 'traditional' view (in this case, people are no longer expected to get married in order to have sex), but in other respects 'traditional' views are maintained (overwhelmingly, sexual faithfulness continues to be valued as a key part of commitment within marriage).

A similar story of change and stability is shown in relation to attitudes about cohabitation outside marriage. Barlow *et al.* in *The 18th Report* (2001) demonstrated that there was widespread acceptance of unmarried cohabitation; indeed, over half the adult population thought this was a 'good idea' before marriage. Almost half thought that there was no need to get married in order to have children; cohabitation was good enough. And even those who were less accepting (such as the elderly and the more religious) were becoming more so over time. In the 2006 survey we went on to examine how far unmarried cohabitation was perceived as an equivalent of marriage. Table 1.2 presents data for four questions on this subject:

> *These days, there is little difference socially between being married and living together as a couple*

These days, a wedding is more about a celebration than life long commitment

Living with a partner shows just as much commitment as getting married to them

Married couples make better parents than unmarried ones

There is a consensus that marriage and unmarried cohabitation are *socially* similar (two-thirds agree), and there is considerable scepticism about weddings as a symbol of lifelong commitment – only 28 per cent think that they are, whereas a majority see them more as a celebration. Around half agree that unmarried cohabitation shows just as much commitment as marriage. While a sizeable minority (around a third) retain a more traditional view, disagreeing with the view that those who live together are just as committed to one another as those who get married, this 'traditional' stance is outweighed by the less traditional position on all of these questions.

Table 1.2 The equivalence of unmarried cohabitation and marriage

		Agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree
There is little difference socially between being married and living together	%	66	12	**19**
A wedding is more about a celebration than life long commitment	%	53	16	**28**
Living with a partner shows just as much commitment as getting married	%	48	13	**35**
Married couples make better parents than unmarried ones	%	**28**	28	40

Base: 2775

Most traditional view emboldened

These results tally with earlier quantitative and qualitative research (Barlow *et al.* 2001, 2005; Lewis 2001) which suggests that it is personally expressed commitment that is seen as significant by most people, not the public display of commitment as expressed in a marriage and a wedding. This overall consensus on the social and personal equivalence of unmarried cohabitation and marriage presumably helps account for the continuing (and incorrect) majority view that cohabiting couples have legal rights afforded by their 'common law marriage'. It also lends support to current attempts to reform the law to give unmarried cohabitants a greater measure of legal rights in the event of separation or death (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 2).

However, public opinion is more ambivalent about the importance of marriage when it comes to parenting. While only 28 per cent agree that married couples make better parents, just 40 per cent disagree – figures virtually unchanged since 2000.

What is the social distribution of these 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' attitudes on marriage? To help summarise views about marriage, we constructed a scale of traditional views,[3] using responses to the four questions presented above. Each respondent scored between 1 (most traditional views) and 5 (least traditional) and then the scores on the scale were grouped into three bands.

Table 1.3 shows the results broken down by related social characteristics.[4] Our expectations about relationships between social groups and views about marriage generally hold true. Those most likely to hold traditional views include religious respondents (20 per cent of those belonging to a religion and attending services compared to six per cent of those with no religion) and those who are married (15 per cent compared to two per cent of cohabitants). By way of example, 48 per cent of those belonging to a religion and attending services *disagree* that cohabitation shows as

much commitment as marriage, compared to 28 per cent of those with no religion. And 43 per cent of married respondents disagree, compared to just 15 per cent of cohabitants. Age is significant in its own right, with older groups most likely to be traditional in their views. This applies even if we take into account other related characteristics such as religion and marital status.

Men are more likely to take the more traditional position on marriage than women, with, for example, 34 per cent of men agreeing that married couples make better parents than unmarried ones, while just 23 per cent of women take this view (perhaps reflecting the distribution of 'hands-on' experience). This tallies with the claim of individualisation theory that it is women who often lead change, as they break away from their traditional role as homemaker. Interestingly, both on the summary variable, and on our specific question on parenting, those at the 'coal face' – parents with dependent children – are notably *less* traditional than non-parents; just 17 per cent of parents agree that married couples make better parents than unmarried ones, compared to 32 per cent of non-parents. This is likely to be a function of age, religiosity and marital status, as the relationship between parenthood and attitudes to marriage is no longer significant once these factors are controlled for. Finally, social class is a factor, with professionals being more likely to take the traditional view than those in lower supervisory and technical occupations, or in semi-routine or routine jobs. This confirms other research which has shown that this group can show more traditional behaviour in their family practices than might be assumed from their somewhat more liberal social attitudes (Duncan and Smith, 2006).

Table 1.3 Traditional views on marriage, by socio-demographic groups

	% most traditional	Base
All	11	2775
Religion		
Belongs to religion, attends services	20	884
Belongs to religion, doesn't attend	9	610
No religion	6	1281
Marital status		
Married	15	1343
Widowed	13	269
Cohabitants	2	271
Separated/divorced	4	338
Single, never married	9	553
Age		
18–24	9	223
25–34	12	443
35–44	8	555
45–54	10	446
55–59	8	261
60–64	13	220
65+	17	623
Sex		
Male	13	1220
Female	10	1555
Parent status		
Parent of dependent child in household	9	725
Not parent	2	2049
Social class		
Managerial & professional	14	1032
Intermediate	12	349
Employers in small org	11	218
Lower supervisory & technical	7	335
Semi-routine & routine	9	760

So far we have seen that, for many, marriage does *not* have normative centrality, and unmarried cohabitation is seen as its equivalent. However, the way in which people think about cohabiting couples suggests that many traditional norms about relationships still hold true. Indeed, qualitative research shows that, for many cohabitants, living together is seen as a form of marriage rather than an alternative (Barlow *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, just as the majority think that sex outside marriage is wrong, the same applies to sex outside cohabitation: the large majority of cohabitants, over 80 per cent, think that sex outside a cohabiting relationship is wrong, according to the 2000 *National*

Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Erens *et al.*, 2003). These findings give little support to the notion that many people cohabit outside marriage because cohabitation is more congruent with a project of the self, as individualisation theory would have it (Hall, 1996).

