

# History of Families: Premodern and Modern



## Pre-Industrial Society

This is a very important component of the sociology of the family. The sociology of the family really focuses on how families have and continue to change and the challenges associated with such changes. Some questions you might receive on your exam have to do how changes in society have influenced the family. Has the family influenced changes in society, especially recently? To what extent can changes in the family be connected to changes in society, changes in social policy, changes in demographic diversity, changes in our understanding of gender, etc. So this particular section is pretty big.

Cambridge focuses on three distinct eras: Pre-Industrial, what we can call Pre-Modern; Industrial, or what we can also call Modern; and Post-Industrial, or again, we can call this Postmodern. Notice, that we are using the words "industrial" and "modern" interchangeably. In some ways, using "industrial" instead of "modern" is more descriptive. For instance, the Himba people of Namibia or the Huarani in the Amazon are examples of cultures still in existence...in modern times...but are not industrialized. So, is it fair to call them pre-modern? Or is it more descriptive to say pre-industrial? It's an open question. Often Cambridge will use Pre-Industrial, Industrial, and Post-Industrial. But even this has some questions.

For purposes of understanding, I suggest using a three-column chart (because...of course I do!)

<b>Pre-Industrial Pre-Modern &lt;1750 ce</b>	<b>industrial modern 1750-1975</b>	<b>post-industrial Postmodern 1975-Present</b>
Description of society		
Description of family		
Dominant Institutions		

I think, for the sake of ease, I'm going to spend the next few days going over the links between family structure and historical structures starting with Pre-industrial societies. This might be a good time for you to stop and do some research for yourself before moving on. Then review with me. What were pre-industrial societies like and how did this influence family? This is a huge time span, so focus on that time period before 1750, I would say from about 1500 to 1750. We will see later on that this is the beginning of the transformation between the pre-industrial and industrial eras.

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## *Pre-Industrial Society*

What is a pre-industrial society? Pre-industrial societies are those in which most economic activity is shaped by surplus agriculture as opposed to subsistence agriculture. Subsistence agriculture means that families are dedicated to growing crops to sustain the family. Economic activity happens within the family, for the family. There may be some small surplus, but that is used for the sake of the family. Surplus agriculture means that the family grows crops much of which will be traded or sold on a market. In ancient societies, this surplus agriculture was made possible by massive amounts of slave labor. In pre-industrial societies, surplus agriculture is possible because of the invention of the animal-drawn plow, or a plow that could be yoked to a large, domestic animal, usually oxen. The plow becomes the dominant technology in this era.

The plow should have been a huge benefit to families and individuals, being able to work the land and create a surplus. However, during this time, we also see a breakdown of the kind of law and order that existed in the time of ancient Rome. As a farmer, a peasant could cultivate more land, but that land needed to be defended from marauders and those using sophisticated iron weapons and tactics to take the surplus from relatively defenseless peasants. Social arrangements changed to be centered around castles rather than city-states like Rome or Ravenna. Land was divided up by noble Dukes to local Lords loyal to the Duke. The Lords were responsible for protecting the land. To do so, they engaged a second tier military class, called knights. Knights would swear loyalty to defend the lords and to wage the lords' wars. In exchange, the knights would receive status in the lord's court. Exceptional knights may even be given title to land and become lords themselves. The lands controlled by the lords were worked by peasant farmers. These farmers were called serfs. They belonged to the land and were not allowed to leave. The serfs were parcelled lands, some of which they could farm for themselves and to meet their needs. The majority of the land, however, had to be farmed for the lord. In exchange, the lord took responsibility for protecting the serfs.

This was a system called **Feudalism**. It was held together by a hierarchy of responsibilities and social ties called **vassalage**. The serfs produced goods for the lord. The lord provided protection by hiring knights who were loyal to the lord for status and land. The lords were loyal to a regional Duke who oversaw titles to the land and protected the smaller lords from larger lords and dukes from other duchies. Sometimes a regional duke would become powerful enough to enforce his authority on other dukes and crown himself king, thus extending the hierarchy of privilege and vassalage.

Economic activity centered around a fiefdom overseen by the manor, or the Lord's estate. A castle was always nearby to provide protection, housing the knights, and offering shelter from invasion. Towns or cities emerged around the manors where agricultural surplus was brought to market. That also became the sight for craftsmen to set up shop and sell their wares. Merchants who conducted trade with other fiefdoms would also set up shop. Throughout the Middle Ages, as trade grew and money became more stable, some of these merchants became very wealthy. Keep this in mind.

Now, you can imagine that a society held together by vassalage, or mutual obligation between classes, when one class controlled a military and the other class pulled the plows was one of

pretty deep exploitation. Lords were not always nice guys and were prone to misusing their power and the obligation of vassalage. Land, equating to power and wealth, incentivized constant warfare. Plagues and droughts often immiserated the people whose lives were often very hard and short. Why would anyone be willing to participate in such a society and obey such lords?

During this time religion filled the role of providing the dominant discourse or meta-narrative holding the society together. In Western Europe, including Great Britain, that religion was the Roman Catholic Church. For almost a thousand years the Roman Catholic Church, headed by the Pope seated in Rome (The Vatican) was the most powerful institution in Western Europe (we're focusing on Western Europe here, hence an automatic bias...in Eastern Europe the dominant institution was the Eastern Orthodox Church centered in Constantinople or the Russian Orthodox Church centered in Kiev). Even the most powerful kings did not offend The Church. If they did, The Church could "excommunicate" the king and nobody would then follow him...opening the king up to invasion and conquest.

That's a description of the society that families developed in in pre-industrial Europe. It looked similar throughout Eurasia with some notable differences depending on culture. So how did such a society influence the family?

## Pre-Industrial Families

There are a couple of defining characteristics shaping family structures in pre-industrial societies. Namely, life was hard and short. Furthermore, land was the chief source of wealth, and ownership of land was mostly based on lineage, not an open market. This lineage was patriarchal...in other words, land was owned by men and passed down to other men, usually the eldest son. This is called **primogeniture** when the eldest son inherits all property.

Also, the family functioned to satisfy just about all individual needs. Everything from medical care to education, housing, job training, midwifery. Everything was done through the family or family connections. In pre-industrial societies, the family really was the foundational institution in society. For most people, almost all of whom were peasants, there was little interaction with the political centers. Few people interacted with the Lords except during tax time or depended on the lords for more than the military protection they received. Maybe a commoner might take a grievance to the Lord for resolution. That was it. The family was almost completely insular, with some other family networks that filled in any missing functions.

This kind of arrangement privileged large, extended family structures. Infant mortality was high. Most children didn't live past age five. So women were expected to become pregnant...a lot. This was also dangerous because many women died in childbirth. But children were an economic necessity. As soon as children were physically able to perform labor, they did so. Peasant children started doing chores on the farms pretty much from the moment they were able to use their gross motor skills. The more children one had, the more likely some of those children would survive, the more people were able to be economic producers for the family. But for the very young, there was little difference between childhood and adulthood.

Of course, children in peasant families performed farm labor at a young age. Another characteristic of societies based on animal-drawn plows is that a **gendered division of labor** was incentivized. In the early Middle Ages, when plows were hand-held, both men and women performed very similar tasks. The animal-driven plow allowed for a separation of labor. Men, having on average greater upper body strength, more efficiently engaged the plow. Women were then more engaged in domestic tasks. We start to see a division of labor in which **men perform the instrumental tasks** of market production, and **women do the nurturing tasks** of raising the young children and maintaining the household. This is not as clear as it seems. Commoners did whatever was necessary to survive. It was not unusual in the late Middle Ages to see women working the plows while men dug wells or some such. Even in craftsman families, women often worked in the workshops alongside the men. For working class people the divisions were not so clear.

