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49 *Guardian*, 17 January 1984.
50 C.A. Moser, 1972, *op. cit.* in note 1, p. 28.
51 *Ibid.*
52 Home Office Statistical Department, *op. cit.* in note 34, para. 18.
53 *Searchlight*, March 1982.
54 *Guardian*, *op. cit.* in note 49.
55 Home Affairs Committee, 1983, *op. cit.* in note 12, paras. 105–8.

'Family ideology': identification and exploration

Jon Bernardes

Abstract

The issue of 'family ideology' has been systematically ignored by a majority of 'family'[1] scholars whilst it has been taken for granted by a minority. The following study arises from the author's attempts to explore the issue of alternative theoretical approaches to the analysis of 'family life'.[2] Increasing numbers of contemporary researchers concur in recognising the diversity of 'family forms' and the inappropriateness of speaking of 'The Family'.[3] Despite these recognitions many researchers find themselves re-adopting the term 'The Family' in their discussions and especially in the titles of their work. For example, Segal clearly recognises that the 'traditional family model' no longer reflects the reality of our lives (1983, 11) and yet the title of her book is *What is to be done about THE FAMILY?* (emphasis added).

One reason for the re-importation of the idea of 'The Family' may be found in the rather limited nature of previous conceptualisations of 'family ideology'. With the exception of Barrett (1980), recognitions of 'family ideology' tend to be conceptualised in terms of sets of partisan beliefs supporting a particular 'family form'. Thus the concept of 'The Family' is rarely regarded as being problematic in itself, rather attention is paid to the presumed virtues or deficiencies of the particular form of 'The Family' which is assumed to be prevalent. Notwithstanding the recognition of 'family diversity' or the inappropriateness of the term 'The Family', nearly all discussion becomes a straightforward attack upon, or defence of, 'The Family'.[4] Only very rarely does analysis avoid this trap and question whether 'The Family' really exists to be attacked or defended; thus Collier *et al.* have asked 'Is there a Family?' (1982) and the present author has asked 'Do we really know what "The Family" is?' (Bernardes, 1984a).

The objective here is to identify and explore a specific conceptualisation of 'family ideology'. The aim is to avoid engaging in attacks upon, or defences of, 'The Family' but rather to address the ideological

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context of such debates themselves, especially in respect of the assumed existence of 'The Family'. It is hoped that this approach will stimulate a much more critical examination of 'family ideology' and the concept of 'The Family'. More generally, the attempt to conceptualise 'family ideology' in this much broader sense is seen as a pre-requisite for the development of an alternative theoretical approach to the analysis of 'family life'.

Identifying 'family ideology'

The conceptualisation of ideology offered here has three main sources. Firstly, great significance is attached to Karl Mannheim's attempt to specify two conceptions of ideology, namely the 'particular' and 'total' conceptions of ideology (1972, 49–50). Secondly, Michele Barrett's analysis of the '. . . Problems in Marxist feminist analysis' (1980) is drawn upon insofar as it involves a clearly relevant and wide ranging recent discussion of ideology. Thirdly, the general notion of 'multiple realities' as found in phenomenological sociology is drawn upon, modified and reformulated in order to complete the construction of a viable conceptualisation.

Notwithstanding Mannheim's presentation of two conceptions of ideology as being 'distinct and separable' (1972, 49) these two concepts will be regarded here as the extremes of a continuum. Mannheim distinguished a 'particular' conception of ideology which '. . . denotes that we are sceptical of the ideas and representations advanced by our opponent' (1972, 49) from a 'total' conception of ideology which refers to the 'ideology of an age or . . . historico-social group . . . [here] we are concerned with . . . the total structure of the mind of this epoch or of this group' (1972, 49–50). Clearly, Mannheim's 'particular' conception of ideology equates well with the ideologies Nava identifies (1983, 86) as relating to women's oppression. The same is true of contemporary debates 'for' and 'against' 'The Family' as explored by Berger and Berger (1983). However, the concept of 'The Family' itself would appear to be much closer to Mannheim's 'total' conception of ideology. The very existence of 'The Family' seems to be part of the 'total structure of the mind' (Mannheim, 1972, 50) of contemporary society in much the same way as notions of ownership and wage labour seem to be. This is to suggest that contemporary dominant ideology, which legitimates

current economic and social structure, should be conceptualised as also incorporating a total conception of 'family ideology'. Between the two extremes of 'particular' and 'total' conceptions of ideology it is obviously important to recognise many levels or layers of ideology which are each more nearly 'total' or more nearly 'particular' in nature.