The importance of tradition, alongside change, is also suggested by responses to a set of questions on marriage as an ideal (see Table 2.2 in Chapter 2 for results of the first three):

> *There is no point in getting married – it's only a piece of paper*
>
> *Even though it might not work out for some people, marriage is still the best kind of relationship*
>
> *Marriage gives couples more financial security than living together*
>
> *With so many marriages ending in divorce these days, couples who get married take a big risk*

Here (in contrast to our first four statements), the traditional view is the consensus on all but the last of these questions, suggesting that marriage is widely perceived as an ideal. Overwhelmingly, the idea that marriage is just a piece of paper is dismissed: just one in ten (nine per cent) agree with this proposition, figures hardly changed since 2000. Meanwhile, just over half (54 per cent) see marriage as the best form of relationship, although a sizeable minority disagree or choose the 'neither' option. Furthermore, six in ten (61 per cent) think that marriage is more financially secure than living together – something which fits uneasily with the assumed social and emotional equivalence displayed in Table 1.2. This financial non-equivalence, in contrast to the consensus that cohabitation and marriage are socially equivalent, presumably helps fuel public support for legal change. It is also something of a change since 2000, perhaps reflecting the recent profile of high income divorce cases, or possibly increasing awareness of the common law marriage 'myth' (see Chapter 2). In contrast to the consensus in responses to the first three questions, our fourth splits opinion. A third (34 per cent) see marriage as risky because of the high likelihood of divorce (especially those who are themselves separated or divorced, 47 per cent of whom agree), and this is matched by a similar proportion who disagree (36 per cent).

While marriage is held up as an ideal by many, we should remember the blurred lines seen earlier between marriage and cohabitation in everyday life, if not in law. Unmarried cohabitation may be included as part of this 'married' ideal by some; cohabitants may be re-creating a form of marriage, albeit informally.

Partnering and commitment

We have seen that in terms of everyday life and commitment, many people see cohabitation and marriage as more or less equivalent, rather than alternatives.
What then is the nature of this commitment? This question lies at the heart of the individualisation debate, where theorists claim that people can no longer rely on partners and relatives (Bauman, 2003 is perhaps an extreme example).

Qualitative studies report that by the 1960s the couple (which was assumed to mean marriage) had moved to the centre of many people's social and emotional lives – at least normatively (Lewis, 2001). However, in 2006 most respondents think that relationships are much stronger if both partners have independence. We asked respondents to choose between these two options:

Relationships are much stronger when both partners have the
independence to follow their own careers and friendships
OR
Partners who have too much independence from each other put their
relationship at risk

As many as 62 per cent choose the first option, with just 28 per cent thinking that social independence for partners poses a risk. So, yet again, we see a departure from the 1960s' normative model – the majority think partners can and indeed should be socially independent. Even a majority (54 per cent) of those with the most 'traditional' views on marriage take this view. Note, however, that this does not necessarily mean the decentring of conjugal partnership itself, as the questions asked presume that partnership remains in the middle of an individual's emotional life; indeed, the 'decentred' option in this question was framed in terms of independence *strengthening* partnership.

To try and further understand the strength and nature of this 'emotional centre' we asked respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with two questions about the importance of partners relative to support from relatives and love for, and from, children:

Relatives are always there for you in a way that partners may not be

The relationship between a parent and their child is stronger than the
relationship between any couple

Only small minorities *disagree* with these statements (31 and 20 per cent respectively), thereby seeing relationships with partners as more dependable than those with relatives or stronger than those with children. In both cases, the most popular response, given by around four in ten is "agree" or "strongly agree" (41 and 42 per cent). Perhaps, surprisingly, parents with dependent children are little more likely than non-parents to see the relationship with a child as stronger. These responses both confirm and contradict individualisation theory. On the one hand, its theorists claim that children become the last source of unconditional love in an uncertain world of risky commitment. On the other hand, they would hardly see the 'given families' of relatives as providing an alternative (e.g. Giddens, 1992, Weeks *et al.*, 2001). It may also be the case that people have always seen relatives and children as more reliable than partners; on this point, our survey – like individualisation theory – is limited by a lack of historical perspective. But we can say that, in 2006, we find elements of both continuity and change when it comes to 'traditional' notions of the relationship between couples.

The couple relationship, then, is not seen by most as necessarily the most durable source of support, nor the strongest bond. Perhaps reflecting this, there is an overwhelming consensus (75 per cent) that "many couples stay in unhappy relationships because of money or children". Even a majority of those most committed to marriage more generally (the religious, those who have separated/divorced and those with more traditional views) agree, although they are less likely to do so than their less traditional counterparts. Clearly, then, most people see the world of families and relationships as potentially involving severe structural constraints to personal choice. This is hardly a case of 'choosing one's own biography', as individualisation theory would have it.

Divorce and separation

To those taking a 'traditional' view, one that stresses the centrality of the married and co-residential couple, divorce and separation are clearly a family tragedy. Both significantly undermine the traditional model of marriage which has lifelong commitment at its centre; indeed, those taking the pessimistic position cite divorce and separation rates as evidence of family breakdown (for example, Social Policy Justice Board, 2007). Alternatively, a 'decentred' view would see divorce and separation as a normal, perhaps even beneficial, part of the life-course (Smart, 2004). Meanwhile, when divorce does occur, individualisation theory sees a developing ideal where both father and mother become equally active and lifelong parents, with traditional

assumptions about roles and rights questioned (Giddens, 1992). We turn now to see how far the views of the general public support or refute these claims.