As families became better off economically, however, this gendered division of labor became much clearer and the expectations more strict. Among craftsmen, boys learned the family trade while girls learned domestic tasks. Boys worked side by side with their fathers in the workshops. Boys who did not show aptitude for the trade, or extra boys who were not needed in the workshops would often be apprenticed to other tradesmen from about age seven until around age fourteen. This apprenticeship was, pretty similar to slavery. The child would be brought to a

tradesman and would live permanently with that family as the father's servant in the workshop. In the course of those seven years, the child would learn the trade until they could become independent journeymen around age fourteen. Upon demonstrating mastery to a trade guild with a "masterpiece", the young man would then be able to set up his own shop and take on his own apprentices. This was working-class education. A child with exceptional acumen might be sent to a monastery or seminary to become a priest. This was considered a great status achievement for the family.

Working-class girls served a different function. They were to be married, their marriages strategically designed to advance the family's status. For instance, if I am a carpenter, it might be a great economic boon to be tied by family to a mason. We could share jobs with each other and become more marketable. So, I might be inclined to marry one of my daughters to one of the mason's sons to seal that relationship.

Of course, that means I would have to provide some incentive for the mason to marry one of his sons to my daughter. To sweeten the pot, my daughter would enter the marriage with a dowry, or something of value that she would bring to the new family. Upon marriage, the young woman was expected to start having children...specifically male children. This arrangement was often problematic for families with a large number of daughters. If a family had too many daughters, some were often sent to nunneries or even sold into servitude. Often the youngest daughter (or least "marriageable"...meaning homely) was dedicated to taking care of her parents if they were lucky enough to live to old age. She would become a "spinster".

This means that marriages were almost exclusively economic or even political arrangements. Love, as we know it, was not really the focus. As a young person, your parents would arrange a marriage for the interests of the family as a whole. The typical process worked much like this (with some variation related to culture). Young girls were often sequestered in the household until they became of "marriageable" age...usually upon reaching menarche, their first menstrual period. This was often around age fourteen or fifteen (it's earlier today. I blame the hormones in our chicken...but I could be wrong!).

At this point, the young woman would be presented as marriageable. For working-class girls, that meant she would be brought to the marketplace in her best clothes so that all of the families could see her and know that she was ready to be wed. For wealthier or upper-class families this often involved some kind of "coming out" celebration in which the young girl was introduced to upper-class young men and their families. Here, the young girl would demonstrate her sociability, etiquette, and even her talent with singing and musical instruments.

Bidding would then commence. Parents might make the choice exclusively, in which case the prospective husband and wife may have been given some time to get to know each other...under strict supervision. Or maybe not. A young man might see a young woman and become enamored with her. If that were the case, he would first seek permission from his parents to pursue a courtship with her. He would then speak to the girl's father and ask for permission to court his daughter. If he passed the deadbeat test by demonstrating that he came from a good family and had good prospects and something to offer to the girl's family in terms of status and economic

potential, then the girl's mother and aunts would take charge of the courtship. He would be allowed to visit and bring gifts...under strict supervision...until they decided to marry.

A lot of this is actually captured by some of the quaint customs we associate with the marriage ceremony. In reality, these customs were not so quaint. For instance, the tradition of the father giving the bride away was, at the time, a literal transaction. In other words, the father had dominion (literally control of the daughter that comes from her living with him) up until he gave the bride away. At that point, dominion passed to the husband. The vows for the husband were to "love, honor, and cherish". The young bride was expected to "love, honor, and obey." Obey was non-negotiable. Sometimes, when the young man lifted the veil, that was the first time he may have even laid eyes on his intended. Kissing the bride was literally expected to be the first kiss between the two.

At that point, a contract was made between the two families. This contract was to be signed in blood...specifically, her blood. This was especially true when wealth and titles were on the line. Peasant marriages had more margin for error on this, but upper-class and noble families...not so much. The young woman was expected to be a virgin as defined by having an intact maidenhead. She would, therefore, bleed during the consummation (s.e.x) of the marriage on the wedding night. The more wealth, the more formal this process. After the wedding, the young couple would be led to the wedding chamber, the bedroom. The room was made up with fresh linens and went through some kind of ritual to purify the room of bad spirits and maximize fertility. The couple would be led to the bed, often a four-post bed with curtains around it. The curtains would be drawn and someone would be by the bed as a witness, often the bride's mother, but could be more in the case of high nobility. "Sounds of consummation" would be listened for. When the sounds stopped, the curtains would be opened and the bed sheets examined for virginal blood. Upon finding the virginal blood, the marriage was official. Some cultures would even display the sheets!

If she didn't bleed...that was a problem! The marriage could be annulled to great shame for the young woman's family. She would often be sent to a nunnery for the rest of her life. This was why such great care was taken to protect a wealthy young woman's "chastity" defined as the physical existence of the hymen. This is why young women rode side saddle and avoided physical exertion. This is also another incentive for marrying young. Again, for peasant girls and working-class girls, this was not such an issue, but for nobility, kingdoms may have rest on the matter! No blood on the sheets may have meant two kingdoms going to war and shedding very different blood. I'm not describing this to be prurient. This was a big deal!

Of course, we all know that sometimes, teenagers don't make the best decisions when it comes to...um...preserving chastity. Also, physiologically, her maidenhead may not have been intact for any number of reasons unrelated to sex. In such cases, there were other ways to sign the contract that were looked down upon, but if kept discrete were often ignored. A young woman may, for instance, cut her heel. Also, they may also have procured a bladder of goat's blood from a local apothecary and broke that on the sheets. It was understood that a young man would certainly not allow such chicanery if there was a chance that she had lost her virginity to another man, so if he was good with the blood, everyone was good with the blood. Celebration!

At this point, the young woman had one job. She was to start having babies. Specifically, she was expected to have male babies that survived. Again, for peasant women, there was more leeway. In many ways, it could be argued, when it came to marriage, peasants, especially peasant women had more freedom than princesses! For noblewomen, upon whom the legacy of titles and property rested, that male heir was paramount to all else.

Upon having children, especially male children, women enjoyed an immediate increase in status. The title of mother or matron became very important. Even husbands in many Western cultures, would refer to their wives as "mother" upon her having children.

I often like to finish this lecture by looking at one of my favorite dysfunctional families. That of King Henry VIII of England. Maybe I'll dedicate Day 13 to Henry.



## Marriages of Henry VIII



At this point I like to talk about one of my favorite personalities from history. Henry VIII and his numerous marriages. I like to talk about this because it's a great story, and in the telling you will see the spectrum of norms and values associated with marriage and family in pre-industrial/modern societies.

Remember, however, this is the story of a king, the pinnacle of the social strata at the time and certainly does not represent everyone or even most people. But there are a couple of things we know. First, we know from sociologist Thorsten Veblen in his [Theory of the Leisure Class](#) that upper class values will often trickle down to the masses. Veblen was a modernist, but his theories should apply across the board if they are any good. Secondly, as we'll see, the norms and values were constraining on Henry despite the fact that he was king. He hated them, fought them, in some cases changed them, but in many ways was bound by them.

So, even peasants were bound by many of the same norms, though because the stakes were not quite so high as they were for Henry, there was more flexibility. But even peasant families entered into marriages for often political and economic reasons. Some savvy peasants actually became quite wealthy. It's important to understand, however, that pre-modern societies practiced mostly **Endogamous Marriages**. In other words, people married within their own class and

cultural milieu. Peasants married other peasants. Kings selected wives from the upper nobility. Working class married working class. In the west today we accept what are called **Exogamous Marriages**, it is acceptable to marry outside of our social group and class...though there are still elements of endogamy involved.

Also, there's some historical context because, of course there is! England had just experienced a brutal, bloody, destabilizing civil war called the [Wars of the Roses](#) between the House of York and the House of Lancaster for control of the kingdom. The civil war ended when Henry Tudor, a Lancaster, defeated and [killed Richard III](#) at the [Battle of Bosworth Field](#). Henry Tudor then married Elizabeth of York to unite the houses and end the war. He became Henry VII. When Henry VIII became king upon the death of his father in 1509, this was the first peaceful transition of the crown in almost ninety years. So, Henry VIII's reign was really important.