Following Althusser, Barrett locates ideology as part of 'lived experience' (1980, 30). Ideology is not merely a set of ideas but is, rather, a necessary component of everyday social practice. Barrett argues that:

> the concept of ideology refers to those processes which have to do with consciousness, motive, emotionality; it can best be located in the category of *meaning*. Ideology is a generic term for the processes by which meaning is produced, challenged, reproduced, transformed. (1980, 97)

In referring to the processes by which human social life is made meaningful, Barrett emphasises beliefs and attitudes which are so deeply embedded in our consciousness that we can hardly avoid drawing upon them. Barrett focusses upon 'The Family' briefly (1980, 205) and the 'ideology of familialism' (1980, 251) at greater length but is obviously most concerned with 'women's oppression' rather than an extensive analysis of 'family ideology'.

A third element to add to the conceptualisation of ideology to be offered here concerns the issue of multiplicity. Phenomenologically inclined sociologists have recognised that there does not exist only a single unitary social reality which we all simply 'access'; rather we may think of 'multiple realities'.[5] Barrett emphasises the centrality of ideology as 'located in the category of meaning' and discusses the way in which 'meaning is negotiated' (1980, 97). It is no great leap to relate this conception of ideology to the analysis of the negotiated 'social construction of reality' presented by Berger and Luckmann (1971) or, in terms of marriage, Berger and Kellner (1971). This negotiation of meaning takes place in a wide variety of forms and contexts and upon a wide variety of levels to constitute the multiplicity of social reality. Thus ideology, since it is located in the category of meaning, is also multiple. Most simply stated, ideologies may be thought of as relating to the many processes by which individuals construct, at a variety of levels, their own sense of social reality. Thus ideology should be conceptualised as being multiple in two senses. Not only

is an ideology multi-layered in terms of ranging 'vertically' between the 'particular' and the 'total' but the lived experience of individuals also involves multiple 'readings' of an ideology upon any specific 'horizontal' dimension at any point between 'particular' and 'total'. Thus, for example, an individual may accept the universal existence of 'The Family' ('total family ideology') and yet wish to defend his or her own slightly variant personal 'family' circumstances ('particular family ideology'). Further, in any one context he or she may emphasise the joy of parenthood at one moment and then bemoan the economic burden of 'family' responsibilities; thus an individual may 'read' 'family ideology' in different ways for different purposes.

Having identified three main sources of a conceptualisation of 'family ideology', several further points need to be made. An ideology is best thought of as being phenomenon-specific in the way implied by Nava who discusses 'ideologies – of femininity, of wifehood and motherhood' (1983, 86). This phenomenon specificity relates to the 'vertical' dimension from a total conception of ideology down to a particular conception of ideology. Each phenomenon-specific ideology is composed of multiple layers or levels of ideology. Beyond this, different phenomenon-specific ideologies exist side by side or simultaneously occupy the same 'horizontal' dimension. Different ideologies do not exist independently but rather should be thought of as overlapping and frequently interlocking with one another; thus the three ideologies identified by Nava overlap and interlock to support and legitimise one another. Further, it is vital to recognise that specific ideologies quite often combine to form larger or overarching ideologies. Thus 'family ideology' is composed of, among many others, the ideologies of masculinity, femininity, motherhood, fatherhood and many more. Finally, it needs to be made clear that any given ideology does not need to be internally coherent or rational and that mutually reinforcing ideologies are frequently incompatible in strictly logical terms. Ideology seems to be not only a 'process by which meaning is produced . . .' (Barrett, 1980, 87), but also a means by which contradictions and irrationalities are accommodated or rendered unapparent. For example,'gender ideology' seems to reconcile the contradictions between the very powerful ideology associated with wage labour and the ideology of motherhood and housework. That is to say that despite a widespread emphasis upon work and instrumentalism, the labour of a huge number of women is neither recognised as 'work' nor rewarded by wages.

Having travelled this far in conceptualising ideology it is now appropriate to turn to identify the content of 'family ideology' more specifically. A recent and succinct account of 'family ideology' is that given by Lynn Segal:

> Our traditional family model of the married heterosexual couple with children – based on a sexual division of labour where the husband as breadwinner provides economic support for his dependent wife and children, while the wife cares for both husband and children – remains central to all *family ideology*. (Segal, 1983, 11)

A more detailed and systematic identification of the content of 'family ideology' was presented by Arlene and Jerome Skolnick in 1974 who looked at the assumptions underpinning what they called the 'nuclear family model' (1974a, 7–8). Firstly, 'The Family' is assumed to be universal and, secondly, it is assumed to be a necessary condition for the survival and stability of any society. Thirdly, 'The Family' is seen as the elementary unit of society and, fourthly, it is seen as based upon a clear cut, biologically determined division of labour. Fifthly, 'normal family life' is seen as vital to adequate socialisation whilst the sixth assumption asserts that any other 'familial forms' are deviant, pathological and unworkable.

