

# The Sociology of Intimacy and Relationships

## Unit Handbook: 2025-26



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## What You Will Learn in This Unit

In this unit, we will explore what shapes our most personal relationships – including but not limited to gender, policy, work, and inequality.

By taking this unit, you will:

- Think critically about how gender roles, welfare systems, and workplace expectations affect care and family life.
- Learn how policies in the UK and other countries shape experiences of and inequalities in family life, employment, income, and wellbeing.

By the end of the unit, you'll be able to:

- Use sociological and feminist theories to understand family life, parenting, and work.
- Analyse real policies and workplace practices and what they mean for gender equality.
- Critically assess different measures of inequality and what they (do not) tell us.
- Compare how different countries support (or fail to support) families and care work.
- Reflect on your own assumptions about choice, fairness, and the 'private' sphere.
- Confidently write critical essays using theory and evidence.

## Recommended Background Reading and Other Resources

If you would like to explore some of the key themes before the unit begins – or deepen your understanding as we go – here are a few good starting points:

- The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home (available online through the library)
- [Journal of Marriage and Family](#)
- [Journal of European Social Policy](#)
- The Palgrave Handbook of Family Policy (available online through the library)

Here are also some useful resources for statistics or policy examples, which you might want to consult and draw on in class prep tasks and for your revision:

- [OECD Family Database](#) provides cross-national indicators on family outcomes and family policies across the OECD countries.
- [21st International Review on Leave Policies and Related Research 2025](#) gives lots of detail about early-years family policies across different countries.
- [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) often provides analysis of UK family policies and trends.

Some other great non-academic resources include:

- [MissPerceived podcast](#)
- [Motherhood Sessions podcast](#)
- [BBC Worklife](#)

## Teaching and Assessment

The unit includes **ten taught sessions**: 3 x 50-minute sessions and 7 x 1hr 50-minute sessions. Sessions are a mix of lecture content, discussion, and applied activities.

The assessment for this unit is **100% exam**.

## **LECTURES & READING**

### **Week 1 – Introduction to the Unit**

### **Week 2 – Gender and the Division of Unpaid Work**

<b>Intended learning outcomes</b>	<p>By the end of the session, you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify different forms of unpaid labour and how it is divided unequally between men and women.</li> <li>• Compare and contrast sociological theories explaining the persistence of the gendered division of unpaid work.</li> <li>• Apply sociological theories to real-world examples and cultural representations.</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-class task</b>	<p>Watch Motherland, Series 1, Episode 2.</p> <p>As you watch it, think about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What forms of unpaid labour appear? Who is doing them?</li> <li>▪ How is motherhood presented – who is ‘good’ at it?</li> <li>▪ How is fatherhood presented?</li> <li>▪ Do you think portrayals of motherhood might differ if the characters were ‘working class’ rather than ‘middle class’?</li> </ul>
<b>Bonus readings</b>	<p>Daminger, A. (2019). The Cognitive Dimension of Household Labour. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 84(4), 609-633. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419859007">https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419859007</a></p> <p>Daly, M. (2022). The Resilience of Maternalism in European Welfare States. <i>Contemporary Social Science</i>, 17(4), 313–325. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2022.2061042">https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2022.2061042</a></p> <p>Duffy, M. (2005). Reproducing Labour Inequalities: Challenges for Feminists Conceptualising Care at the Intersections of Gender, Race, and Class. <i>Gender &amp; Society</i>, 19(1), 66-82. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12245">https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12245</a></p>

### **Week 3 – Gender Inequalities in Paid Work: Concepts and Measures**

<b>Intended learning outcomes</b>	<p>By the end of the session, you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define and distinguish key concepts used to measure gender inequality in paid work.</li> <li>• Interpret and critically discuss statistical indicators of gender inequality (e.g., gender pay gap data), recognising what they reveal and their limitations.</li> <li>• Identify the components of a coherent, well-argued exam response.</li> </ul>
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<b>Pre-class task</b>	<p>Look up <a href="#">UK gender pay gap data by occupation</a> (scroll down to Figure 6). Pick 1-2 occupations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What occupation(s) did you choose and why?</li> <li>▪ What is the pay gap?</li> <li>▪ Why might this gap exist in that occupation?</li> <li>▪ How might unpaid work and workplace cultures play a role?</li> </ul>
<b>Core readings</b>	<p>Olivetti, C. &amp; Petrongolo, B. (2016). The Evolution of Gender Gaps in Industrialised Countries. <i>Annual Review of Economics</i>, 8, 405-434. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080614-115329">https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080614-115329</a></p> <p>England, P. (2010) The Gender Revolution: Uneven and Stalled. <i>Gender and Society</i>, 24(2), 149–166. <a href="http://www.jstor.org/stable/27809263">http://www.jstor.org/stable/27809263</a></p>
<b>Bonus readings</b>	<p>Napp, C. (2024). Gender Stereotypes About Career and Family Are Stronger in More Economically Developed Countries and Can Explain the Gender Equality Paradox. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i>. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672241286084">https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672241286084</a></p> <p>Kowalewska, H. (2024). Gendered Employment Patterns: Women’s Labour Market Outcomes Across 24 Countries. <i>Journal of European Social Policy</i>, 33(2), 151-168. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287221148336">https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287221148336</a></p>