Another historical factor began a few years after Henry VIII became king. A monk in Germany by the name of Martin Luther wrote 95 Theses by which he challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. This singular act became a movement called the [Protestant Reformation](#) and many schools of thought started to emerge to suggest that The Church of Rome, the dominant institution for about a thousand years, was illegitimate. In England, this movement was taken up by a fellow named William Tyndale, who dared to translate the Bible into English. Don't worry. He was allowed to be strangled to death before they set fire to him! The bottom line is, around the time of Henry VIII, there were challenges to Church authority just bubbling to the surface. Challengest that Henry will take advantage of.

All right. Let's get to it. The story begins before Henry VIII becomes king. After Henry VII won the Wars of the Roses and married Elizabeth of York, and put down a number of Yorkist uprisings, he found himself the king of a wrecked nation surrounded by very powerful nations. He needed an ally. So, here we see how marriage worked. His ministers got in contact with the ministers under King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella (yep, the folks who funded Columbus) and negotiated a treaty. Spain's power was ascendant. It had just driven the Muslim Moors from the country and consolidated power by uniting the Houses of Castille and Aragon into one powerful country. It also worked for England, who frankly needed a friend against a very powerful France.



Young Catherine of Aragon.

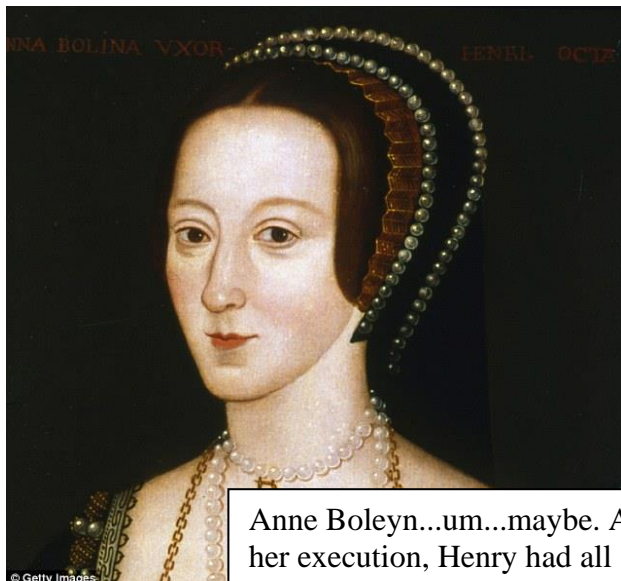
The treaty was sealed by the betrothal of the Spanish Princess Catherine to the English Crown Prince Arthur. Both Catherine and Arthur were children at this time and had exactly no say in the matter.

Arthur and Catherine were married in 1501, but Arthur became sick, presumably from [The Sweats](#), and died the next year. This was a problem. Yeah, Arthur dying so young was really sad, but the treaty between Spain and England was dependent upon this marriage. At first, a now middle-aged Henry VII considered marrying Catherine, but...ew! So Prince Henry, the new crown prince, inherited the betrothal. That's how marriage worked. It was often a purely political or contractual arrangement.

As it turned out, Catherine and Henry got along very well. Both were very intelligent and curious. Henry at this point was a young, good looking, athletic man. Catherine often ran the court while Henry was off fighting the French. They were married for over twenty years. Catherine, however, had one very tragic flaw. She proved incapable of satisfying the singular duty she had. That is, in that twenty years she was unable to bear male offspring. Out of six children, five were either still-born or died in infancy, including two boys. The only surviving child was a girl named Mary.

This is a huge problem for Henry. Henry needed a clear heir to the throne lest another civil war break out. Henry also had a penchant for...um...romantic dalliance. During this time it was understood that men, especially great men like Henry, were going to be unfaithful to their wives. Any children resulting from that infidelity, however, had no legitimate claim to any of the father's titles or estates. In 1519, Henry had a male child with his mistress, Lady Blount. His name was [Henry Fitzroy](#). So, whatever the issue was, inability to produce a male heir was squarely in Catherine's lap.

By 1530, King Henry had established a romantic relationship with a Lady of the court named Anne Boleyn and was trying to get his marriage to Catherine **annulled**. In other words, the marriage would have been treated as if it never happened. This should not have been a problem. It happened all the time. There were two legitimate reasons for an annulment. First, infidelity on the part of the woman...not the man. This was about the purity and sanctity of the bloodline. The man had an expectation that any offspring from his wife was his own. There could be no question. The second reason was infertility, often blamed on the woman. In noble households, this also meant an inability to have male offspring. Henry and his ministers pointed to a verse in the Bible forbidding a man from taking his brother's wife, Leviticus 20:21, "if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless..." They offered this as the reason for Catherine's infertility. Catherine swore that the marriage between she and Arthur was never consummated, and they were therefore not really married (unlikely, but she swore to it).



Anne Boleyn...um...maybe. After her execution, Henry had all images of her destroyed.

This shouldn't have been a problem...but it was. Catherine was the favorite aunt of Charles I of Spain...who also happened to be Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. In other words, this dude was badass! He was the most powerful man in the world, ruler of two powerful empires, and Catherine was his favorite aunt! As Holy Roman Emperor, he was also the recognized protector of the Holy Roman Catholic Church and the Pope...the guy Henry needed to sign off on his annulment. It should go without saying, Henry wasn't getting his annulment.

Henry did, however, receive some literature from Tyndale's acolytes, of which Anne Boleyn was one. This literature suggested the King was selected by God to rule his kingdom, and therefore, the king was the first and last word about religion in any kingdom. The Pope had no say in the matter. Henry liked the idea that the Pope couldn't tell him what to do. This goes along with a long standing tradition of conflict between the Church and the English Crown going back to [Henry II and Thomas a Becket](#) the Archbishop of Canterbury. Kings of England had been trying to be free of Church rule for centuries. Henry VIII saw an opportunity to do what Henry II couldn't.

To be fair, Henry did try to get the marriage annulled legitimately for years. He was a devout...ish...Roman Catholic. Eventually he just said, "to heck with it" (probably with courser language). He married Anne in 1533, declared himself the head of the Church of England and gave himself a divorce. Don't cry for Catherine of Aragon. She was fine. She was put up in a grande estate and continued to claim her rightful place as queen until she died three years later...reportedly of a broken heart.

Later that year Anne gave birth to her first child...a girl named Elizabeth. Unfortunately for Anne, she later had a miscarriage and then after that gave birth to a still-born son. She was also very unpopular in the court. She made lots of enemies, especially among the Catholics. By 1536, Henry had already moved on to other women and seems to have fallen in love with the lovely Lady Jane Seymore. Anne was imprisoned in the Tower of London, accused of adultery (adultery is bad, but when it is adultery against the King...that's also treason) and was executed by beheading. Henry was kind enough to send for the world's greatest executioner for the proceeding, so Anne's head came off in one swift chop.

Within a couple of weeks of Anne's beheading, Henry, always classy, married Jane Seymore. It looks like this really was a marriage for love. Jane was also the perfect example of a dutiful wife. In other words, she "gave" Henry a son, Prince Edward. Unfortunately, as was very common, even among the most wealthy, Jane died shortly after the birth due to infection. The marriage lasted just over a year. After her death, Henry went into a deep mourning for many months.

**Um...which one is the right Jane Seymore? HMMM...**



After Jane, Henry went unmarried for a few years. In his previous marriages he had managed to anger Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Catholic Church. He caused a religious uprising in his kingdom. It looked like Spain and France were entering a Catholic alliance against him. Henry needed a friend. So, he sent his ministers out to create an alliance. An alliance was

created with the Duke of Cleves, a Protestant German. The alliance would be sealed with Henry's marriage to the Princess Anne, otherwise known as Anne of Cleves (Anne was a popular name!).



Holbein's portrait of Anne of Cleves

The marriage was arranged before Henry and Anne met. When they did meet, Henry was less than impressed. It seems his court artist, Holbein...um...filtered Anne's portrait. When Henry saw her for the first time, he was less than inspired. To be fair, Anne was probably disappointed as well, though as a woman nobody asked her. By this time Henry was no longer the robust, athletic young jousting of his youth. He was middle-aged, fat, pock-marked and had an open, necrotic wound on his leg that smelled and would not heal. Henry and Anne spent the wedding night playing cards--Anne won! The marriage was not consummated. When it turned out that Spain and France hated each other as much as they hated England, the strategic value of the marriage ended and it was annulled without conflict from either party. Don't cry for Anne. She was given an estate and lived very well. In fact, she outlived them all, including Henry.