The majority of respondents, as Table 1.4 shows, take the 'decentred' view. We might expect widespread agreement with the proposition that divorce is the only response to violence – only 14 per cent disagree – but even fewer disagree with the idea that divorce can be a positive step towards a new life (just seven per cent). Nearly two-thirds agree with this statement. This suggests that, for most, lifelong commitment through marriage is not seen as a necessary part of a successful life, a result that undermines the traditional view of marriage. Overwhelmingly, 78 per cent agree with the view that it is not divorce in itself that harms children, but parental conflict. This supports other research in this field (Smart, 2003). In this respect, our respondents are confronting some recent media comment and political shibboleths about the harm caused by divorce *in itself*. Rather, they appear to see children's welfare as being most affected by the process of 'doing' family (that is, what actually happens in parenting). Dysfunctional families are seen as the problem, not the actual separation.

Table 1.4 The normality of divorce

		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
If either partner is at all violent then divorce is the only option	%	64	18	14
Divorce can be a positive first step towards a new life	%	63	26	7
It is not divorce that harms children, but conflict between their parents	%	78	12	7

Base: 2775

Despite these findings, people are more likely to question the 'normality' of divorce when children are brought to the foreground. Table 1.5 shows responses to a question which asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed that:

> *It should be harder than it is now for couples with children under 16*
> *to get divorced*

As many as 30 per cent agree (the more traditional view) and a quarter remain undecided. As the table also shows, unsurprisingly, those with traditional views about marriage in general are more likely to support making divorce harder for parents. Once again, those who might actually face this scenario – parents themselves – are actually *less* likely than non-parents to take the 'make divorce harder' position (although this relationship appears largely to reflect the marital status and age profile of parents).

Table 1.5 Divorce should be harder if children are under 16, by views on marriage and parental status

Agree			Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Base
All	%	30	26	38	2775
Views on marriage					
Most traditional	%	48	25	24	289
Least traditional	%	24	26	47	1302
Parental status					
Parents	%	26	26	43	725
Non-parents	%	32	26	37	2049

As we will see later in the chapter, children seem to hold a particular, 'morally absolute' position in people's attitudes to family. While less fixed and less definite family arrangements may find widespread acceptance when it comes to adults, this is less likely to be the case when children are involved.

Just as the married couple with children used to be normatively central, so too was the assumed position of the mother if divorce did take place. Children, it was assumed, should and would live with the mother and both normal practice and court decisions reflected this norm. We do not have time-series data to see how views have changed over time on this, but it is notable that in 2006 under a quarter (23 per cent) of respondents opt for "the mother" (and a mere 0.2 per cent opt for the "the father") when asked:

> *If a couple with children divorce, who do you think the children*
> *should normally live with for most of the time?*
>
> *[Spend equal time with both parents/Live with the parent who is best*
> *able to look after them/the father/the mother]*

For some leading individualisation theorists, the ideal is lifelong parenting by both father and mother, where children live with both the separated parents equally. At the same time, family law has been moving towards this 'norm'. However, just 18 per cent of respondents choose this more rigidly 'democratic' option of "equal time with both". Rather, the majority, 57 per cent, opt for the more open and contextual option "with the parent who is best able to look after them". Both age and social class are significant here. Those most likely to take this pragmatic view of parental rights and children's welfare are those aged 25– 64 (the age groups most likely to have dependent children), and professionals. This pragmatism also questions current trends in family law towards joint residence after divorce.

Individualisation theory sees families as becoming steadily more democratic, with children also having their say in important family decisions. This should clearly apply to where they should live post-divorce, and indeed family courts are increasingly taking children's views into account when reaching decisions like this. But what do the public think – we asked the following question to assess this:

> *... imagine a 9 year old child whose parents are divorcing. How much*
> *say should a child of this age have over who they will live with after*
> *the divorce?*
>
> *[A great deal/Quite a lot/Some/Not much/None at all]*

An overwhelming majority – 84 per cent of respondents – think that the child should have at least some involvement in choosing whom they would live with after the divorce. But this idea of family democracy is not unequivocally accepted, for only 44 per cent opt for much influence ("a great deal" and "quite a lot"). In this case at least, family democracy is seen as more 'consultative'.

If divorce is largely normalised, then so too should be 'reconstituted' families after divorce with step-parents and stepchildren. After all, step-families accounted for 10 per cent of families with dependent children in 2005, according to Social Trends (Office for National Statistics, 2007). This normalisation did seem to be the case, at least for the usual pattern of a stepfather and biological mother (86 per cent of all step-families in 2005 – *ibid.*). We described this as follows:

> *I would like you to think about a family where the parents separated some time ago. The children are all under 12 years old and now live with their mother and her new partner. Do you think that these children could be brought up just as well by their mother and her partner as they could be by their mother and father?*

Fully 78 per cent agree that this sort of family 'definitely' or 'probably' could bring up children just as well as two biological parents. Perhaps, surprisingly, being a parent or a step-parent did not particularly relate to views on this topic (81 per cent of both groups take this view).

This acceptance of stepfathering then begs the question of the balance of rights and responsibilities between the 'household' stepfather and the 'absent' biological father. Individualisation theory expects that 'lifelong parenting' by separated biological fathers is one part of the development of democratic families, although qualitative research suggests that some stepfathers rather see stepchildren as 'their children', hence excluding the biological father from this role (Ribbens-McCarthy *et al.*, 2003). We gave respondents a scenario to assess their views. Following the question about step-parenting, we asked:

> *Still thinking about the same family, where the parents separated some time ago and the children now live with their mother and her partner. The children's mother and her partner don't have very much money and are worried that the children are being spoilt by their father because he regularly buys them expensive gifts and pays for outings that the children's mother and her partner cannot afford Which of these statements comes closest to your view about this situation ...*

> *... the father should be allowed to spend what he likes on his children,*

> *OR*

> *the children's mother and her partner should have the right to insist that the children's father spends money on things the children need, rather than expensive gifts?*

Most respondents – 63 per cent – give the household stepfather and the child's residential mother primacy in this situation (which, after all, portrays them as more in touch with children's needs), with only half as many – 30 per cent – supporting the primacy of the biological father. Those most likely to support the biological father include men, younger respondents, cohabiting and single respondents and those with the most traditional views on marriage. That more traditional groups (men and those with traditional views on marriage) are more likely to support the biological father is unsurprising. The more surprising support by some in less traditional groups (younger and cohabiting/single people) suggests the question taps into a different dimension than the marriage questions considered earlier – perhaps an idea of equity in terms of the rights of the absent father – as well as their likely inexperience in the actual practice of bringing up children.