'Family ideology' then is identified here as a very powerful ideology which encompasses a variety of levels ranging from the 'total' to the 'particular'. Ideology is conceptualised as multi-layered and phenomenon specific; different ideologies tend to be mutually reinforcing and tend to compose 'larger' ideologies. Ideology centrally concerns the erection and maintenance of meaning and, as such, relates well to the social construction of reality. Whilst different ideologies overlap and interlock there is no necessary compatibility or coherence between the tenets of different ideologies. 'Family ideology' refers here to that varied and multi-layered system of ideas and practices which holds 'The Family' to be a 'natural' and universally present feature of all human societies, an 'institution' which is positively functional and the basis of morality.

The exploration of 'family ideology'

An obvious preliminary step must be a brief review of the location

of 'family ideology' in contemporary society. Most simply stated, contemporary dominant ideology appears to involve, amongst others, three specific and mutually reinforcing ideologies: 'family ideology', 'gender ideology' and 'work ideology' or 'wage labour ideology'. These three ideologies reflect basic contemporary divisions: the division of the public and the private, the division of the sexes and the division of labour.

'Family ideology' portrays 'The Family' as a universal, biologically based human grouping, performing specific functions and responding to the exigencies of industrialism in terms of internal dynamics.[6] More than this 'The Family' is believed to exist and is regarded as being a vital institution by powerful dominant groups such as State and Church. In the UK both major political parties have claimed to be the party 'of the family' (Study Commission on the Family, 1980, 7).

'Gender ideology' is, of course, a key component of both 'family ideology' and 'wage labour ideology', legitimating the sexual division of labour and the ascription of gender identity. Recently, feminists have been in the vanguard of discussion of 'family ideology'[7] but such discussions are usually instrumental in the analysis of women's oppression rather than aimed at analysing 'The Family' itself. Indeed many feminists have criticised 'The Family'[8] rather than doubted its existence.

It hardly requires a Marxist sociologist to link 'wage labour ideology' with 'gender ideology' and 'family ideology'. Contemporary 'family life' is usually seen as involving the reproduction of workers or labour power (Barrett, 1980, chapter 6), instilling 'appropriate' values relating to honesty and hard work (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982, chapter 1), and involving large amounts of unpaid female labour in housework and motherhood. In this sense the assumptions made by Parsons (1956) are remarkably close to the assumptions of Engels (1972) or Zaretsky (1976).

These three interlocking ideologies are, one hopes, reasonably obvious to contemporary sociologists. This 'obviousness' ought, of course, to be regarded with extreme caution. As I have mentioned elsewhere (Bernardes, 1984a), the recognition of 'family ideology' may have focussed our attention in a particular way; in taking for granted the existence of 'The Family', 'family ideology' has focussed our attention upon the location and role of 'The Family'. Just so, the interlocking of 'family ideology', 'gender ideology' and 'wage labour ideology' has focussed our attention upon what 'The Family' *does* and *is*. The intention here is to shift attention away

from the 'family' orientated elements of 'family ideology' towards more fundamental and basic, perhaps even irreducible, elements of 'family ideology'. It is suggested here that 'family ideology' functions to sustain industrial societies and modes of thought appropriate to industrial societies by means of four key elements. Firstly, 'family ideology' plays a vital role in sustaining an individualistic mode of thought in contemporary societies. Secondly, 'family ideology' sustains an essentially naturalistic analysis of human behaviour. Thirdly, 'family ideology' facilitates and sustains major forms of differentiation in contemporary society. Fourthly, and perhaps most contentiously, 'family ideology' constitutes an idolistic mystification of human social life; that is to say that 'family ideology' creates and venerates an idol of 'The Family' which mystifies the reality of so called 'family life'.

I The individualistic element

Perhaps the strangest feature of 'family ideology' is the apparently paradoxical emphases upon 'group' and 'individual'. Whilst 'The Family' is often regarded as the fundamental natural human grouping it is also the case that 'family ideology' requires and legitimates the inculcation of extreme individualism. Arguably any group with an internally structured differentiation actually depends upon individualism to function as a group. In the case of 'The Family' as enshrined in 'family ideology' each structural location ('father', 'daughter', etc.) is based upon individualistically orientated ascription. Thus, being a 'father' is quite distinct from being a 'mother'; the roles of 'son' or 'daughter' depend upon age, sex and consanguinity. The structure of 'The Family' is filled by unique individuals and whilst replacement or substitution is possible, it is far from smoothly or easily achieved. A non-related adopted child may 'be *like* a daughter' but it is less easy to ignore the lack of biological connection to claim that the child '*is* a daughter'. The child in such a situation may never accept that the man '*really* is *my* father'. This is to say that 'The Family' is conceived of as containing unique structural locations which are occupied by individuals *as* individuals; hence the paradox of the emphasis upon 'The Family' as the irreducible human group and yet also an emphasis upon individuality within that grouping. Six areas, in which this emphasis upon the individualistic is particularly stark, well illustrate the means by which 'family ideology' purveys this emphasis.