Shortly after his marriage to Anne was annulled Henry married Catherine "Kitty" Howard. The motivation was pretty standard. She was a lady of the court, a member of the powerful Howard family. And she was young and beautiful. Also, Henry had one son, but that was not enough to secure the throne. The rule was, "an heir and a spare." Remember, Henry himself was the spare. He needed at least one more son to secure his father's dynasty.

Catherine was seventeen when she married a much less than youthful Henry--he was forty-nine. At this point, Henry was morbidly obese, almost certainly diabetic and riddled with gout...if not syphilis. It should come as no surprise that Kitty, a teenager, did what teenagers often do, made bad decisions with regard to s.e.x. Before her marriage, Kitty was "very popular" with the young men. Some of her previous amours were still in her life. One of whom became her personal secretary--not a good look for the Queen of England. Another, Thomas Culpepper, to whom she had been previously engaged, may have rekindled their relationship...or he was blackmailing her. It's unclear from the history. Regardless, Kitty was tried for adultery and treason and beheaded. She was no more than twenty years old.



The ill-fated "Kitty" Howard

Of course, Henry still needed that elusive "spare", which by this time in his life and his state of health he was completely incapable of fulfilling. A woman in his daughter Mary's court caught his eye. She was a widow twice over and had exactly zero interest in marrying Henry--for obvious reasons! Also, she had another long time love interest whom she wanted to marry. But becoming queen would elevate her family and, could further that family's cause in promoting Protestantism in England. She reluctantly conceded to marry the rotund king.



Catherine Parr

By all reports, Catherine Parr's marriage to Henry was if not happy, a functional one. Um...there was a near threat of execution toward the end there, but she avoided it. She tended to Henry through the last sickly years of his life. She was a devoted step-mother to Henry's children, Mary, Elizabeth, and Edward. Catherine was responsible for convincing Henry to restore his daughters to the line of succession. This one action on Catherine's part may have saved England from another bout of brutal civil war. She is also the first woman in English history to publish a book in English under her own name, *The Lamentation of a Sinner*.

Henry died in bed from any number of health reasons. His body just gave out. Between the obesity of his old age, and the myriad wounds he suffered from jousting and warfare, Henry was a mess. He went to sleep, and did not wake up. Catherine Parr went on to marry her love interest, Thomas Seymore, only to be betrayed by him. She died about a year later.

After Henry's death, Prince Edward became [Edward VI](#). Though he was young, he was well educated and a devoted Protestant. He is most famous for officially declaring England a Protestant nation guided by the Church of England, the Anglican Church. However, he was a weak king, mostly manipulated by his ministers, his Uncle John Seymore, the Duke of Sumerset and then the wily John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland. Unfortunately Edward was never a particularly healthy young man. He ruled only six years before dying of consumption...what we now call tuberculosis. There was a brief civil unrest after his death when Northumberland plotted to install his daughter-in-law, [Lady Jane Grey](#), to the throne.

Lady Jane lasted about a week and a half when she was overthrown and beheaded by Henry's daughter Mary, who became [Mary I](#). You all know Mary I as Bloody Mary. She was a devout Catholic who dedicated her reign to restoring England to the Church of Rome no matter how many Protestants had to be burned at the stake. Upon Mary's death after five bloody years of rule, Anne Boleyn's daughter, Elizabeth was crowned [Elizabeth I](#). She would go down in history as one of England's greatest monarchs. She ruled for forty-five years and helped usher in a Golden Age of culture and literature during the English Renaissance--something else to thank Catherine Parr for! She died without children and thus ended the Tudor Dynasty.

The lesson, however, is about marriage and family. Hopefully, this gave you a picture of pre-industrial family and marriage. Mostly, these arrangements were practical, contractual interactions. That's not to say, however, that emotions like love or passion were not involved. It's just that they were secondary to other practical interests, often arranged by others. With one exception. Most men did not have the power to have their wives beheaded when they got mad at them. Marriages were expected to last for life, and there were few opportunities to make them shorter other than dying...which people did.

It's also a really interesting lesson on the role of women in this process. In many cases, women were often used as pawns by scheming men to gain access to wealth and power. But women were not entirely powerless. Many women played the game as well...some losing big, like Anne Boleyn...others doing fairly well for themselves, like Anne of Cleves.

## Transitioning to the Modern

A couple of days ago we talked about life in Pre-Modern societies. Pre-modern societies were very stable, despite the violence, disease, drought, and pestilence. Feudal societies in Europe shaped the culture for over a thousand years. For families this meant that there was an incentive to construct large, extended families with many children. Children helped perform the economic production. Marriages were often arranged based on economic, political, or otherwise contractual needs. Romantic love existed, but was not pre-requisite to marriage. Lifespans tended to be short, so families often extended only a couple generations. Third generations family members were often too old to contribute to the family needs. Furthermore, the family was the centerpiece for the individual. Almost all social functions relevant to the individual were satisfied by the family. Institutions like the state were barely considered until tax time or war time.

By the time Henry VIII became king, most of the variables were already in place that would lead to a disruption of this thousand year old system. But it would take time to materialize. Often times when we think of history we think of distinct eras and dates. Before this date we had pre-modern societies. After this date it became modern. That's not how it worked. Often, the people living during these transitions barely understood that it was a transition. Before modern communications technology, these transitions were glacial in their pace.

So, today I want to deal with the transition from pre-modern societies to modern societies. Again, we are dealing mostly with Europe and the United States at this point, but you can see similar phenomena anywhere. Again, I want you to understand, many of these transitions literally took centuries to come together, but when they did, beginning in the seventeenth century, they did cause some major disruptions. Then, by the eighteenth century, we see the formation of a new social era. This historical transition is really important to sociologists and plays a role in all sociological inquiry. If you do get to take A Level, or if you go on to take sociology classes in college, you'll cover a lot of the same material.



The Little Bacillus That Changed the World!



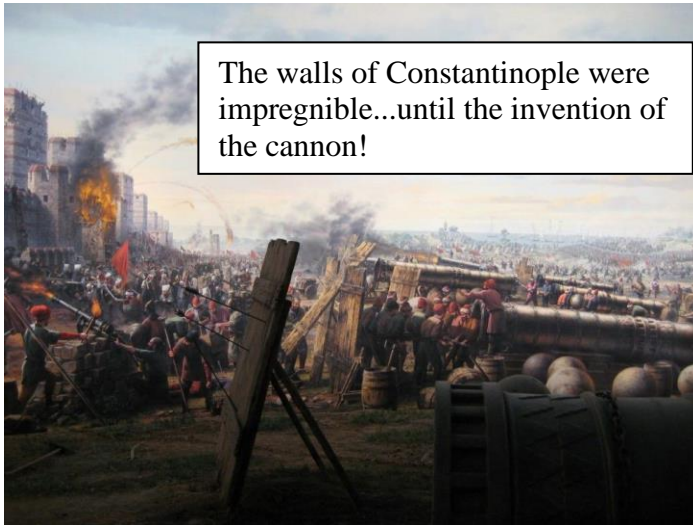
I could literally write a book on this topic, but I'll try to keep it short and sweet. A few important historical calamities took place before Henry VIII that set the stage for the modern world. First, was the Black Plague. The Black Plague ravaged much of Europe, disrupting the vassal system that held Feudalism in place. Some fiefdoms were almost completely wiped out. Lords found themselves looking at lands without serfs to do the work. Some serfs found themselves on lands no longer protected by a Lord. The disruption to labor, once populations started growing again, led some Lords to do the unthinkable...hire people for money to sow and reap the crops. This was the beginning of wage labor that our buddy Marx is going to have a lot to say about.