So far we have found that the centrality of the married couple has diminished; marriage is no longer seen as necessary for legitimate sex, unmarried cohabitation is seen as more or less equal to marriage – in everyday life, if not in law – partners should have social independence, divorce is usually seen as a normal, even beneficial, part of the life-course, and step-parenting is acceptable. Earlier norms about marriage as a lifelong commitment have been undermined and replaced by a preference for serial monogamy. However, throughout we often find caveats and doubts where children are concerned. In a sense what appears to have happened is that the social rules surrounding marriage have relaxed – 'marriage' may not be expressed formally through legal and public ceremony, and it can be interrupted through divorce and separation – but it continues informally in cohabitation and is rebuilt in reconstituted 'second' families. Extra-marital sex, and sex outside a cohabiting relationship, remain widely condemned. The emotional centre continues to be the residential couple, even if children and relatives are seen as more dependable over the

long term. The question therefore remains of how far the 'married' couple in this wider sense – in other words the co-residential heterosexual partnership – is also 'decentred' in contemporary Britain. This is the subject of the next section.

Beyond the family

In previous sections we showed how the centrality of marriage itself has diminished in contemporary Britain, but that nevertheless the co-residential partnership (whether married, cohabiting or reconstituted) remains an emotional centre for many. Marriage, as a social institution, may have simply been reformed, widened and 'modernised' rather than being 'decentred'. The question remains, therefore, of how far co-resident heterosexuality remains at the normative centre of family life. If this family form were indeed 'decentred', we would expect to find that those who live apart from their partners, solo living and same-sex partnerships are seen as equivalent, rather than inferior family forms. Indeed, individualisation theory sees living 'beyond the family' in these ways as the vanguard of change (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). In this section we will examine how far these family forms are seen as adequate, or indeed equivalent, to the co-residential partnership.

Living apart together (LAT)

'Not living with a partner' does not necessarily mean not *having* a partner – they might simply live elsewhere. However, a traditional view which places coresidential partnership at the centre of a relationship can hardly recognise this logic, and would see living apart from one's partner as both abnormal and, if it happened at all, a temporary phenomenon forced by external causes, such as one partner obtaining a job a long distance away. This is perhaps why the idea of people *choosing* to 'live apart together' (LAT) has only recently been recognised (Roseneil, 2006). In fact, living apart from your partner is not that uncommon. Previous studies estimate that around a third of adults in Britain between 16 and 59, who were neither married or cohabiting, were living away from their partners (Haskey, 2005). Our latest survey (which includes people aged 18 or over only) is in rough agreement with these overall figures, and nine per cent of respondents (n = 320)[5] report that they are in a relationship but not living with their partner, compared to 65 per cent who are married or cohabiting and 26 per cent who do not have a current partner, either in the household or outside it. This equates to 25 per cent of those outside a co-residential (married or cohabiting) partnership.

Like previous surveys, we find that living apart from one's partner is more common among younger respondents. As many as four in ten respondents aged between 18 and 34 and outside a co-residential partnership have a partner who lives elsewhere (38 per cent of 18–24 year olds; 37 per cent of 25–34 year olds). However, this situation is to be found across all ages; for example, 13 per cent of respondents aged 55–64, and outside a co-residential partnership, report a partner living elsewhere. Non-parents (those without dependent children) are significantly more likely than parents to live apart from their partner. We cannot tell from our data whether the higher likelihood of living apart among younger groups is a cohort, period or generational effect, but taken together with the evidence on parents and non-parents, these findings suggest that for many living apart coincides with a particular life-stage or set of circumstances.

The majority of respondents with a partner living elsewhere (seven per cent of the full sample) had been in the relationship for six months or more, so if we use time as a measure of relationship status then these appear to be relatively established 'living apart together', or LAT, relationships. However, we were able to conduct a more incisive assessment of the status of living apart relationships by asking questions about *why* people were in this position, and about what partners living apart do together socially.

By far the main single reason for living apart, given by four in ten of those respondents with a partner living elsewhere, is that they are not ready to live together, or that it is too early in their relationship. This is not because these respondents are waiting to get married – a mere five per cent cite this as a reason for living apart (also underlining the normalcy of unmarried cohabitation

discussed earlier). This gives a different impression of the status of these relationships than our more simplistic measure of length – we can perhaps see these as akin to the old-fashioned notion of 'going steady' boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, rather than full-blown partnerships. Half indicate clear external constraints on living together: this includes a quarter who cannot afford to do so and a fifth whose partners are working or studying elsewhere. Only around a third cite 'choice'-type reasons for living apart, including not wanting to live together, and wanting to keep their own home (both 14 per cent). In terms of activities, just over a half act as long-term partners in a social sense, for example, in terms of seeing relatives together (53 per cent), or going on holiday together (55 per cent). Putting all this together suggests that only a minority of respondents who live apart from a partner are LATs in the sense of both being in a significant relationship and *choosing* to live apart. While we do not have time-series data to assess whether more people choose to live apart now than in recent decades, the relative paucity of such relationships does not easily support the impression given in some of the individualisation literature of a developing rejection of conjugal relationships.