1 Symbolic interaction places great emphasis upon the distinction between the 'I' and a variety of 'others';[9] a variety of psychological approaches to child development similarly emphasise the delineation of 'self' on the part of the infant. The idea of private ownership and property is founded upon the delineation of 'I' and 'self'. 'Family ideology' supports a child rearing process that creates individuals and which simultaneously closes off any potential alternative paths of human development. The rearing of children in a non-individualistic manner is simply unthinkable;[10] 'family ideology' thus plays a central role in defining the way we think about *ourselves*. Child rearing in contemporary 'family life' generates a powerful emphasis upon individualistic ownership and possession; this emphasis is sustained in adulthood and is nowhere more clear than in the parental use of the term 'my child'.

2 Related to individual ownership and possession is the notion of privacy; that is, 'my space' and 'my time'. Historically, 'family life' may have restricted privacy to a privileged minority. Nowadays however, 'The Family' serves as a focus for the growth of privacy; 'The Family' itself is regarded as private or distinct from the public sphere. 'Family' housing is, of course, the central means by which individuals can exclude not only the wider society but also other 'family' members. This value upon privacy is, of course, deeply individualistic and highly praised by 'family ideology'. It is 'good' and desirable that each child should have a room of their own whilst it is generally thought that adults should have some 'time to themselves' and even private spaces or rooms.

3 Thirdly, 'family ideology' emphasises competition and striving for achievement in a material and individualistic context. The child rearing process is generally located as the source of individualistic competitive spirit. So much of our lives is based upon the reality or metaphor of competition that it becomes difficult to find examples that do not involve, in some way, the issues of competition or achievement or possession. The whole idea of 'work' involves, of course, the related themes of competition, incentive and reward.

4 A further area concerns the issue of power. The idea of power is itself built upon the individualistic elements of possession and ownership, competition and achievement. Power concerns the imposition of will, usually by individuals upon other individuals. 'Family' interaction, from the earliest socialisation to adult conversation, involves the development, refinement and use of power. Both dimensions of the Parsonian formulation of 'family structure' involve power; one axis explicitly concerns leadership

whilst the other instrumental-expressive axis clearly involves power in that affection may be used to gain compliance (See Morgan, 1975, 28–29).

5 Contemporary 'family ideology' is centrally based upon the idea of romantic love; the notion of romantic love is exclusively individualistic. One falls in love with another individual rather than a group;[11] romantic love is also exclusive in that one falls in love with one specific individual rather than another. This exclusivity is extended into our notion of monogamous marriage and the prohibition of bigamy and polygamy. Love and marriage are central components of 'family ideology' and each involve strongly individualistic emphases.

6 Finally, 'family ideology' prescribes a 'healthy' attitude to sex and sexuality. Sex, as enshrined in 'family ideology', is a private activity between a married heterosexual pair of individuals who 'give' of themselves and 'receive' or 'take' from their partner. 'Family ideology' prohibits group sexual activity and proscribes incestuous sexual relationships. Increasingly, sexual activity is conceptualised in terms of possession, power, competition and performance. 'Family ideology' thus plays a vital role in defining the essentially individualistic nature of contemporary sexual behaviour.

II The naturalistic element

'Family ideology' not only fundamentally shapes our views about ourselves as individuals but also propels our views along essentially naturalistic[12] lines. That is to say that 'family ideology' presents and legitimates essentially 'scientific' views of human behaviour and 'family behaviour'.

This naturalistic element of 'family ideology' plays two key roles in the wider society. Firstly, in asserting the naturalness of 'The Family', 'family ideology' contributes very powerfully to an overwhelmingly naturalistic mode of thought in contemporary society. In asserting the biological bases of human behaviour, 'family ideology' legitimates and supports the power of science and scientists to define the 'proper' course of, and intervention in, our lives. Secondly, a naturalistic analysis of 'family life' is in itself powerfully self-supporting. The assertion of the biological bases of 'The Family' underpins the debates about the universality and functionality of 'The Family'. Briefly, if 'The Family' is biologically based it must also be universal and must perform identifiable

functions. Three aspects of the naturalistic element of 'family ideology' will be examined here.

1 Many feminists have examined the assumptions of the biological bases of 'The Family', the maternal instinct and the ascription of gender.[13] 'Family ideology' tends to come down heavily upon the nature side of the nature/nurture debate as it relates to 'family life'. Morgan (1975, 43–7) pays detailed attention to critically analysing the Parsonian formulation of 'family structure' as it relates to sex roles and Delamont has exposed some of the naturalistic assumptions about women and motherhood (1980, chapter 9). The necessity of child socialisation is usually located in the biological 'fact' of reproduction and the lengthy period of dependence of the human infant.[14] Beyond this the widespread naturalism with regard to 'family life' may be seen in the approaches by which many of the more 'scientific' branches of psychology seek to analyse 'family behaviour' (Chodorow, 1978) and in the way that many 'family problems' are often regarded as falling within the domain of medicine.