Also, if you have a shortage of people, but you have a lot of work to do, you may come up with clever mechanisms by which to do it. I find this fascinating. Using the same technology as water and wind powered mills, some people found some clever ways to use wheels and pullies to do things like spinning wool and even weaving cloth. We see the first remnants of a mechanized factory system. [Slater Mill](#) in Rhode Island is considered the first factory in the United States. It ran entirely on water running down the Pawtuxet River.



**The Black Plague caused people to start questioning the Roman Catholic Church's story about God's role in the world. This was the story that bound the Feudal world together. What happens when people stop buying the story?**

Another contribution of the Black Plague is it caused people to doubt the validity of the Roman Catholic Church as a vehicle for God to communicate to the masses. The Plague took everyone out, sinners and saints, priests and prostitutes. Nobody was safe. The go-to explanation was that God was PO'd about something...but what? This catastrophe led people to start thinking about other ways to communicate with God or even if communicating with God was such a good idea.



The fifteenth century saw a major catastrophe and some opportunities that changed the balance of power in Europe. Up to that time, most of the economic power in Europe was centered in the Italian city states, especially Florence, Genoa, Milan. These Italian cities were the doorway to trade with Asia via Constantinople and the Silk Road. In 1453 Constantinople fell to the Seljuk Turks. The Byzantine Empire, the last vestige of the Roman Empire ceased to exist. This did two things.

First, Constantinople was the repository for Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Persian scholarship. Many of those scholars packed their libraries and skedaddled to Italy. Their presence in Italy became a driving force for the re-awakening of Classical studies...that is the philosophies and literature of Ancient Greece and Rome. This helped spur the Renaissance. Rediscovery of folks like Aristotle, Plato, Aeschylus, etc. inspired a new philosophical movement called humanism. This is the movement that inspired me to study the history of ideas and got me into the sociology of knowledge. I have a bias on this one. Anyway, humanists believed that human beings were good and capable of perfection. That human intellect was all that was necessary to understand the universe around us. Humanists [believed](#)--and still believe--that human beings have a responsibility to live uplifting and fulfilling lives and to help others do the same. An uplifting and fulfilling life was one in which an individual could exercise his (at the time it was his, not her) reason and creativity to make the world a little bit better. This was a challenge to the belief that the primary responsibility of the individual was to serve God, and then serve his Lord.

Also during this time we see the development of another very important technology. Gunpowder. It was Hungarian cannons that brought down the walls of Constantinople. Cannon use meant that castles were no longer meaningful defensive technologies. Artillery became a central feature of any effective army, but the expense associated with cannons was more than most lords could pay. Dukes and Kings were often the only ones with enough resources to create artillery units. When the cannons became small enough to be held in hand...what we call muskets...this was a huge boon to those Dukes wealthy enough consign gunsmiths and to offer commoners money to join a large army.

Again, castles were going obsolete. If you wanted to protect your territory, you needed a large army. But knights required a lifetime of training and were very expensive. There weren't enough around to do the job. But if you take an average person, put a musket in their hands, it doesn't

take much training to make that person more than a match for any knight. Soon, Dukes could raise large armies with regiments of "musketeers". These Dukes used this military technology to become kings and to consolidate their "kingdoms" into nations with defensible boundaries. They could also use these new soldiers to patrol their streets and make sure the highways were free of "highwaymen" who would steal and rob those using the highways. Once kings' soldiers controlled the highways, trade became easier. But these kings also needed to raise taxes in order to fund these now large, wage-earning armies. So, steady tax structures had to be put into place. Those kings who could pull this off benefited from large, powerful kingdoms like France and Spain, later England.

Another thing the Fall of Constantinople did was, it made trade with India and China a lot more expensive. European merchants would have to travel through Ottoman controlled territory. If the Silk Roads weren't closed, they would have to pay high taxes to the Sultan. This incentivized the desire to find other ways to get to India and China. See where this is going? Fortunately for Europeans, especially the Portuguese and the Spanish at that time, there was a development of a new technology. Actually, it was an amalgam of some older technologies. Portuguese sailors took the wide, shallow hulls of Viking longboats, fitted them with Arabic Lateen Sails, outfitted them with Chinese compasses, armed with canons using Chinese gunpowder. They had a versatile ship called the Caravelle that could tack against the prevailing winds and navigate without having to sight land.



The caravel could tack against the wind and navigate shallow bays. For the first time Europeans were able to circumnavigate Africa.

Using the Caravelle, explorers from Portugal found an all-water route

to "the Indies" around the Cape of Good Hope in Africa. This was significant. But the most significant thing to happen was an ill-planned voyage by a Genoan sailor funded by the Spanish King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Yep, I'm talking about Christopher Columbus. Columbus is important not because he "discovered America". He was important because he was the first European to establish a permanent presence in the Americas, creating massive opportunities for trade and, of course, conquest. He, and those who came after him, were responsible for what historians call [The Columbian Exchange](#).

When you learned about the Columbian Exchange in history class, you learned it pretty quick. It was a thing you needed to know for the test. But the Columbian Exchange was a massive social structure. It was a sociological phenomenon. People had to set it up, from the folks who loaded and unloaded the ships to the Kings who chartered the expeditions. The central players in this structure were the merchants who had the knowledge and expertise for organizing such systems, as well as the money and the financial savvy to fund and profit from them. The Columbian Exchange is going to transform the world in ways that you already know. Diseases will wipe out

more people as a result of the Columbian Exchange than did the Black Plague. Animals and plants will be transported and find ecological niches all over the world in places they had never been before, transforming and even destroying environments and altering cultures like the indigenous Comanche and Souix on the American Great Plains. Other species will go extinct.

Sociologically, the biggest transition will be in the empowerment of the merchants, which in France were called the Bourgeoisie...(Yep, you see where this is going). The Bourgeoisie in Feudal society was looked down upon. They were members of the commoner class, the Third Estate in France. Wealthy Bourgeoisie (Borghese in Italy, Burghers in Germany, etc.) often had some influence through merchant guilds and such. In some cultures they had higher status, such as England, and Holland. The Columbian Exchange, however, created a massive transfer of wealth from the Americas, and later the rest of the world, to Europe. Much of this wealth passed through the hands of the Bourgeoisie and was used as a new kind of financial technology...Capital. They could then invest this capital in myriad ways. Often, they made loans to noble lords. They often purchased land, making them landlords even if they did not have the noble title that traditionally went to landowners.

They also invested that money in new technologies that could pay off for them in the end. One of the most significant of these new technologies was in invention by which steam could be used to pump water out of coal mines. Coal was becoming very important for working iron to make tools, especially guns. Over time, this new "steam engine" was applied to other uses, until an Englishman named James Watt invented one that was versatile to use in a myriad of different ways. In the mid eighteenth century the Industrial Age was born, first in England, but ultimately spreading through much of Europe. Steam engines could be used to power this other new social technology called The Factory. Societies that embraced industry soon transformed from nations in which most economic production took place in the countryside, on the farms, to one in which most production took place in the cities, in factories.

So, the question is, for our purposes, what kinds of transformations might we see as societies shift from surplus agriculture to industrial production? Brainstorm what you think will happen to European families.

## Talcott Parsons: The Fit Thesis

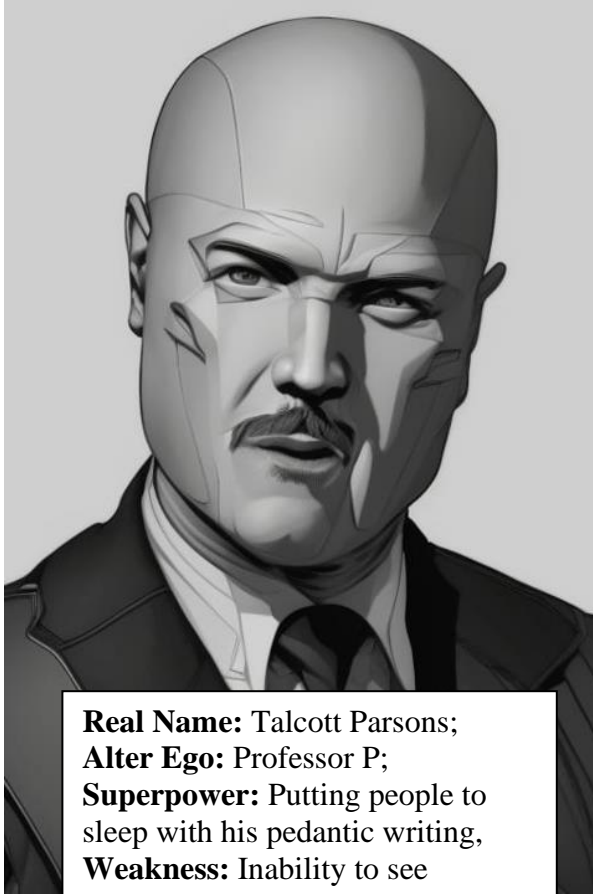
The last couple of days I've elaborated what life was like in Pre-Industrial societies...focusing mostly on Europe. Then I highlighted the elements contributing to the development of the Modern or Industrial World. What were those elements?

