

Lecture 8: The Victorian Family and Gender

Structure of the Lecture:

- Historiography
- Marriage and the family
- Work
- Sexuality
- Childhood
- Female suffrage

John Ruskin, 'On Queens' Gardens' (1864)

'By her office and place, [the woman] is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in the open world, must encounter all peril and trial: to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error; often he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and always hardened. But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence. This is the true nature of home – it is the place of Peace...'

Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (2007), p. 6.

Historiography:

1. demographic
2. sociological

Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500-1914*

3. feminist and later gender history
4. separate spheres

Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class* (1987)

5. reinterpretations

Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English Women's History,' *Historical Journal*, 36:2 (1993)

Marriage and the Family

One particular family type?

Couveture.....

Custody of Infants Act 1839

Divorce.....

1857 – Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act 1878

Married Woman’s Property Acts 1870 and 1882

Spinsters and governesses

Work

Factory legislation

Debate over married women working.....

Myth of the male breadwinner household?.....

Childhood

By 1901 the population of England and Wales was 32.5m; 80% of whom lived in or near cities. The population of London doubled 1841-1901 to 4m.

Birth rate peaked at 36 births per 1000 individuals in 1870 – outstripping the death rate – in 1880, 22.2 deaths per 1000 men and 19.5 per 1000 women.¹

Idea of childhood developing.....

The 1913 Parliamentary Report showed that while the infant mortality rate was 77 per 1000 births in the upper and middle classes, it was 133 per 1000 in the wage earning class and 152 per 1000 among families of unskilled labourers. 16 of the 25 towns showing the highest rates were clustered in a belt across industrial Lancashire and Yorkshire.²

Poverty, philanthropy, and education.....

Biggest changes 1870–1914.....

W. T. Stead and ‘white slavery’.....

Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon

¹ C. Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (2007), p. 1.

² S. Meacham, *A Life Apart: the English working class, 1890-1914* (1977), p. 156.

The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 and the Punishment of Incest Act of 1908, 'involved several overlapping concerns, not least the important of which were attitudes to sexual freedom, notions of social regulation, family ideology, concepts of childhood and adolescence, and visions of public morality. Neither of these acts was exclusively or even mainly concerned with protecting children from sexual abuse...Both acts were strong on symbolism in that they were declarations of reformers' ideals (nearly always middle-class in origin) of sexual, family, gender and age relations. They were attempts to legislate a public and private morality in a period of intense anxiety, unrest and historical discontinuity'.

H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England, 1872-1989* (London, 1994), p. 67.

1908 Children Act:

- Infant Life Protection;
- Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Young Persons;
- Juvenile Smoking;
- Reformatory and Industrial Schools
- Juvenile Offenders.

Lord Bishop of Ripon, vice president of the Infant mortality conferences of 1906 and 1908: 'All children are the natural care of the State, and ...where parental responsibility is not understood and not acted upon, we must for the very preservation of the State, step in...We are bound at all costs to see that the children grow up in such a fashion that they may become useful, serviceable and profitable citizens of this great Empire.'

Hendrick, *Child Welfare*, p. 125.

Suffrage

1857-60 Langham Place group founded – Barbara Bodichon, Emily Davies, Bessy Rayner Parkes, *Englishwoman's Journal*, Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, Girton College Cambridge 1873

1884 - 30,000 property-owning women in Britain but they could not vote

Some key dates:

1833 - Factory Act

1839 – Custody of Infants Act

1842 – Mines Act

1857 – Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act

1866 – first Female Suffrage Committee formed

1866 – June – Emily Davies and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson bring the ‘Ladies’ Petition’ to parliament.

1867 – J. S. Mill proposed to amend the second Reform Act by replacing ‘man’ with ‘person’ – defeated by majority of 123.

1867 – November – National Society for Women’s Suffrage

1870-83 – women’s suffrage bills introduced into parliament every year apart from 1880

1870 - Forster’s Education Act

1870 - Married Woman’s Property Act.

1872 and 1897 – Infant Life Protection acts.

1875 – age of consent for girls raised to 13

1878 - Matrimonial Causes Act, allowed separation for violent abuse.

1880 - schooling made compulsory for 5 to 10 year olds.

1882 – Married Women’s property act amendment.

1885 – Criminal Law Amendment Act – raised age of consent to 16; made it an offence to procure girls under 21; made provisions to remove girls from brothels; outlawed male homosexuality.

1888 – Central Committee of National Society for Women’s Suffrage split over question of permitting political groups to affiliate with the suffrage societies.

1889 – Children’s Charter act.

1889 – Women’s Franchise League formed, including Emmeline Pankhurst and Josephine Butler

1891 - fees for state schooling abolished.

1897 – National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies [NUWSS] formed.

1903 – Women’s Social and Political Union [WSPU] formed.

1905 – October – Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney arrested after asking questions at a political meeting in Manchester

1906 – Education (Provision of Meals) Act

1906 – October – 11 WSPU members arrested and imprisoned in Holloway

1908 – Children Act

1908 – Punishment of Incest act

1908 – NUWSS broke from WSPU after suffragettes abandoned their non-violent policy

1909 – September – beginning of force-feeding policy for arrested suffragettes

1911 – November – more than 220 suffragettes arrested during demonstrations

1913 – February – Lloyd George's house damaged by bomb – Pankhurst changed and sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment

1913 – April – Prisoners' Temporary Discharge for Ill Health Act ['Cat and Mouse' Act]

1918 – Representation of the People Act – all women over age 30 given the vote

1919 – Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act abolished disqualification by sex or marriage for entry into professions, universities, or public office.

Further reading:

Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London, 1995), chapters 3-5.

Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (2007)

Sophia A. Van Wingerden, *The women's suffrage movement in Britain, 1866-1928* (1999)