**Family Functions: Teachers Notes**

Curriculum links:

* GCSE Religious Studies AQA 3.2.1 Theme A: Relationships and Families – Gender Equality; Religious Studies OCR J625 Relationships and Families / Challenges to religion – Secular attitudes / legal changes to marriage, divorce and gender roles within families in Britain.
* GCSE Sociology AQA 3.3 Families – Conjugal role relationships and feminist views
* GCSE History AQA BB Britain: Power and the people: Part 4. Equality and Rights – Women’s Rights.

These are general background notes on to assist with the powerpoint and PDF print of the 1975 Why be A Wife Campaign leaflet. They do not follow the presentation exactly but assist with giving a wider context so you can adapt / use the powerpoint as you want to.

The presentation presents Caroline Norton in Victorian Britain and the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970s as two case studies for campaigns to change marriage and towards gender equality in the UK. Sections can be cut depending what curriculum / subject you are covering.

**Changing Relationships and Gender Equality**

**The Victorian Angel in the House**

The *Angel in the House* was a narrative poem by Coventry Patmore published in 1854 (revised in 1862) about his wife Emily, who he thought was the ideal woman and wife. The poem centres on there being distinct spheres within marriage for men and women. The wife was meant to run the home and rear children with little public role, while the husband earnt money or provided for his family. This was a middleclass ideal as it relied on only one wage and assumed daughters could be provided for until they married.

John Ruskin delivered his lecture ‘Of Queen’s Gardens’ on the role of the wife within marriage in 1864, which argued for the moral influence of women in the home to be recognised and cultivated. Ruskin outlined that women should have access to education and ‘roam free’ in libraries to be a better ‘helpmate’ to their husband.

The rights of married women (or lack of them) were much debated in the 1850s and 1860s. The first Married Women’s Property Act, allowing women some ownership of property and right to their own income, was passed in 1870.

**Case Study: Caroline Norton**

Caroline Norton, nee Sheridan, married George Norton, a MP and barrister, in 1827. Caroline supported her family – they had three sons – through her writing and securing her husband a paid position. The marriage was disastrous, George Norton had affairs and accused his wife of having one with Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister at the time. He also beat Caroline and kept the money she made from writing. As a married woman, Caroline had no right to her own earnings. Even after separation in 1835, her earnings went to her husband while he paid her a small allowance. Even money Caroline inherited went to her husband unless it was left to her individually.

George Norton took their three sons and would not let Caroline see them. As a wife separated from her husband, she had no legal access to them. Caroline campaigned and in 1839 the Infant Custody Act was passed in England and Wales. This act gave custody for children under 7 to the mothers and allowed the non-custodial parent access to the child. In response George removed their children to Scotland and their youngest son William died in 1842 – Caroline was not allowed to see him. After William’s death, her other children Fletcher and Brinsley spent half the year with Caroline and half with George.

In the 1850s Caroline campaigned for married women to retain property and earnings but did not join the more radical feminists arguing for women’s rights from the 1850s onwards.

**Legislation around Marriage and Infant Custody**

**Marriage in the Twentieth Century**

Marriage was still seen as the main option for the vast majority of women. Women needed to be married for financial security and to be afforded any sort of status in life. Also, as the number of professions a woman could enter was limited, it was almost impossible for women to earn the same as men and comfortably support themselves.

Although many women worked during the Second World War, they were encouraged to return to the home afterwards and throughout the 1950s the housewife was celebrated as the heart of the home. Despite the glamorisation of domesticity, the number of women working outside the home increased, and the reliance on marriage for security diminished and many women chose to reject the idea of marriage completely.

While both men and women now share the workplace, child-rearing is often perceived as the preserve of women, meaning that many women are now faced with having to balance their traditional role within the home with full time work outside of the home.

**The Women’s Liberation Movement**

The Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s grew out of the campaigns for gender equality – particularly for equal pay and access to the workplace - waged by feminists a generation older. It was influenced deeply by the radical, revolutionary politics of the period and particularly by the Civil Rights movement led by African Americans in the USA.

Rejecting hierarchical structures, the movement was made up of a loose network of independent women's groups that came together on an annual basis at WLM conferences and out of which a broad programme of demands was formulated.

As a movement it not only continued to campaign for women's economic and legal equality, but it also initiated campaigns in areas once thought private and personal; it campaigned against rape, violence against women, pornography, and for the rights of women to express their sexuality freely.

Wages for Housework Campaign was founded in 1972 and works to make visible women's "double day" including unwaged and low-waged work and housework and campaigns ' to get compensation for the unwaged work women do'.

**The demands of the Women's Liberation Movement**

The first Women's Liberation Movement conference took place in 1970 in Ruskin College, Oxford and was attended by over 600 women. Over the proceeding eight years the movement adopted the following demands:

* Equal pay for equal work
* Equal education and job opportunities
* Free contraception and abortion on demand
* Free 24-hour community-controlled childcare
* Legal and financial independence for women
* An end to discrimination against lesbians
* Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of male violence. An end to the laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women

**The Personal is Political**

The movement adopted the slogan 'the personal is political', proclaiming that issues such as childcare, contraception, housework and domestic violence were not simply private matters negotiated between individual men and women, but rather political issues which demanded political answers.

**Marriage, Civil Partnership and Relationships**

The number of couples choosing to get married in the UK has declined in the UK since the 1950s for a multitude of reasons:

* The women’s movement put forward the idea that marriage was not the ideal and that women could strive to have careers and be independent.
* The increasing number of women working outside the home also means marriage is no longer seen as a necessity for a woman’s financial security.
* The increasing secularity of society has contributed to removing the taboo against cohabitation and having children outside of marriage.
* After the Divorce Reform Act 1969 it was easier and less expensive to get a divorce.