- Rise of a Capitalist economy
- Rise of a professional middle-class
- Investment in Industrial technologies
- Secularization and "Enlightenment" thinking emphasizing science and reason
- Urbanization: People leaving the countryside to work in the cities
- Nationalization: Increased control of nation-states over fiefdoms, duchies, etc.
- Bureaucratization: State level and Business level organization of social life
- Small "R" republican forms of government

Most historians agree that the very first of what we could call a "modern" society was England in the eighteenth century. Why England? The answer is complex, but for the most part it has to do with how England managed all of the above factors. The England of Henry VIII was a midling, second-rate power that had to dance around the bigger powers like France and Spain. By the eighteenth century, however, England was a global power. It had an expansive empire from which it was extracting a significant amount of wealth. This empire was held together with the most powerful navy in world history. It had incorporated its bourgeoisie into the legitimate exercise of power within its parliamentary system relatively peacefully (not peacefully, mind you, but relatively peacefully). This bourgeoisie was not just central to English wealth, but also to English higher education, thinking, culture, especially science, politics, and economics. It had the resources to industrialize, especially access to iron and coal. It could organize national level social forces into a singular national entity. By the middle of eighteenth century England was the center of a United Kingdom of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales with an expanding global empire.

England's foray into modernization provided so many benefits, political, economic, and cultural, that other nations had to find ways to compete or be left behind. Modernism thus spread throughout Europe and North America, later adopted by Japan and then China among other nations. By the end of the 19th century, much of the world was composed either of modern nations, or territories subject to the power of modern nations.

But this is a class on family. The question is, **how did modernity influence family structures?** To help answer this question let me introduce you to the first new theory to be learned this semester (YES! Back to learning theories!).



**Real Name:** Talcott Parsons;  
**Alter Ego:** Professor P;  
**Superpower:** Putting people to sleep with his pedantic writing,  
**Weakness:** Inability to see anything outside of the middle class

This theory was put forth by our buddy [Talcott Parsons](#). We were introduced to Parsons during first quarter when we were going over the Functionalist Perspective, or Structural Functionalism. Parsons was the guy who theorized the "function of institutions" that can be broken down into the acronym **AGIL**. For Parsons, all societies must **Adapt** to their environment, Establish legitimate **Goals**, **Integrate** members or citizens, and reproduce itself through established **Latency**. Family as an institution, as far as Parsons was concerned, were central to all four of these functions for the larger society. This was especially true in pre-industrial societies. Of course, every institution, including families, also have to answer the same AGIL questions for themselves. They have to adapt, set goals, integrate members, and reproduce. That's just a quick review of Parson's [Action Model](#), or the Functions of Institutions.

But Parsons' look at the history caused him to consider some of the changes that were happening to families as societies shifted from pre-industrial, Mechanical (remember our buddy

Emile) societies to Organic, modern societies. Parsons posited what is known as the "Fit Thesis" or the "[Functional Fit Thesis](#)". This theory suggests that as societies change from pre-modern to modern, the family will change to fit the new needs of society. The family will shift its focus according to the AGIL model. So, what does this look like.

According to Parsons, in pre-modern societies, life was largely sedentary...in other words, people didn't move around very much. Most people in pre-modern societies lived out their lives within the same ten mile radius, rarely travelling beyond that. Economic activity took place around the household and was mostly involved in agriculture or craftwork. The state was rarely involved in an individual's daily life. Everything the individual needed, he could find within the family and immediate community.

In such societies, large, extended family networks were an advantage. Lineage in the families were known to all as generation grew up next to generation. Families derived status through ascription...in other words, family names were meaningful and not to be taken lightly. One did not act in such a way as to bring shame to the family. Families exercised rigid social control over individuals.

In modern societies, however, things were different. Less labor was often needed on the farms and economic opportunities could be found elsewhere, especially the growing cities surrounding important trade ports. Families had to become mobile. This encouraged the development of insular nuclear families consisting of two parents and children. It was much easier to pack up a nuclear family than an extended family and move to the city, and then move again as jobs became available elsewhere.

Families were no longer participating in economic activity around their households. People were working for wages by, "going to work." The household was, increasingly, an urban tenement where one went to sleep between travelling to a factory to participate in economic production. We start to see a split between the household and direct economic production. In modern societies the ideal arrangement was one in which the adult male "went to work" while the adult female remained in the household to take care of the domestic and nurturing work of the household. Individuals worked to advance their own nuclear families rather than extended family relations. Work was no longer passed on through traditional arrangements of family trade. Individuals were now responsible for adapting to the needs of the economy, learning skills that could increase their income paid by a capitalist owner.

This movement to the cities meant that people were no longer able to feed themselves. They had to buy food. They also couldn't turn to extended family for help on things like health care, child care, education and other functions. Indeed, increased population in the cities was becoming a huge problem. Dangerous and dirty slums were being thrown up to house the migrants coming to the city, with no rules about how these dwellings were to be built. Fires devastated cities. Disease like Cholera spread as a result of unsanitary conditions. Poor people crammed together in tiny hovels created pools of desperation, homelessness, gang and criminal activity. In these cities, increasingly, the state had to create rules, and police those rules in order to regulate the urban environment.

Parsons recognized that, increasingly, the functions that used to be satisfied by families were now being exercised by the state and other institutions. Families received their pay from the market. They sought medical care from clinics. Sent their children to schools to receive an education. Of course, all of these things cost money. As the modern system grew and advanced, the number of rules increased. Soon, for instance, schools for children were not private services that those who could afford it sent their children to. They were public services that families were required to send their kids to. It took a long time for these rules to be debated and implemented, but today you can go to a huge city like New York and not have feces dropped on your head! Urban life is possible because of these rules.

But these rules also mean that families lost many of the functions that pre-industrial families were responsible for. If families keep losing functions to the state and to the marketplace, then will there come a time when families have no functions at all? Parsons didn't think so. He identified two "irreducible functions" of the family. First, families provide **Primary Socialization** of children. It is in the family that children first learn the norms and values of the larger society.

For Parsons, one of the values learned in families is what he called **Gender Role Socialization**. Boys were socialized to perform the "instrumental tasks" of the family. In other words, they learned how to provide resources to the family (Adaptability). Boys were raised to be the "breadwinners" to perform maintenance tasks in the household, fix stuff, and also to take on the role of disciplinarian. The male, being the main economic provider, was presumably in charge of the family. Girls were socialized to perform the "expressive tasks." In other words, she learned how to care for children and perform domestic chores around the household. Her job was to provide the care for those in the household. This was a subordinate role.

The second irreducible function is the **Stabilization of Adult Personalities**. This means a lot of things. For the most part, when people, especially men, have families that they must care for, they become a lot more cooperative. A single man with a crappy job might be inclined to say, "screw it!" and quit...or even deck his supervisor. A man with a wife and kids at home will likely just suck-up whatever he has to in order to pay the bills. Adults with families, again especially men, are less likely to be sexually promiscuous. Finally, for Parsons, modern economies are very stressful...yep! especially for men! The family becomes the refuge for men returning to their domestic household after a long day and relaxing in the embrace of his loving wife and adoring children. This is often referred to as the **Warm Bath Theory**.