2 A second naturalistic aspect of 'family ideology' is that of the frequent adoption, by the public as well as academics, of a variety of deterministic analyses. We insist upon the biologically determinist view that all women are 'naturally' capable of bearing and raising children. This theme underpins, of course, the wide-ranging biological determinism that relates to gender roles. When one level of 'hard' deterministic analysis comes under attack, such as the critiques of the 'maternal instinct', there is a tendency to substitute other types of deterministic analysis. Thus use is made of mixtures of economic determinism, technological determinism, environmental determinism and historical determinism.[15] Perhaps the clearest naturalistic element enshrined in 'family ideology' is to be found in 'evolutionary' type accounts of 'family' change ranging from Engels (1972) to Young and Willmott (1973), from Zimmerman (1972) to Shorter (1977).

3 A third deeply naturalistic aspect of 'family ideology' is to be found in the popular, professional and academic tendencies to define 'family problems' (or 'problem families') and seek causal explanations of these. It is difficult to reflexively analyse the depth and extent of our commitment to 'scientific' explanations based upon cause and effect. Put most simply, the majority of ideological forms are so deeply naturalistic in themselves that there is no readily available alternative analytical perspective. We explain things causatively or risk the accusation of not having 'explained'

at all. 'Family life' is no exception – as a society we demand causal explanations and commission academic disciplines and the 'caring' professions to find them. We possess an astonishingly deeply instrumental view of our own society. Rather than accept 'things as they are', we always seek to 'change things', 'solve problems' or 'conquer disabilities'. Thus it should be no great surprise to find that the social sciences and the caring professions not only aspire to naturalistic explanations but also powerfully reinforce 'family ideology' in this respect.

III The element of differentiation

'Family ideology' is one of the key ideologies which differentiates human beings and thereby underpins the very possibility of social structure. To recognise this most clearly we must quite deliberately attempt to 'see the ordinary as strange, the routine as new, and the unquestioned as doubtful' (Weigert, 1981, 48). To a very large extent the individualistic and naturalistic elements of 'family ideology' support the possibility of differentiation. The creation of difference, and inequality, rests upon distinguishing individuals by apparently 'objective facts'. Six particular forms of differentiation, as legitimated by 'family ideology', will be explored here.

1 Firstly, 'family ideology' clearly and elegantly structures our view of human beings in terms of age, sex and gender. The very idea of 'The Family' differentiates male and female, child and adult. Whilst many have criticised the 'oppression' of women and children, relatively little attention has been paid to the social construction and cultural location of these categories.[16] 'Family ideology', in emphasising the naturalistic elements of child bearing and motherhood, legitimates the differentiation of male and female, child and adult. In order to grasp the fundamental importance of differentiation by age and sex, one need only imagine a world in which individuals of both sexes and all ages had equal legally supported authority and rights.

2 'Family ideology' is crucial in differentiating the life of each individual in terms of developmental sequences related to age, sex, and 'rites de passage'. In our lives we each move from 'baby' to 'child', 'adolescent' to 'single young adult', 'married' to 'parent', 'middle-aged' to 'old'. Thus, by means of differentiation on the basis of age, sex and developmental stages, 'family ideology' prescribes and legitimates different degrees of authority, respect, or deference as well as actually prescribing the style and

content of language used by one actor in conversing with another. To fully recognise this point, imagine a conversation between an adult male and a ten year old girl but reverse the style and patterns of speech; thus the man listens quietly and deferentially, to the authoritative instructions of the ten year old girl.

3 A third form of differentiation relates to daily time and space. By interlocking with ideologies relating to paid work, motherhood and childhood, 'family ideology' structures and routinises our days, our emotions and even our physical location. 'Family ideology' supports a particular form of spatial differentiation, that is the dividing up of society into separate households or 'family homes'. Such households tend to be regarded as 'natural' units of consumption and the reproduction of labour power (Barrett, 1980, chapter 6). In supporting the establishment of 'family households', 'family ideology' legitimates an inherently weak (and perhaps weakening) form of spatial differentiation. Most simply, it is surprisingly easy to maintain domination over small separate 'family households'. In legitimating certain age and gender related authority patterns within those households, 'family ideology' makes key contributions to ensuring the stability and continuity of a particular way of life.