#### Week 4 – Motherhood Penalties and Fatherhood Bonuses

<b>Intended learning outcomes</b>	<p>By the end of the session, you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define the “motherhood penalty” and “fatherhood bonus”.</li> <li>• Identify and critically assess the mechanisms underpinning these concepts.</li> <li>• Reflect on how other intersections of identity and workplace culture shape employment outcomes for mothers and fathers.</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-class task</b>	<p>Read: <a href="#">The ‘motherhood penalty’ is making me choose between my career and having a second child</a>. By Anya Meyerowitz, Glamour UK, 9 August 2024.</p> <p>As you read, think about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What pressures or expectations shape women’s decisions about work and family?</li> <li>▪ What do these stories reveal about ‘choice’ – or constraints – in relation to work and family?</li> <li>▪ How do workplace cultures or policies help or hinder parents? How might this be different for mothers versus fathers?</li> <li>▪ How does Meyerowitz’s experience connect to the gender pay gap and occupational segregation?</li> </ul>

<b>Core readings</b>	<p>Correll, S.J., Benard, S., &amp; Paik, I. (2007). Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty? <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 112(5). 1297-1339. <a href="https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/511799">https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/511799</a></p> <p>Williams, J.C., Blair-Loy, M., &amp; Berdahl, J.L. (2013). Cultural Schemas, Social Class, and the Flexibility Stigma. <i>Journal of Social Issues</i>, 69(2), 209-234. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12012">https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12012</a></p>
<b>Bonus readings</b>	<p>Glauber, R. (2018). Trends in the Motherhood Wage Penalty and Fatherhood Wage Premium for Low, Middle, and High Earners. <i>Demography</i> 55(5) 1663-1680. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-018-0712-5">https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-018-0712-5</a></p> <p>Chung, H. &amp; Seo, H. (2024). Flexibility Stigma Across Europe: How National Contexts Can Shift the Extent to which Flexible Workers are Stigmatised. <i>Social Indicators Research</i> 174(2024), 945–965. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-024-03420-w">https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-024-03420-w</a></p> <p>Gillies, V. (2007). <i>Marginalised Mothers: Exploring Working-Class Experiences of Parenting</i>.</p> <p>Petts, R.J., Kaufman, G., &amp; Mize, T.D. (2023). Parental Leave-Taking and Perceptions of Workers as Good Parents. <i>Journal of Marriage and Family</i> 85(1), 261-279. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12875">https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12875</a></p>