Statistically, then, couples who live apart are not as uncommon as some might expect, although this often seems to reflect constraint rather than a preference for living apart. But how are these non-residential relationships regarded in a normative sense? A majority (54 per cent) agree that "*a couple do not need to live together to have a strong relationship*", with only 25 per cent disagreeing. Not surprisingly, those with traditional views on marriage are twice as likely to disagree (48 per cent); conversely only 15 per cent of the youngest 18–24 age group do so. While choosing to live apart seems quite rare, many more people find themselves living apart from a mixture of circumstances, and this is generally seen as good enough for partnering. Indeed, other research has found that a significant minority of people describe 'living together apart' as their 'ideal relationship', compared to over 40 per cent for exclusive marriage and just under 20 per cent for unmarried cohabitation (Erens *et al.*, 2003).

Solo living

There has been a substantial rise in the number of people living alone in Britain over recent decades; by 2005, 17 per cent of adults aged over 16 were in one-person households, compared to just eight per cent in 1971 (*General Household Survey*, 2005). Although many elderly people are forced to live on their own because of the death or infirmity of a partner, this recent increase is almost entirely accounted for by a rise in solo living among younger age groups. Indeed the proportionate increase has been greatest among those in the 25–44 age group, rising from just two per cent in 1971 to 12 per cent in 2005 (*ibid.*). As Roseneil (2006) points out, it is precisely this age group which traditionally would be most expected to be married and having children. By 2005, over a quarter of adults over 30 had lived alone at some stage in their lives (Wasoff *et al.*, 2005).

As we have seen, some of these people classified as 'living alone', particularly in younger age groups, will in fact be in 'living apart together' relationships with partners living elsewhere. In these cases it is still the intimate *couple* which forms a central part of life. What, then, of those who live alone, without a partner living elsewhere? When the centrality of married couples was taken for granted, such people often attracted 'spinster' and 'confirmed bachelor' stereotypes – people who in some way had failed at normal life, and were inadequate at making relationships (although this had different connotations for men and women). These particularly negative stereotypes have now been replaced in common parlance, and in official documents like marriage and birth registers, by the less pejorative appellation 'single'. Going even further, individualisation theory sees single women as in the vanguard for change in personal relationships – they are voting with their feet in rejecting the traditional, undemocratic, heterosexual couple and choosing to build 'families of choice' outside it. Nonetheless, qualitative research shows that this 'choice' is often difficult to sustain (Reynolds *et al.*, 2007). The question remains of whether solo living is still seen as a 'deficit identity', defined negatively by *lack* of a partner and 'normal' family life, or whether it is seen as a viable way of living where those who live alone are as socially accomplished as those who live as a couple. To assess this, we asked respondents how far they agreed or disagreed with the following statements. The first two relate to normality of single living, the second two address the issue of solo parenting:

You do not need a partner to be happy and fulfilled in life

People who choose to live alone just aren't good at relationships with others

There is nothing wrong with a single woman who lives alone having a child if she wants one

One parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together

As shown in the first two rows of Table 1.6, there is little support for the 'deficit identity' image of solo living; 69 per cent agree that it is not necessary to have a partner to live a happy and fulfilled life. Similarly, six in ten reject the idea that people who choose to live alone are not good at relationships (and only one in ten agree). But when we turn to parenting, this picture changes, as the next two rows in Table 1.6 show. Less than half are supportive of solo parenting: only 44 per cent think that there is nothing wrong with a single women who lives alone having a child if she wants one, and just 42 per cent think that single parents are as good as two parents at bringing up children. (Although this does show some change since 1994, when only 35 per cent agreed that single parents could be as good). The notion of solo living as 'deficit' returns for many when it comes to parenting.

Table 1.6 The normality of living alone and solo parenting

Living alone		*Base*
% agree do not need a partner to be happy and fulfilled in life	69	*2775*
% disagree people who live alone aren't good at relationships	60	*2775*
Solo parenting		
% agree nothing wrong with a single woman who lives alone having a child	44	*2775*
% agree one parent can bring up a child as well as two	42	*2775*
Donor sperm		
% think donor insemination should be allowed … … for single woman	61	*3197*
… for co-residential heterosexual couple	90	*3197*

We forced the issue of solo parenting by asking respondents for their views about donor insemination for a single woman (implying that she had made an overt choice to be a single parent), and in comparison, for a heterosexual couple. The scenarios were described as follows, and the results are shown in the last rows of Table 1.6:

These days it's possible for women to get pregnant by paying a clinic and using sperm from a donor. I'm going to read out two scenarios about different people. For each, assume that they can afford to pay for the treatment and bring up the child without relying on benefits.

First, do you think that a single woman who lives alone, who wants to have a child, should be allowed to have this treatment?

And what about a man and woman who live together as a couple, and who want to have a child, but the man can't have children. Should the woman be allowed to have this treatment?

(IF NECESSARY REPEAT: Assume they can afford to pay for the treatment and bring up the child without relying on benefits)

As many as 61 per cent think that single women "definitely" or "probably" should be allowed to use donor sperm in order to become pregnant – at least if she is financially self-supported. This somewhat contradicts our earlier finding that just 42 per cent think that single parenting is as good as two parents together. Perhaps the question appeals to feelings about the importance of private choice and freedom for individual adults, which are less influential when faced with perceived moral absolutes of actual parenting, not to mention some media stereotyping of single parents. Nevertheless, this majority approval is significantly below the overwhelming consensus, at 90 per cent, that heterosexual couples should be allowed such treatment. Overall, then, we have found considerable support for the idea that solo living is not seen as deficient, though the issue of solo parenting is far more likely to divide public opinion.