4 'Family ideology' not only differentiates individuals but also legitimates inequalities of power, authority and apparent wisdom. Inequality clearly rests upon the individualistic and naturalistic elements of 'family ideology', not to mention a particular form of spatial differentiation (households). However, such inequality is dynamic rather than static in that each actor, in accommodating present inequality, ensures limited present or future power for himself or herself. The most lowly and oppressed wage slave is indeed 'king' in his own home and the most oppressed wife of such a man is, in his absence, herself a powerful 'queen'. Children are not simply dominated but rather learn very early that their 'turn' will come and can be observed to play out the holding of such power in the future. Thus, 'family ideology' ensures that virtually all individuals have some opportunities to hold and exercise power and authority. Beyond this, 'family ideology' supports a very wide range of types of differentiation that can be most clearly comprehended in the way in which our notions of romantic love and 'free' mate selection contribute to great stability in terms of the concentration of wealth (Giddens and Stanworth, 1978, 226–35), the stability of social class (Reid, 1978, 134–6) and the permanence of regionalism (Coleman, 1973, 634–6; Harris, 1974,

36–7). Further 'family ideology' has been used to justify and legitimate the individualistic orientation of the 'cycle of deprivation' thesis of poverty (Joseph, 1975).This style of argument tends to be extremely divisive in that it differentiates the 'adequate' parents from the 'inadequate' and places a clear emphasis upon 'The Family', rather than 'society', as the prime cause of poverty.

5 A fifth form of differentiation may be found in the way in which 'family ideology' structures personal aspirations and goals. Again, 'family ideology' enables us all to achieve personal goals regardless of status but simultaneously differentiates such achievements in terms of qualitative assessment. Thus parenthood is one of the few honoured and praiseworthy statuses that can be achieved by virtually all adults regardless of qualification or ability. It is perhaps this widespread legitimation of marriage, parenthood and establishing a 'home' that also makes the grosser inequalities between social groupings unapparent or at least tolerable. In giving people realistic personal aspirations and goals, 'family ideology' ensures stable differentiation. It is not surprising that so great a part of everyday life revolves around the achievement of marriage, parenthood and setting up a home.

6 A sixth and final form of differentiation relates to the cultural and ethnic level. 'Family ideology' tends to be decidedly ethnocentric in terms of the naturalistic emphasis upon 'family types' and the technologically determinist view of 'progress' which tends to regard the most recent 'advances' as the 'peak' of civilisation. Quite often the study of 'family' life in 'less developed' or 'less industrialised' societies implies, or is taken to imply, an inferior or archaic 'family' form.[17] One need look no further than the Parsonian statement of the 'normal American Family' for clear evidence of racist ethnocentricity (Parsons, 1971).

Having explored various forms of differentiation implicit in 'family ideology', it is important to also note that a continuing emphasis upon 'The Family' conflicts with any attempts to generate class solidarity or gender solidarity. The elements of individualism and naturalism underpin the erection of a particular form of social structure which resists any trend towards solidarity or collectivism. Certainly, as Barrett and McIntosh argue, it is 'hard to imagine a world in which "family" plays little part' (1982, 159). Whilst the recognition of the way in which 'family ideology' presents and legitimates differentiation may well be an element of a search for 'new ways of living' (*ibid.*) it is, more importantly, a fundamental component of a 'new way' of doing 'family sociology'.

IV The element of idolistic mystification

The foregoing three elements of 'family ideology' (the individualistic, the naturalistic and the element of differentiation) take us a long way in analysing what 'family ideology' does and why it is so powerful. There now remains the task of presenting an account of how 'family ideology' maintains such a central and powerful role. The key to comprehending the nature, pervasiveness and power of 'family ideology' is to be found in teasing out the intimately related elements of idolism and mystification. These elements explain how 'family ideology' endures in such a key location in terms of contemporary ideological forms.

'Family ideology' is idolistic in that it presents an image or idol of 'The Family' which is distinct from the reality of the phenomenon it represents. Thus 'family ideology' encourages the veneration of an idol rather than the examination of 'family life' *as lived*. The image or idol of 'The Family' rather than the reality of peoples' lives is taken as the object of attention.

Further, 'family ideology' mystifies in that it makes secret or obscures the 'lived reality' of our own lives. The very existence of an idol facilitates this mystification; attention is given to the idol as a fixed, apparently objective entity rather than given to the complex realities of everyday life. In this way, the concept of 'The Family' actually masks lived experience with an attractive but essentially spurious idol.

The point that 'family ideology' masks reality is by no means a new argument. In discussing 'Studies of the family' in 1945, Komarovsky and Waller made the following point:

> The worker in this field is shackled by taboos and ancestral superstitions, which he has the more trouble in combatting because *they are in his mind* as well as in his environment. We are able to *observe only what the mores permit us to see.* (Emphases added) (1945, 443).

It is of course sad to recognise that so little progress has been made in nearly forty years. On the other hand, this lack of progress should signal the urgent need to address vigorously the issue of 'family ideology', as is the focus here, and begin the task of constructing alternative theoretical approaches to the analysis of 'family life'.

The power of the idol of 'The Family' to mystify our own actual

experience of 'family life' rests upon the elements of individualism, naturalism and differentiation. The element of idolistic mystification itself is inevitably extremely difficult to analyse but some attempt must be made here. Six aspects of the operation of idolistic mystification will be examined.