#### Week 5 – READING WEEK: No Lecture

#### Week 6 – Female-Breadwinner Couples: Challenging Gender Roles?

<b>Intended learning outcomes</b>	<p>By the end of the session, you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe patterns and trends in female breadwinning across high-income countries.</li> <li>• Analyse how increased female breadwinning both challenges and reinforces gender norms around care, work, and family life.</li> <li>• Evaluate the social, relational, and emotional consequences of female breadwinning for individuals and families.</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-class task</b>	<p>Watch the following documentary: The Big Flip</p> <p>Given everything that we have covered so far, reflect on the following questions as you watch:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How do you think a reversal of gender roles in the household – where the woman earns more than the man, or is the sole breadwinner – might impact on relationships, wellbeing, and sense of self?</li> <li>▪ How might these impacts vary by class, ethnicity, or other social identities?</li> <li>▪ Do these families describe their situations as freely chosen or driven by financial, career, or life circumstances?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you think younger generations feel the same way about breadwinning roles as older generations? Why or why not?</li> </ul>
<b>Core readings</b>	<p>Chesley, N. (2016). What Does It Mean to Be a “Breadwinner” Mother? <i>Journal of Family Issues</i>, 38(18), 2594-2619. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X16676857">https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X16676857</a></p> <p>Demantas, I., &amp; Myers, K. (2015). “Step Up and Be a Man in a Different Manner”: Unemployed Men Reframing Masculinity. <i>The Sociological Quarterly</i>, 56(4), 640–664. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/tsq.12099">https://doi.org/10.1111/tsq.12099</a></p>
<b>Bonus readings</b>	<p>Pinho, M., &amp; Gaunt, R. (2019). Doing and Undoing Gender in Male Carer/Female Breadwinner families. <i>Community, Work &amp; Family</i>, 24(3), 315–330. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2019.1681940">https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2019.1681940</a></p> <p>Sánchez-Mira, N. (2024). (Un)doing Gender in Female Breadwinner Households: Gender Relations and Structural Change. <i>Gender, Work &amp; Organization</i>, 31(4), 1196–1213. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12775">https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12775</a></p> <p>Dunn, M. G., Rochlen, A. B., &amp; O’Brien, K. M. (2011). Employee, Mother, and Partner: An Exploratory Investigation of Working Women With Stay-at-Home Fathers. <i>Journal of Career Development</i>, 40(1), 3-22. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845311401744">https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845311401744</a></p> <p>Van der Lippe, T., Treas, J., &amp; Norbutas, L. (2017). Unemployment and the Division of Housework in Europe. <i>Work, Employment and Society</i>, 32(4), 650-669. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017017690495">https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017017690495</a></p>

### Week 7 – Family Policy in the UK

<b>Intended learning outcomes</b>	<p>By the end of the session, you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyse family policy approaches and discourses under consecutive UK governments since the 1990s.</li> <li>Assess the (in)effectiveness of these approaches for enabling employment participation, reducing poverty, and supporting wellbeing.</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-class task</b>	<p>Listen to:  <a href="#">The two-child welfare limit: why won't Labour scrap the cap? - podcast</a></p> <p>As you listen, reflect on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What examples did you hear about how the two-child limit affects everyday life for families?</li> <li>Introducing the limit, George Osborne argued that families on benefits should make the same decisions as working families about how many children they can afford. Do you agree or disagree?</li> <li>Why do you think Labour Party have chosen not to commit to scrapping the two-child limit?</li> <li>Did anything in the podcast surprise you? Challenge your assumptions?</li> </ul>



<b>Core readings</b>	<p>McEnhill, L., &amp; Taylor-Gooby, P. (2018). Beyond Continuity? Understanding Change in the UK Welfare State Since 2010. <i>Social Policy &amp; Administration</i>, 52(1), 252–270. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12310">https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12310</a></p> <p>Millar, J., &amp; Bennett, F. (2017). Universal Credit: Assumptions, Contradictions and Virtual Reality. <i>Social Policy and Society</i>, 16(2), 169–182. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746416000154">https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746416000154</a></p>
<b>Bonus reading</b>	<p>Gillies, V., &amp; Edwards, R. (2024). ‘The Conservatives, Family Policy and the Data Revolution.’ In: Bochel, H., &amp; Powell, M. (eds.) <i>The Conservative Governments and Social Policy</i>, Bristol: Bristol University Press.</p> <p>Wood, M., &amp; Bennett, F. (2023). Parenting in the Pandemic: Exploring the Experiences of Families with Children on Universal Credit Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic. <i>Families, Relationships and Societies</i>, 12(2), 163-179. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1332/204674321X16528527479429">https://doi.org/10.1332/204674321X16528527479429</a></p> <p>Levitas, R. (2004). Let’s Hear it for Humpty: Social Exclusion, the Third Way and Cultural Capital. <i>Cultural Trends</i>, 13(2), 41–56. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/0954896042000267143">https://doi.org/10.1080/0954896042000267143</a></p>

## Week 8 – Family Policy in Comparative Perspective

<b>Intended learning outcomes</b>	<p>By the end of the session, you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare differences and similarities in family policies across industrialised countries.</li> <li>• Critically assess certain unintended consequences of family policies.</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-class task</b>	<p>Please identify a policy/statistic that you find interesting and post it on the Moodle forum, along with a brief comment on why you find it interesting.</p> <p>Examples from last year:</p> <p>In 2021, China ended the policy of limiting couples to up to two children and extended it to three children. It aims to cope with the ageing population. Yet, the one-child policy has changed the Chinese childbearing attitude and become a social norm. Thus, this policy does little to boost startlingly low fertility rates.</p> <p>In Finland for female same-sex couples, the female partner who is not the biological mother of the child must be in a registered partnership, married, or living with the biological mother to be able to benefit from any parental leave. However, the same benefits are not given to male same-sex couples, as they are only given adoption leave. This trend can also be seen in a lot of countries in the OCED, where male same-sex couples do not have as much access to parental leave entitlements as female same-sex couples.</p>