Same-sex partnerships

According to the 2001 census, only 0.3 per cent of co-residential couples in Britain defined themselves as same-sex partners (Duncan and Smith, 2006). This is likely to be a significant underestimate of the actual number of same-sex partnerships, for many will be in 'living apart together' relationships. In addition, there was probably a high degree of under-reporting in the census, especially as it relied on self-definition (although this reluctance in itself might indicate some fear of intolerance). Nonetheless, individualisation theorists have seen gay men and lesbians in general, and same-sex partnerships in particular, as pioneers for individualisation. This is because they already lie outside traditional family life and so have been almost forced to create alternative 'families of choice' (Weeks *et al.*, 1999). Not only this, but theorists claim that gay men and lesbians have become a role model for heterosexuals in changing family life more generally (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). Symptomatically, these claims beg the question of how widespread this pioneering and proselytising role actually is (Duncan and Smith, 2006).

  For a number of years *British Social Attitudes* has asked questions about the rightness and wrongness of homosexuality, and these provide some initial answers. The following questions were asked in separate places in the questionnaire:

Homosexual relations are always wrong
*[Agree strongly – Disagree strongly]*

... what about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex?
[Always/Mostly/Sometimes/Rarely wrong/Not wrong at all]

The initial impression is of widespread tolerance. By 2006, only 18 per cent agree with the first question, taking the view that homosexual relationships are always wrong. On this measure, attitudes have become more liberal since 1996 (when 24 per cent agreed). Those who remain disapproving in 2006 are most likely to be older men, those in lower supervisory and technical occupations or in semi-routine or routine jobs, people with traditional views about marriage and the religious (defined as those belonging to a religion and attending services). Young women, and those in professional jobs, were most liberal.

Tolerance declines, however, when we ask our second question, which focuses on actual sexual relations, rather than relationships in general terms. The results are shown in Figure 1.1. Now a third (32 per cent) of respondents see sex between adults of the same sex as always or mostly

wrong – which must leave some respondents in a 'Church of England' position, where homosexuality is all right as long as sex is not involved. This inconsistency suggests a difference between tolerance – something not approved of can be tolerated – and acceptance – where there is no disapproval. However, the largest proportion (49 per cent) still think sex between same-sex adults is rarely or never wrong. Furthermore, the figure shows substantial liberalisation over the last 15 years; before that, around two-thirds or more thought that homosexual sex was wrong.

Figure 1.1 Views on sex between same-sex adults, 1983–2006

Legend: Always or mostly wrong ♦ — Sometimes wrong ■ — Rarely or never wrong ▲
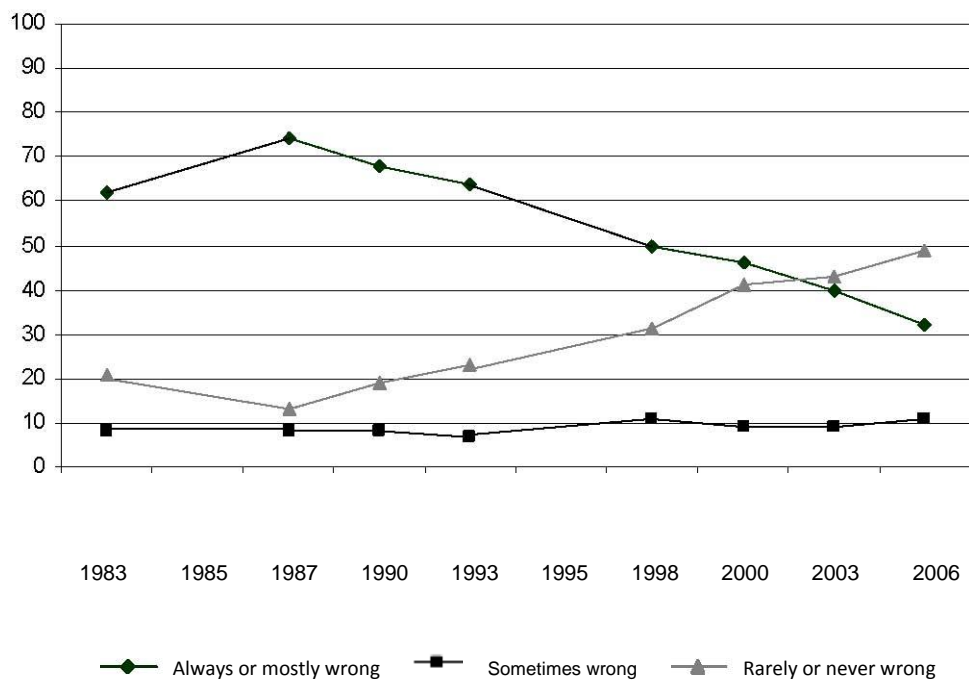
The fact that a significant minority do not accept same-sex relationships is clear when we examine responses to the statement "civil partners should have the same rights as married couples". Over a quarter (27 per cent) disagree with this view, though the majority, 58 per cent, agree. So even when the issue is about rights rather than sexual activity, the acceptability of same-sex relationships is still rejected by a substantial minority.

To what extent are same-sex partnerships seen as adequate for partnering and parenting? Table 1.7 echoes the patterns found earlier for solo living. There is strong consensus for the 'private' matter that same-sex couples can be as committed as heterosexual couples (63 per cent), with few disagreeing (12 per cent). But there is no consensus for the more 'public' issue of parenting – an issue where it seems 'non-individualist' moral absolutes or imperatives are still pervasive (Ribbens-McCarthy *et al.*, 2003). Indeed the larger proportions, around two in five, see same-sex couples as less adequate parents than heterosexual couples. Disapproval is little more for gay men than for lesbians, indicating that it is sexuality, not gender, that is largely at issue.

