



THE FAMILY

Introduction to sociology – session 4
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Outline

1. The family as a social institution
2. What functions does the family traditionally fulfill?
3. How has it changed?
4. The transformation of family forms
5. A crisis in the family?

The family as a social institution (Lévi-Strauss)

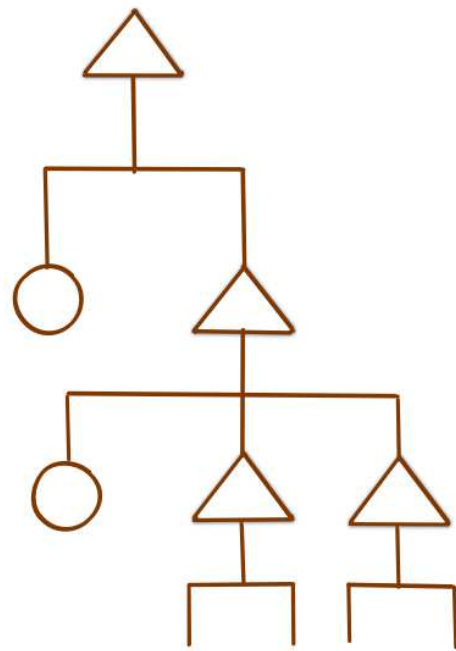
A group of individuals related to one another by ties of kinship and alliance

In every society, alliance and kinship are defined by social rules, the definition of which varies from one society to the other :

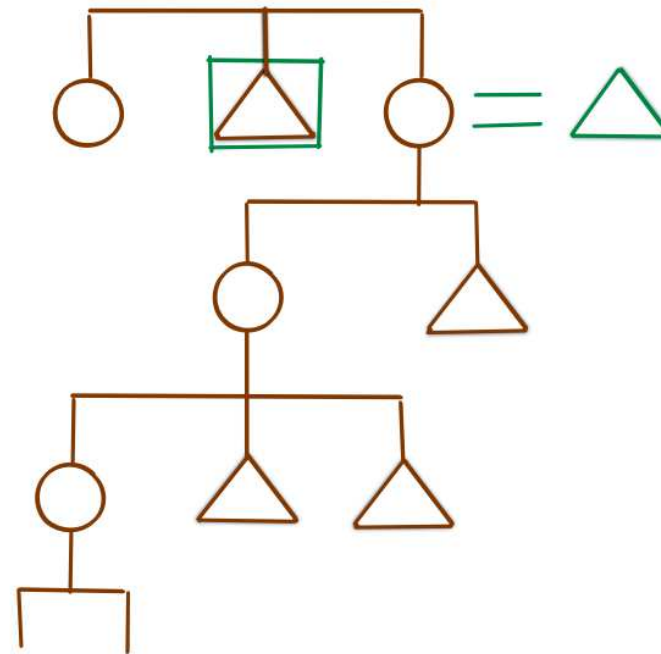
- Prohibition of incest
- Elementary vs complex structures of kinship (→ endogamy and exogamy)

An example : matrilineal vs patrilineal descent

Different systems of kinship



Patrilineal descent. Ex Sudan Nuers



Matrilineal descent. Ex. Trobriand islands

What functions does the family traditionally fulfill?

- Social organization : the rules of kinship and filiation
- Social link: the prohibition of incest (Levi-Strauss) as the basis for establishing links (via exchange in women) between social groups
- Economic
- Demographic
- Socialization of children and social reproduction
- Care
- The family as a « gender factory » (Fenstermaker)
 - Making gender
 - Making heterosexuality

What has changed?

A new conception of the family as a means to fulfill individual happiness...

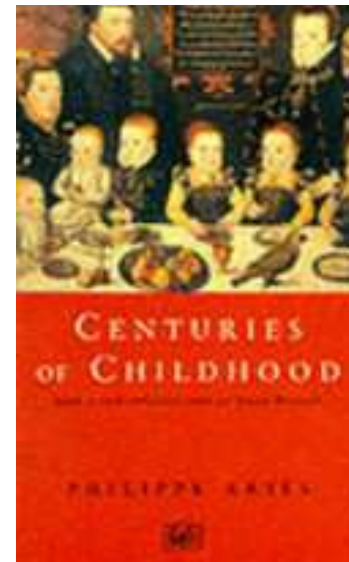
- Love-based marriage
- Couple life as a support for one's personal identity
- Having children as a choice and as the happy outcome of a love story