<b>Core readings</b>	Nieuwenhuis, R., & Van Lancker, W. (eds.) (2020) <i>The Palgrave Handbook of Family Policy</i> . Cham: Palgrave Macmillan – especially Chapters 9 and 11
<b>Bonus reading</b>	<p>Lohmann, H., &amp; Zagel, H. (2016). Family Policy in Comparative Perspective: The Concepts and Measurement of Familization and Defamilization. <i>Journal of European Social Policy</i>, 26(1), 48-65. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928715621712">https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928715621712</a></p> <p>Misra, J., Budig, M.J., &amp; Moller, S. (2007). Reconciliation Policies and the Effects of Motherhood on Employment, Earnings and Poverty. <i>Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis</i> 9(2), 135-155. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/13876980701311588">https://doi.org/10.1080/13876980701311588</a></p> <p>Hegewisch, A., &amp; Gornick, J.C. (2011). The Impact of Work-Family Policies on Women's Employment: A Review of Research from OECD Countries. <i>Community, Work and Family</i>, 14(2), 119-138. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2011.571395">https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2011.571395</a></p>

### Week 9 – Policy Spotlight: Shared Parental Leave

<b>Intended learning outcomes</b>	<p>By the end of the session, you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debate why take up of Shared Parental Leave by UK fathers has been so low.</li> <li>• Explain how take-up of SPL varies across different family circumstances (e.g. income, employment type, family structure).</li> <li>• Compare policy approaches used in other countries to increase men's participation in parental leave, and evaluate their potential relevance for the UK.</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-class task</b>	<p>Read this article by Amanda Ruggeri: <a href="#">The stigma of the stay-at-home-dad</a></p> <p>As you read, reflect on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What specific challenges do stay-at-home dads face in terms of social stigma, identity, and relationships?</li> <li>▪ How might these challenges connect to low take-up rates of Shared Parental Leave in the UK?</li> <li>▪ Can you identify any class, race, or cultural differences in how male caregiving is perceived?</li> <li>▪ What changes (policy or cultural) might help more men feel able to take leave and caregiving roles?</li> </ul>
<b>Core readings</b>	<p>Twamley, K., &amp; Schober, P. (2019). Shared Parental Leave: Exploring Variations in Attitudes, Eligibility, Knowledge and Take-up Intentions of Expectant Mothers in London. <i>Journal of Social Policy</i>, 48(2): 387-407. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279418000557">https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279418000557</a></p>



	<p>Atkinson, J. (2025). Reconciling the Ideal Worker Norm and Involved Fatherhood: New Fathers' Experiences of Requesting Shared Parental Leave in UK Organisations. <i>Community, Work &amp; Family</i>, 28(3), 363–386. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2023.2274276">https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2023.2274276</a></p>
<b>Bonus readings</b>	<p>Duvander, A.-Z. &amp; Fahlén, S. (2025). To Take Leave or Not to Take and How Long to Take? A Study on Swedish Fathers' Parental Leave Use. <i>Journal of Family Issues</i>, 46(6), 1050-1078. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X251329594">https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X251329594</a></p> <p>Wood J., Marynissen L., &amp; Van Gasse D. (2023). When is it About the Money? Relative Wages and Fathers' Parental Leave Decisions. <i>Population Research and Policy Review</i>, 42(6), 93. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-023-09837-4">https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-023-09837-4</a></p> <p>Myers, K., and Demantas, I. (2016) Breadwinning and Bread-Losing: Exploring Opportunities to Rework Manhood. <i>Sociology Compass</i>, 10, 1119–1130. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12437">https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12437</a>.</p> <p>Holloway, V. G., Dhensa-Kahlon, R. K., &amp; Alexandra Beauregard, T. (2024). Daddy's (Not) Home: Work and Gender-Related Factors in Men's Attitudes Towards Shared Parental Leave. <i>Community, Work &amp; Family</i>. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2024.2345872">https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2024.2345872</a></p>

**Week 10 – Mock Exam/Exam Drop-in**

**Week 11 – Revision Session**