Table 1.7 The capability of gay men and lesbians as partners and parents

		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
A same sex couple can be just as committed to each other as a man and a woman	%	63	19	12
A lesbian couple are just as capable of being good parents as a man and a woman	%	36	21	38
A gay male couple are just as capable of being good parents as a man and a woman	%	31	20	42

Base: 2775

Intolerance and disapproval of any particular social group is often linked to its stereotyping as an abstract and unknown (and hence threatening) 'other'. Significant contact with 'real' people from that group allows more inclusive and less stereotypical judgement. We can examine this to some extent through a question which asked whether respondents knew someone who was gay or lesbian and, if so, what the status of this relationship was (respondents could choose more than one answer):

> *Do you personally know anyone who is gay or lesbian?*
>
> *[No, I don't know anyone who is gay or lesbian/Yes – a member of my family/Yes – a friend I know fairly well/Yes – someone I do not know very well/Yes – someone at my work/Yes – someone else/Not sure]*

While over two-thirds of respondents (69 per cent) say they know at least one gay man or lesbian, far fewer can claim what might be *significant* relationships – only nine per cent refer to a family member who is a gay man or lesbian, and 29 per cent to a friend they know 'fairly well'. In total, only 35 per cent of respondents have experience of these possibly closer relationships (some of course are overlapping). Another third (36 per cent) refer only to a more 'distant' acquaintance (to someone they do not know very well, someone at work, or some other person). This leaves a final third (30 per cent) who do not know any gay men or lesbians at all (or are unsure). Older groups (especially aged 65 or more), married respondents, and those in lower supervisory and technical occupations or in semi-routine or routine jobs are the least likely to have significant personal contact through relatives or closer friends This relative lack of significant personal contact, in contrast to more widespread acquaintance, seems to link to the 'tolerance–acceptance' dichotomy noticed above. Certainly the degree and nature of personal contact is strongly associated with rates of acceptance. As Table 1.8 shows, those with 'close' personal contact are substantially more likely to take the accepting or tolerant view than those without any contact.

Table 1.8 Personal contact and accepting gay men and lesbians

	Personal knowledge of gay man or lesbian		
	Close (friend/relative)	Not close, but a more distant acquaintance	None
% disagree homosexual relations always wrong	73	52	30
Base	*632*	*603*	*447*
% agree gay male couple are just as capable of being good parents as a man and a woman	47	28	19
Base	*957*	*931*	*657*

Earlier we outlined the way in which individualisation theorists can see gay men and lesbians as role models for more widespread change (e.g. Roseneil and Budgeon, 2006). While this may be the case, it does seem that this effect may be limited by the relative paucity of significant personal contact between many straight people and gay men and lesbians. Moreover, while there has been a substantial liberalisation of attitudes towards homosexuality, this may reflect public tolerance rather than active approval and personal acceptance.

In this section we have seen that different forms of 'non-conventional' relationships, whether 'living together apart', same-sex, or solo living seem fine for consenting adults. In this sense, the heterosexual, co-residential couple is no longer particularly central as a social norm. However, when it comes to the more public, and morally absolute, issue of children and parenting the picture remains fairly traditional.

Friends and families of choice

Friendship is an important social relationship that has been neglected by research and policy alike, partly because of the normative centrality of the heterosexual couple. In contrast, individualisation theorists place some considerable emphasis on friends, for, of course, friends are 'chosen' to a much greater degree than 'family'. It is not, according to this view, just the heterosexual couple that has become decentred, but also its surrounding family. Given 'families of fate' – the whole panoply of parents, siblings, in-laws, uncles, nieces, great aunts, and so on – will be increasingly replaced by more freely chosen 'families' of friends (Weeks *et al.*, 2001).

The simple polarities set up by this view have been questioned in empirical research. *The 19th Report*, for instance, found that family ties are 'seemingly in robust good health' (Park and Roberts, 2002). The majority of people were in close contact with immediate family members, and family members were a very important source of help to whom most would turn first. Friends, while also important in most people's lives, were far less likely to be a first port of call, even for the young and single. Moreover, those who had most family contact also had more friends. This picture fits in well with other research which suggests that it is not a case of 'family' simply being replaced by 'friends'. Rather there is a 'suffusion' of the two (Pahl and Spencer, 2004). People do indeed tend to choose members of their personal communities – those that are important to them for love, care, support and friendship – but these are as likely to include kin as much as non-kin.

We found some support for the idea that friends can act like family. Three-quarters of respondents claim to have at least one "particularly close friend you can share your private feelings and concerns with" (leaving aside partners or anyone in their family). As many as 41 per cent have more than one such close friend, while a quarter of respondents have no particular close friend at all, as defined here. While those who are married are more likely to lack a close friend

(31 per cent), this is no doubt largely a matter of age rather than partnership status, as cohabitants (who, on average, are younger) are far less likely to be in this position (just 17 per cent). Men are less likely than average to have a close friend (33 per cent lack one), as are those aged 65 or above (40 per cent do not have one), and those in lower supervisory and technical occupations or in semi-routine or routine jobs (around 30 per cent do not have a close friend).

Of those with close friends, 84 per cent had received help or support from them when "facing a difficult problem in your life". Not surprisingly, then, as Table 1.9 shows, most people reject the notion that:

Friends are for fun, not for discussing personal problems with

Friendship is seen by most as an important part of their social support, not something peripheral in their lives. But when it comes to weighing up friends *versus* family, only a minority of three in ten see friends as more dependable than family in times of crisis, although only four in ten see family as more dependable than friends.

This belief in the relative dependability of family probably relates to the persistence of norms about family obligations, as the last two rows in Table 1.9 suggest. The majority think that people should make time for relatives, even if they have nothing in common with them. Even when it comes to more distant relatives, as many as 55 per cent of respondents subscribe to this view, and seven in ten agree in the case of close relatives.