Task 1: Create a comparison between Pre-Modern and Modern Families.

Task 2: In what ways does Parson's Fit Thesis effectively explain the differences between Pre-Modern and Modern Families?

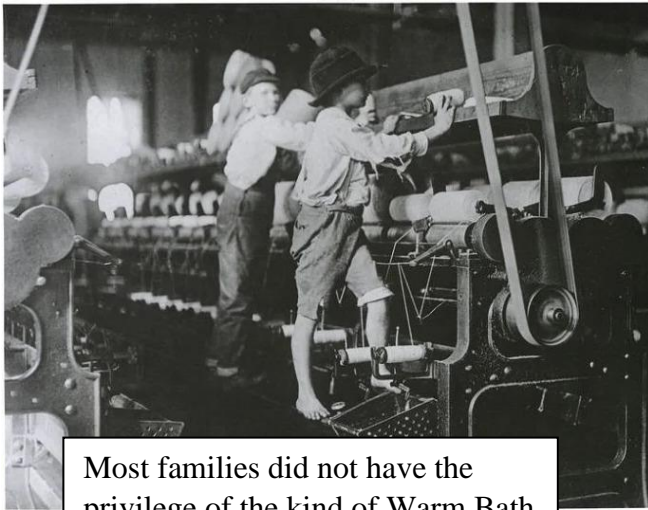
Task 3: Where does Parsons fall short with his Fit Thesis? What are some weaknesses to this theory.



## Modern Families and the Conflict Perspective

terday we started focusing on theories of the family. The first good theory of the family comes from our friend Talcott Parsons. To review, Parsons tried to explain the changes taking place in the family in modern times from large, sedentary extended families in pre-modern societies to relatively small, nuclear families in modern times. He suggested a "Fit Thesis" by which the changes in family can be explained by looking at changes in the overall society. In this case, the transition from pre-modern to modern societies encouraged the primacy of nuclear families because of their mobility and insularity. Overall, this isn't a bad explanation.

You may have identified some problems with Parsons' theory. The one standout problem with the "Fit Thesis" is in the time periods that it is discussing. Traditional marriages remained the norm well after the mid-eighteenth century. Indeed, traditional marriages mostly dominated well into the nineteenth century. Was Parsons really describing an element of modernity, or late modernity? A lot of what we consider common sense with regard to marriage and the nuclear family was really a construct of the early twentieth century.



Most families did not have the privilege of the kind of Warm Bath family described by Parsons

For instance, the centrality of love as a natural development with regard to marriage emerged in the nineteenth century. As modern society progressed, and families became more insular, and mobile, the emotional bonds of matrimony became more important. Parents didn't necessarily select their children's spouses based on practical, economic factors. The role of the intended couple in the function of courtship increased, while the role of parents decreased. Increasingly, courtship was dedicated to building love before marriage. Increasingly, but not exclusively. It really isn't until the twentieth century that we see an expectation that love will precede marriage.

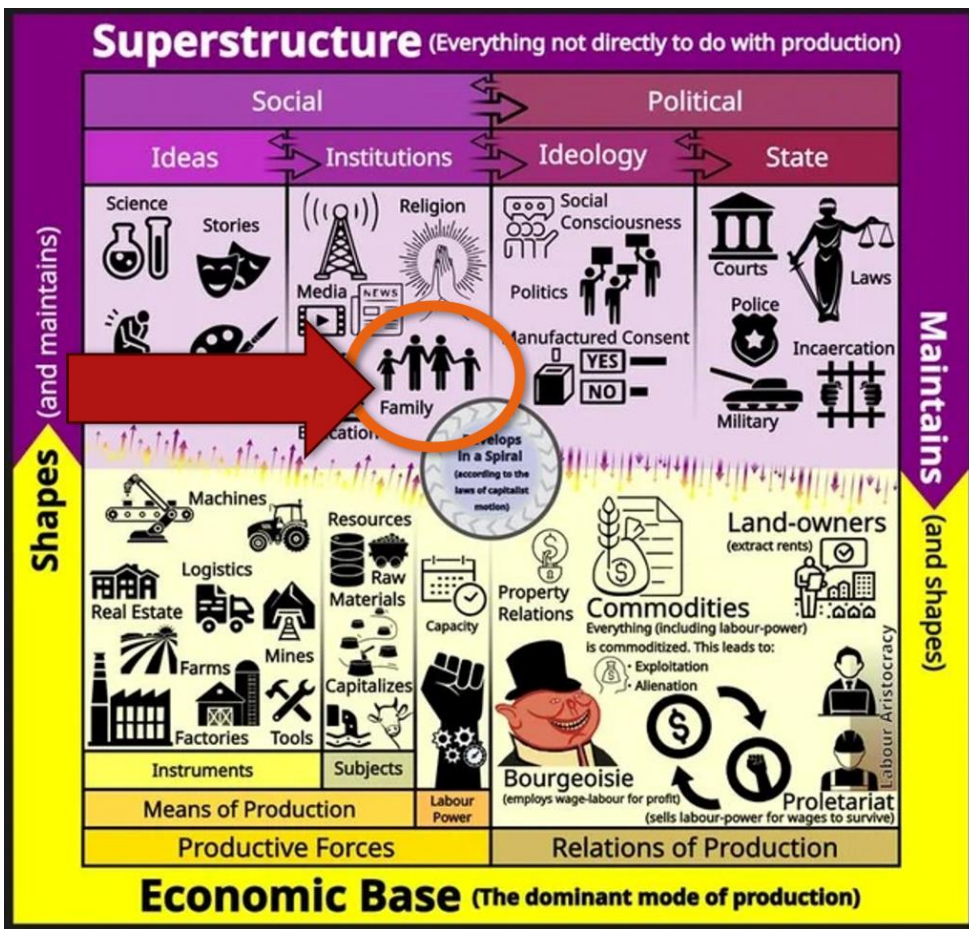
But the biggest weakness attributed to Parsons' Fit Thesis is its middle-class bias. What Parsons was describing was a middle-class ideal of marriage as it existed in the mid-twentieth century that did not necessarily correspond with reality.

The modern age led to the growth of an educated, professional middle-class. These were largely men who, because they had skillsets that could only be attained through higher education that most people couldn't afford, they were able to negotiate wages by which they could build up their own surplus. In other words, they made enough money to take care of their needs, some of their wants, and have some money left over as capital. This professional middle-class was still dependent upon the capitalists, but they made enough money that mother could remain home and be a housewife, taking care of the kids and the domestic tasks. This was Parsons' Gendered

Division of Labor. Furthermore, the family household was distinct from the workplace, and served as that "Warm Bath" to the men mentioned yesterday.

But if you've read your Dickens...and I know you all have, because of course you have, you know that this kind of lifestyle was not the norm for most people. Working class families often did not enjoy the privilege of Dad going to work and Mom staying home to bake the cookies. They couldn't afford cookies...let alone Mom staying home. In working-class families, often all members worked. Children were often sent to the factories at very young ages.

Nor were households distinct from the work place. Early manufacturing was often done through a "[putting out](#)" system by which the household became a mini-factory for production. Factories were introduced later in order to improve supervision and increase efficiency (Remember Weber's [Rationalization Theory](#)). Yet right up even to when I was a young Androsia, the remnants of the putting out system remained in the form of "piece work." Factory workers were "allowed" to take home simple tasks, like sewing buttons onto shirts, to be paid by the piece. Every shirt with buttons would be worth so many cents. Often all members of the family were involved in this piecework, in this case sewing buttons on shirts, in order to make extra money.



Nor was it true that men went off to work in the factories while women stayed home. This really didn't happen until the twentieth century and the rise of unions. Through most of the modern age, women, especially young women, were a significant part of factory labor. In fact, one of the biggest labor strikes in U.S. history was the [Lowell Textile strike](#), almost entirely conducted and organized by women.