1 Firstly, we need to examine the operation of language and note how the term 'The Family' tends to become objectified. The meaning attached to such an objectified term may rarely be examined. In exploring the behaviour of two related ethnic groups, Birdwhistell found that despite sharing a common language the two groups diverged in the meanings attached to this language yet one group may never be aware of the other group's different meanings *despite* interaction, even inter-marriage.

> An Upper and Lower Kutenai – they spoke the same language – could go to school together, could engage in business relationships, and could even marry without ever discovering that they held different views of kinship and family relationships. (Birdwhistell, 1966, 206)

As Birdwhistell makes clear, this situation is possible because of the tendency to believe that the odd behaviour of another individual is a matter of individual idiosyncrasy rather than any systematic differences in behaviour. This is possible because, as Birdwhistell puts it, an individual never 'meets a population: he interacts with individuals' (1966, 210). In this way, language and everyday behaviour not only favour the idolistic mystification of 'family life' but perhaps actually necessitate this process.

2 A second aspect of the operation of the concept of 'The Family' concerns the 'invisibility' of 'family life'. Mayer introduced the notion of the 'invisibility of married life' (1967a) and subsequently explored the way in which 'family life' is rendered invisible because we operate within what he called an 'assumptive world' (1967b). This is to suggest that we do not need to 'see' the details of the 'family life' of other people because we have available a clear set of assumptions as to what 'family life' involves. This theme suggests that the idol of 'The Family' actually simplifies our lives in that we do not need to go to the trouble of inquiring into the detail of peoples' lives because the idol presents all the details we need. Thus the idea of a mother' with a 'young family' communicates more than sufficient detail of the situation. In this way then, 'family ideology' operates to idolistically mystify

in that it presents an objectified central idol which, in being itself a simplification functions to simplify and render comprehensible what would otherwise be the unintelligible complexity of human social life.

3 A third important aspect of idolistic mystification relates to the moral centrality of 'The Family'. An insistence upon 'family values' is usually found in contemporary moralising and political rhetoric. Thus the idol of 'The Family' is often used as a moral weapon involving explicit normative prescriptions about, for example, authority structures related to age and gender (respect for adults, especially fathers) as well as prohibitions upon sexual behaviour (e.g. extra-marital sex and incest). Ball has suggested that the public clarity of normative prescriptions is related to the private opportunities for deviant behaviour (1975). The idol of 'The Family' would seem to fit this analysis very well; this idol may be so popular and powerful because there is, in the 'invisible' and private world of 'family' life, great opportunity to deviate from the public prescriptions. We can all afford to subscribe to the idol of 'The Family' *because* such subscription does not involve us in conformity of actual behaviours and, indeed, such subscription simply mystifies our actual behaviours both for others and ourselves.

4 A fourth aspect of idolistic mystification is to be found in the tenets of most organised religions. Most religions hold 'The Family' in particularly high esteem and adopt all kinds of 'family' based metaphors (God, the Father; Christ, the Son, etc.). Whilst we may live in an increasingly secular society, the established religions still wield great influence in relation to the 'family' events of birth and baptism, marriage and divorce. Many people still look to and accept the teachings of organised religion including those relating to 'The Family'. These teachings very clearly operate to intensify idolistic mystification by asserting the sacredness of 'The Family'.

5 Recent debate should leave no-one in any doubt as to the role of the state in supporting an idol of 'The Family'. Not only do both major UK political parties claim to be 'the party of the family' (Study Commission on the Family, 1980) but government business is increasingly conducted in terms of 'family' metaphors (Segal, 1983, 9). As Moroney (1976) and many feminists (e.g. Barrett, 1980) have argued, it is clearly in the interests of the state to support the idol of 'The Family'. Such support simplifies and limits the tasks of social policy whilst also buttressing the various

moralistic, individualistic, naturalistic and inegalitarian trends of our time.

6 The sixth and final aspect of idolistic mystification must relate to the operation of orthodox social science itself. Analysis preceding this paper suggests that 'traditional family sociology'[18] itself has been one of the prime movers in promulgating 'family ideology'. Certainly traditional family sociology has emphasised the individualistic and naturalistic elements, frequently emphasised the element of differentiation, and contributed hugely to the idolistic mystification of 'family life'. Even today numerous scholars find themselves having to re-adopt the idol of 'The Family' despite explicit recognitions of the dangers. The image of 'conventional families' (Oakley, 1982) held by the public at large has been drawn, in large part, from the disciplines of sociology and psychology. We must therefore assign priority to the exploration of our own weaknesses and theoretical failings. Whilst I do not believe that sociology can be 'value free' in any meaningful sense, we should be able to be somewhat more reflexively critical in our use of everyday terms such as that of 'The Family'.