... in the context of broader social change:

- Individualization
- Change in women's status
 - The cultural diffusion of feminism → increased rights consciousness, questioning of power relations in the heterosexual couple
 - Legalization of and access to birth control and abortion
 - Increased access to paid work, esp. for mothers
- Change in children's status
- A questioning of the heterosexual norm by same-sex couples
- Increased state intervention in family issues

A change in children's status

P. Ariès : how children gradually became the focal point of family life in the XVIIth century

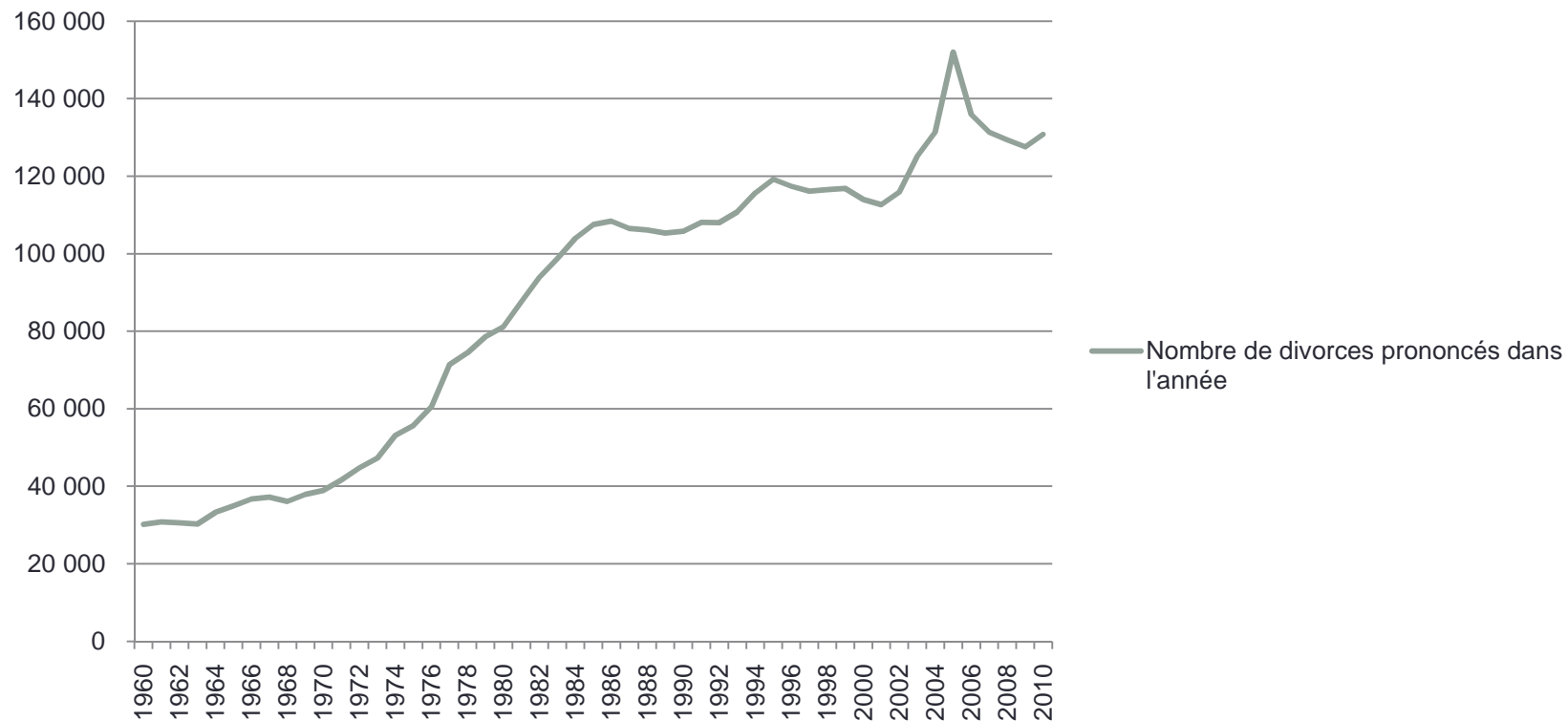


The transformation of family forms: general trends

- XIXth-XXth cent. : Shift from extended to nuclear family (cf Durkheim, Parsons)
- Non-linear change
- Recent trends (since 1970s)
 - Increase in divorces and reconstituted families
 - Increase in single-motherhood
 - Increase in unmarried couples and children born from unmarried couples
 - Postponement of the average age of marriage and for having the first child