Now, if we are going to do a class critique...now we are talking about Marxism and the Conflict Perspective. Remember, for Marxist sociologists, the family is a part of the [Superstructure](#). In other

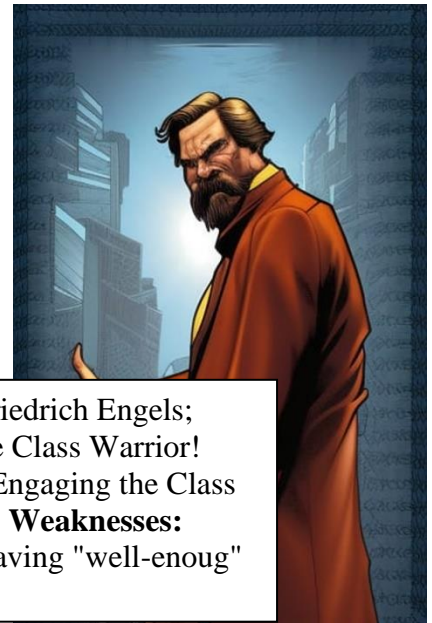
words, it is sustained by the economic base, in this case via wages. In return, the family helps to sustain Capitalism. This is a pretty radical way to look at the family. We don't look at our

families as existing to sustain capitalism. But even Parsons touches on this. What Parsons sees as "stabilizing adult personalities," conflict theorists see as serving as a means to coerce people into serving the dominant group. In other words, you have to do what your boss says or your family will starve. There! Nice, stable, adult personalities! Doesn't sound so good when you put it that way!

For Marxist Theorists, the family is part of the Superstructure.

Where functionalists see the family as the institution of primary socialization, the Marxist theorist sees the family as socializing children with "ruling class [ideologies](#)." Families also become a site by which labor is produced, by having children, prepared through socialization, and cared for assuring fit and healthy workers. As you can imagine, most of this production of labor is work done by women...work that is uncompensated. Also, families become a focus of advertising and consumption as discussed by Eli Zarestski in his [The Family and Personal Life](#).

Maybe the central text for Marxist interpretations of the family comes from our friend Friedrich Engels. As it stands, I really don't have to spend much time elaborating on Engels and his book *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* because I already have. I wrote this blog during the COVID Pandemic to help my students understand Engels. No sense reinventing the wheel. [So here it is](#).



**Real Name:** Friedrich Engels;  
**Alter Ego:** The Class Warrior!  
**Superpower:** Engaging the Class Consciousness; **Weaknesses:** Incapable of leaving "well-enough" alone!

## Review of Modern Families

Okay, so we've covered a lot of territory. We have focused on the transition between Pre-Modern and Modern societies and the impact on families. You have two contrasting theories by which to explain this transition, Functionalist and the Fit Thesis and Conflict Marxist.

So, this is a good time to stop, organize the information to retain it. I would suggest that you set up some way to compare and evaluate the two theories. You might ask yourselves some questions that might appear in some way on the AICE Exam.

For instance:

- To what extent do families meet the needs of the larger society?
- To what extent do families meet the needs of its members?
- To what extent is the nuclear family a functional component of society?
- To what extent is the nuclear family a universal characteristic of modern societies?
- To what extent do individuals benefit from being part of a family?

Furthermore, you want to have an idea as to which theory you think is the best for explaining the evolution of families from traditional/pre-modern societies to modern societies? Which changes do you think were most significant?

I want to elaborate one more thing about this transition into modern families. We have to remember that society never just changes. Societies tend to be conservative (I'm not necessarily talking about the political sense here, but to a certain extent we can also think of this in political terms). In other words, they tend to resist change. When change becomes unavoidable, societies tend to make a few changes as necessary. Therefore, there's never a concrete date upon which *everything changed*. To exemplify this, during the pandemic we heard a lot about how, after lockdowns and social distancing, everything was going to change. Did it? We heard the same thing after 9/11. The Great Recession. How much did things change? Some things changed, but a great deal of social energy in all three cases was dedicated to minimizing change. Sociologists are always skeptical of the "noweverthingisgoingtochange" discourse.

The same holds true here. It was not like families carried on in traditional ways, then we entered the modern age and everything changed. That's not how it happened. The process was slow. There were some changes that were already taking place before modernity. As modernity developed, most of the people experiencing it had no idea what was happening. Many traditions continued on just as ever before. This continued until one day we looked back and said, "wow! this is different." But it was only different in retrospect.

So, I would look at the modern era as divided up into three periods. I would call them Transitional Modern, Developing Modern, and Modern. We can look at them in almost human development terms. Transitional Modern corresponds with childhood. Developing Modern with

adolescence, and Modern with early adulthood. I'm not using "Late Modern" for reasons that will become apparent later. Just to be clear, these are Mr. Andoscia terms, not necessarily terms that AICE or any other sociologists uses. I'm using them to help paint a picture.

In Transitional Modern we see one country, England, developing the industrial infrastructure necessary for a modern world. Soon, other European nations will do the same. This was a period when powerful kings were consolidating nation-states (except in England where kings were losing power). Capitalism was just starting to become distinguishable as a new system that Adam Smith would write about in his *Wealth of Nations*. We are starting to see early movement from the countryside to the cities. We are also seeing wealthy commoners buying up land despite not having noble titles to the land. This was a big deal with the [Enclosure Movement](#) that, hopefully, you learned about in AICE International. This period continues on from about the middle of the 1700s until the early 1800s, culminating with French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.

After the Napoleonic Wars the Feudal System had been uprooted. This was a politically and socially conservative time. Every effort was made to try to restore the old system, but too many changes had taken place during French upheavals...don't forget, the French Revolution took place in 1789 and did not end until the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. If you were born in 1789, you were twenty-six when Napoleon was finally defeated. You had likely started your own families, were in a profession and had enjoyed certain rights and liberties. You may even have some property that you owned despite being a mere commoner. You were unlikely to want to go back to the old system.

This is where modernism starts to gather steam and develops quickly...just like adolescence. Capitalist investors started to invest in factories all over Europe. Goods were produced more cheaply and were available to more people. People lived longer, including more babies living into adulthood. Industrial techniques improved made farming more efficient, thus forstalling [Malthus' prediction](#) of population calamity. This led to more people leaving the countryside for the cities, driving down labor values, fueling the factories. Cities grew exponentially often revealing the slimy underbelly of early capitalism and industrialization. Sections of the city were reserved for the wealthy. Other sections were hellish and crime ridden slums.

This is the period described by Dickens and Stephen Crain and others. This is the period that Marx and Engels were developing their theories. Political movements were rising to challenge the inequities of the modernism and urbanism, including labor unions, socialist movements, and populist movements. Still, many traditions with regard to marriage were being carried forward. Love is, however, becoming more important with regard to marriage.

By the 1880s we start to see these reform movements making progress throughout the modern world. In countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, where governments are more responsive to popular will, there is a demand made on the state to level some of the inequities associated with modern capitalism. There was also the threat posed by socialists to the existing order. Germany and Italy are unified under kingdoms, but under kings and emperors who also had to contend with pressure from the streets to improve the lives of common people. By the beginning of the 20th century, we start to see laws passed with regard to city growth and infrastructure, especially sewer systems which were very important. Public goods were invested

in. Laws were passed to mandate basic education, limit child labor. Unions were winning better work conditions. A middle-class was starting to develop, shaping the culture and providing a goal for many lower and working class people that was reasonably attainable...thus influencing many of Talcott Parsons' theories.

World War I disrupted this adolescent period of modernity, but didn't stop it. Rather, World War I was the end of the old, traditional, political regimes and the rise of small "R" republican government throughout Europe. In other words, the nobility was no longer in charge in any meaningful way. The Great Depression was another significant disruption by which people turned to the state to redress their poverty upon the threat of burning it all down. By the end of World War II, the modern political economy had matured to mostly what we think about today. Most nations had adopted some version of what we call Social Democracy. We had capitalist markets, with state mitigation of the downsides through the provision of social safety nets and public goods. In the United States this was called the New Deal. After World War II this system helped create the most significant period of economic growth in world history.

It may have also been the beginning of the end for modernity and the birth of a new era, called the Postmodern. Tomorrow, I'll elaborate on the development of the postmodern era and its impact of family structures.