Conclusion

The concern of this article has been to identify and explore a specific conception of 'family ideology'. 'Family ideology' is identified as a multi-layered system of ideas and practices which holds 'The Family' to exist, to be 'natural' and universal. 'Family ideology' interlocks with gender ideology and wage labour ideology to form the major part of contemporary dominant ideology. The exploration of 'family ideology' involved the deliberate shift of attention away from 'The Family' and 'family' related elements towards more fundamental and perhaps irreducible elements. Four particular elements were identified: individualism, naturalism, differentiation, and idolistic mystification. The exploration of these elements is, of course, only a beginning and there undoubtedly remains a great deal more to be done in this respect. It is clear, though, from this exploration that 'family ideology', and the idea of 'The Family', is awesomely powerful and clearly one of the key components in erecting and sustaining meaning in contemporary social life. As such, 'family ideology' legitimates contemporary social arrangements. A key element of this legitimating role is to be found in the way in which 'family ideology'

idolistically mystifies our lives. 'Family ideology' actually ensures that certain parts of everyday 'family life' are 'seen' in a certain way and that other elements of our 'family lives' are not 'seen' at all.

It must be clearly recognised that 'family ideology' is not a discrete or independent form of ideology that can be considered in isolation. Previous examinations have acted as if this were the case and focussed upon the 'family' elements of 'family ideology'. It is clear, I hope, that the most important elements of 'family ideology' are those constituents, which relate to more fundamental categories such as individualism, that are promulgated within the idea of 'The Family'. The deliberate attempt must be made to view 'family ideology' in context. Failure to engage 'family ideology' in context is probably the main reason for the relative neglect of 'family ideology' and the low status of 'family sociology'. When looked at in context, it is clear that the emphasis upon any particular 'family form' is very much a vehicle for more basic elements which shape the mode of thought of contemporary social life. 'Family ideology' ensures that we think in naturalistic terms about the differentiation of individuals and that we continually employ idols that mystify our own lives. In this way, 'family ideology', and the idol of 'The Family' is a paradigm case of the operation of ideology[19] and, I believe, the sociologically most important ideology in society today. 'Family ideology' appears to me to not only be the source of many other ideological forms but also to be the keystone in, and the key to understanding, the present structure of interlocking ideologies that form contemporary dominant ideology.

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Notes

1 For a detailed discussion of why terms related to 'family' are set within quotation marks, see Bernardes (1984b). Briefly, the intention is to bracket off such terms to indicate that they are part of everyday usage and are not, in themselves, analytic categories appropriate to the sociological enterprise.
2 Previous work upon this project may be found by examining Bernardes (1981; 1984a; 1984b).
3 See Bernardes (1984a; 1984b), Segal (1983, 11), Collier *et al.* (1982, 37).
4 For examples, see Segal (1983) and Barrett and McIntosh (1982).
5 See Berger *et al.* (1974, 102), McHugh (1968, 8 and 29), Holzner (1968, 1–19).

6 On the universality of 'The Family', see Reiss (1965); on functions, see Parsons (1956); on industrialism, see Goode (1963).
7 See Barrett (1980), Segal (1983), Collier *et al.* (1982), Barrett and McIntosh (1982).
8 For example, see Oakley (1976, chapter 9).
9 For an excellent discussion of symbolic interaction, see Meltzer (1975).
10 I do not mean that such child rearing would be undesirable but rather that we do not have any appropriate systems of ideas available. The issue of naming a child begins the identification of an individual.
11 The exceptions here are the various attempts at group marriage, see Constantine and Constantine (1973).
12 My use of the terms 'naturalism' and 'naturalistic' follows Thomas (1979, 1–12) and is used to indicate an approach to social science that attempts to replicate the (apparent) methodology of natural science.
13 For example, see Chodorow (1978), Delamont (1980), Oakley (1982), Barrett and McIntosh (1982).
14 For a critical account of Malinowski's original formulation, see Collier *et al.* (1982, 25–6).
15 Several sets of examples are relevant here:
Firstly, Young and Willmott invoked technological and environmental determinism in their comparison of the East End of London and Greenleigh (1957). Later, the same authors invoked a mixture of economic, historical and technological determinism to support their claimed type of 'Symmetrical Family' (1973).
Secondly, Harris discusses several debates utilising a variety of deterministic analyses (1983).
Thirdly, Gordon discusses technological determinism in relation to feminist attitudes to family life (1982).
Fourthly, Mitterauer and Sieder discuss a wide range of deterministic types of analyses in *The European Family* (1982).
16 A notable exception here is Barrett, for example see her study (1980, 205–8).
17 The best example here is Murdock's mammoth study, first published in 1949, see Murdock (1965, chapter 8).
18 For discussion of what is meant by 'traditional family sociology', see Bernardes (1981, chapter 1).
19 That is to say, for example, that gender ideology may operate in a similar way using the idols of 'man' and 'woman' to mystify everyday life.

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