The transformation of family forms: divorces

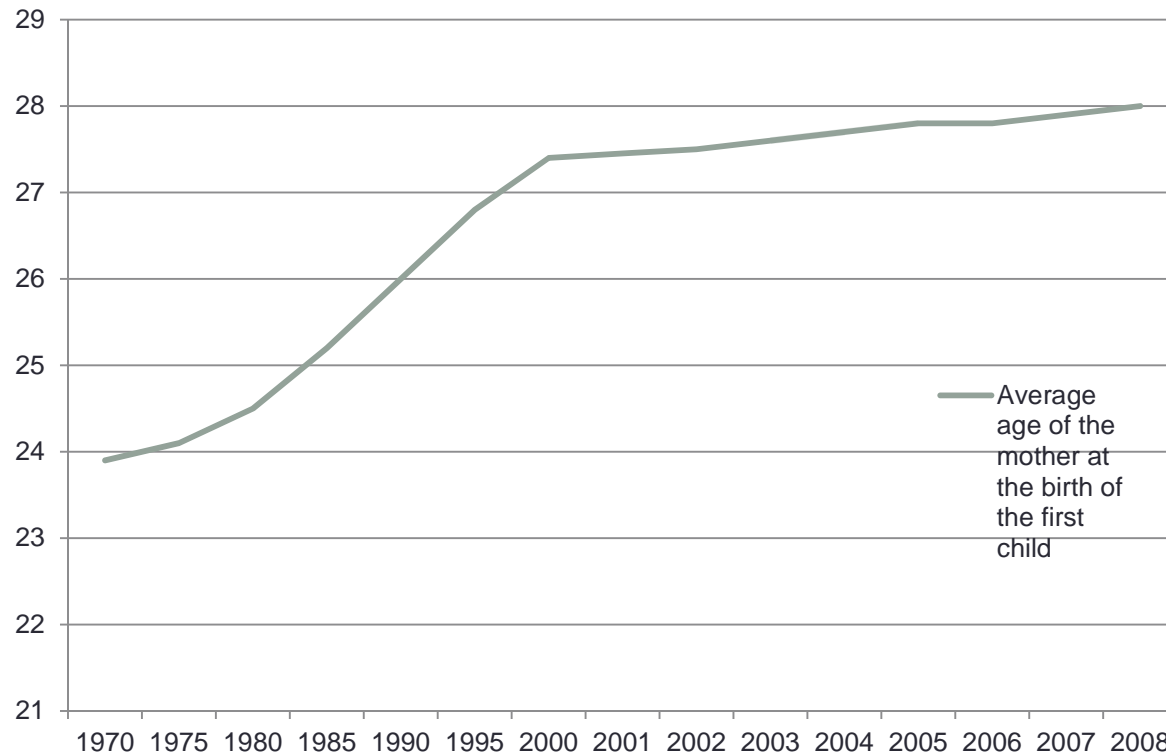
**Number of divorces in France
per year, 1960-2008**



Based on INSEE data, « Evolution du divorce depuis 1960 », INED,
http://www.ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/france/mariages_divorces_pacs/divorces/

The transformation of family forms: average age of first maternity

**Average age of the mother
at the birth of the first child**



Based on INED data

http://www.ined.fr/fr/pop_chiffres/france/mariages_divorces_pacs/nuptialite_generations/

The transformation of family forms: the postponement and decline of marriage

Cohort nuptiality

Per 100 males

Male birth cohort	Proportion of ever married at 49*	Mean age at first marriage* (years)	Proportion of ever married at 24	Proportion of ever married at 30
1953	85	25,0	52	75
1958	79	26,4	39	64
1963	72	28,2	23	52
1967	68	29,4	16	44
1971	64	30,4	9	39
1973	63	30,6	8	37
1977			6	32
1979			6	29
1981			5	
1983			5	
1985			4	

Source : INED

http://www.ined.fr/en/pop_figures/france/marriages_divorces_pacs/nuptiality_generations/

A crisis in the family?

- Broader diversity of family forms ≠ crisis
- A massively endorsed value
- A key social and economic role

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