Table 1.9 Family and friends

		Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Friends are for fun, not for discussing personal problems with	%	12	14	71
When things go wrong in your life, family is more likely to be there for you than friends	%	42	26	29
People should make time for relatives like aunts, uncles and cousins, even if they don't have anything in common	%	55	26	15
People should make time for close family members, even if they don't have anything in common	%	68	20	9

Base: 2775

To explore the relative importance of friends and family further, we attempted to force respondents into a somewhat artificial choice between family and friends:

Some people feel that having close friends is more important than having close ties with their family. Others disagree. Where would you put yourself on this scale between these two positions? [5-point scale, from 1 'Friends most important' to 5 'Family most important']

Given the persistence of norms about given obligations to family, it is perhaps not surprising that around half (48 per cent) feel that maintaining close ties with family is more important than having close friends (choosing 4 or 5 on the scale), with just 13 per cent choosing close friends (choosing 1 or 2). However, the fact that a large minority (39 per cent) choose the mid-point between the two positions supports the 'suffusion' idea that friends are becoming more like family and *vice versa*. Gender and whether or not a person themselves has a close friend – but not age nor marital status –

are related to this view: women are more likely than men to choose the mid-point (41 per cent compared to 36 per cent), while those with more than one close friend are 15 percentage points more likely to choose this 'neutral' position than those with no close friend (45 per cent *versus* 30 per cent).

Overall, friends are important to most people for support and closeness as well as for fun, and in this way friends can take on 'family' functions. At the same time, many people retain a sense of obligation to family and, reciprocally, see family members as more dependable in the long run. If 'families of choice' are replacing 'families of fate', then these chosen families are likely to have partners and kin at the centre.

Conclusions

We started this chapter by asking how far the 'traditional' core of 'the family' – the married, co-resident, heterosexual couple – was no longer central, and how far alternative family models are seen as equally valid. Is marriage still seen as the best form of relationship for partnering and parenting, does marital breakdown still mean tragedy, are other forms of relationship just as good, and can friends replace family?

Certainly the centrality of the formally married couple has diminished. While marriage is held up as an ideal by most, it is no longer seen as necessary for legitimate sex, and a majority see unmarried cohabitation as more or less equal to marriage in everyday life. Most think partners should have social independence, divorce is usually seen as a normal part of the life-course – even beneficial in some instances, and step-parenting is viewed as a good enough alternative to a child being brought up by both his or her biological parents. We have found, therefore, that on all of these issues public attitudes do not conform to normative expectations of the 'traditional' family model of the mid-20th century – although we also find caveats and doubts where children are concerned.

But in many ways this is a case of '*plus ça change, c'est la même chose*'. For in a sense what has happened is that the social rules surrounding marriage have relaxed rather than vanished entirely. 'Marriage' may not be expressed formally through legal and public ceremony, and it can be interrupted through divorce and separation, but it continues informally in cohabitation and is rebuilt in reconstituted 'second' families. Sex outside cohabiting and living apart relationships are as widely condemned as extra-marital sex. Marriage, as a social institution, may have simply been widened more than 'decentred'.

The same theme of decentring within continuity is repeated when it comes to alternative forms of relationship. Living apart together, living alone without a partner, and same-sex couples are not seen by most as inadequate or deficit family forms. In this way the heterosexual, co-residential couple is no longer that central as a social norm. But the picture becomes more traditional when it comes to the more public issue of children and parenting. Children seem to hold a particular, 'morally absolute' position in people's attitudes to family. While less fixed and definite family arrangements may find widespread acceptance when it comes to adults, this is less likely to be the case when children are involved. Similarly, friends can take on 'family' functions, but at the same time many people retain a sense of obligation to family and, reciprocally, see family members as more dependable in the long run.

If 'families of choice' are replacing 'families of fate', then most of these chosen families are likely to have partners and kin at the centre. Theories of individualisation and their negative reflection through ideas of 'breakdown of the family' both rely on assumptions of dramatic and universal social change. While we have been hampered in that we must rely for the most part on cross-sectional data for 2006, our evidence suggests a more mixed picture. Certainly there is evidence of change and evolution – one example where we do have longer time-series data is the widespread tolerance, if not always acceptance, of same-sex relationships developing since the 1980s. Attitudes and practices also vary between different social groups and, we might add, vary in different places (Duncan and Smith, 2006). And yet while theories of individualisation may have heuristic value, they seem partial and exaggerated as a description of norms and attitudes about family life in contemporary Britain. Rather, if we take a broader view, norms about the content and nature of family life seem quite durable. People ascribe centrality to maintaining good relationships and functional family lives, not to their own self-projects in isolation. This also

means that most people seem to place the emphasis on successfully 'doing' family in practice, whatever situation people find themselves in, rather than on the supposed functionality of different family forms. In this way there seems to be as much 'recentring' as 'decentring'.

Notes

1. In "Balls takes charge of new ministry for children", *The Guardian*, 29th June 2007.
2. For an examination of this claim in relation to social class, political and religious identity, we refer readers to Heath *et al.*, (2007).
3. Scores were created by reversing the numerical values for the first three statements, so that the most traditional view was changed from 5 to 1 and so on; the values for the four statements were summed, divided by four, and rounded. The 1 to 5 scale was then recoded into most traditional views (1 and 2), middle (3) and least traditional (4 and 5). Not answered or "don't know" at any of the four questions was excluded. We repeated this analysis with a larger number of statements included in the scale (the additional statements were the final three statements listed on page 8. However, the 'most traditional' group using this increased scale was larger and more diverse, and therefore less useful in identifying our most traditional respondents. It did, however, produce similar results in terms of identifying broad social patterning of views about marriage. Indeed, the only social group which was not related to the second scale, but was to the first, was parent status.
4. All of the characteristics shown in Table 1.3 are significantly related to views on marriage, even after controlling for the effect of the other factors through regression analysis. The results of the regression are available from the authors on request.
5. In addition, nine did not answer definitively (DK/RF); these are included in the base for the follow-up questions, meaning the unweighted base for those is 329.

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Acknowledgements