There are, however, still significant legal benefits to marriage or civil partnerships such as in tax, inheritance and property law which encourages couples to get married, who might otherwise not.

In 2004 the Civil Partnership Act granted same-sex couples rights and responsibilities over inheritance, property and next of kin, like those in a civil marriage. In 2013 the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill enabled same sex couples to marry in England and Wales. In 2019 a case amended the Civil Partnership Act to allow mixed sex couples to be partners.

**Domestic Violence**

The Government defines domestic violenceas "*Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality*." The most common form of domestic violence is perpetrated by men against women and children within the home.

In 1973 domestic violence was first talked about in parliament, which led to the 1976 Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act. Domestic violence and rape became increasingly politicised issues in the 1970s and 1980s. Women campaigned successfully for domestic violence to be treated as a crime and fought for the establishment of refuges for women so they could escape abuse in a safe space.

In 1971 the women’s refuge movement began in Chiswick by Erin Pizzey, supported from 1974 by the Women’s Aid Federation. In 1977 the first Rape Crisis Centre opened in London, whilst two years later Southall Black Sisters was founded. Since then Refuge and other organisations have expanded and provide care and refuge for those suffering domestic abuse, though many are at risk due to funding cuts.

**Family Allowance**

After WWII, bringing up several children was encouraged to restore the birth rate so in 1945 the Family Allowance was introduced to provide benefits for second and subsequent children. It was paid to the mother. In 1973 it was proposed that the payment be made to main breadwinner, which at that time was most likely to be the father. The changes did not go through.

In 1975, the then Labour social affairs secretary Barbara Castle put forward the Child Benefit Act proposing additional benefit for the first child. Between 1977 and 1979, the modern Child Benefit replaced the Family Allowance and Child Tax Allowance.

Universal Credit has replaced the Child Tax Allowance. Child Benefit is still paid directly to the mother or main guardian but since 2017 has been restricted to only two children per mother / family unit.

**The 1975 Sex Discrimination Act**

Following the 1970 Equal Pay Act (which specified that women must be paid the same as men when they are doing equal work), the 1975 the Sex Discrimination Act made it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sex specifically in areas of employment, education and advertising or when providing housing, goods, services and facilities. It also prohibited harassment in employment, vocational training and further education.

In 1976 the Equal Opportunities Commission was set up to monitor the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act, ending gender discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity.

**Maternity**

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 established the Equal Opportunities Commission and was the first Act to state that women were not to be discriminated against on grounds of pregnancy or maternity. This has since been greatly improved and updated – most recently by the Equality Act 2010 which makes pregnancy a protected characteristic.

SMP (Statutory Maternity Pay) is now in effect which entitles women to 6 weeks paid leave at 90% of her salary, then 20 weeks at a statutory rate of pay (around £120 a week), then an additional 26 weeks leave unpaid, with a right to return to work afterwards.

Despite the numerous provisions for working women during pregnancy and early motherhood, however, many women still find they face discrimination, ranging from questioning of their ability and commitment to work, to being made redundant, being denied promotion and not being offered part-time work after the birth of their child.

**WLM Feminist Sociology: Ann Oakley**

Ann Oakley is a writer and a sociologist. She is best known for her work on sex and gender, housework, childbirth and feminist social science.

In 1982, Oakley published the chapter ‘Conventional Families’ in an influential book *Families in Britain* in which she outlines the gender definition and roles in families from the Victorian period until the 1970s and that dissatisfaction with these roles has grown. She also pointed to the growth of ‘dual income’ households and the increased need for working mothers financially within families.

**Counter Response to WLM Feminism**

The rejection of being confined to the home and role of mother by WLM feminists has been criticised. Black feminists have pointed that being a mother and having a secure family unit is not something that women of colour can take for granted due to histories of slavery, sterilisation and racial oppression. Later feminists argued that the importance of housework and the home has been underplayed and many women do want to be mothers and see that as their job.

Some sociologists, such as Harry Hendrick, have accused Ann Oakley as being Childist, i.e. anti-children and putting the needs of adults – whether women or men – above those of children who have little agency.

**Equality Act 2010**

Both the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 have been replaced by the 2010 Equalities Act, which recognises these protected characteristics:

* age
* disability
* gender reassignment
* marriage or civil partnership (in employment only)
* pregnancy and maternity
* race
* religion or belief
* sex
* sexual orientation

Discrimination on the basis of any of the above is now illegal.

**Resources**

* British Library: for much more on the Women’s Liberation Movement see their Sisterhood and After webpages: <https://www.bl.uk/sisterhood>
* The British Library has also put some copies and articles from one of the main WLM publications the magazine *Spare Rib* online: <https://www.bl.uk/spare-rib>
* For more on legislation see the Women’s Legal Landmarks page and search under the topic of family: <https://womenslegallandmarks.com/category/family/>
* The BBC Archive has news items about the women’s movement and interviews in its collection Second Wave Feminism: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/second-wave-feminism/zdhw382>
* For an engaging, if emotionally challenging, novel try Onjali Q. Rauf (2019), The Star Outside My Window. It is an older children’s / YA book (suitable for years 6-8 depending on reading and emotional capability) on violence against women and the impact on children. There is also a website linking to questions here: <https://makingherstory.org.uk/homepage/star-outside-my-window/>
* The official Parliament.uk website has some information on Relationship Legislation: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/marriagedivorcesexuality/>