

# [Modernity post-modernity: has is brought more harm than good on institutions like...](https://assignbuster.com/modernitypost-modernity-has-is-brought-more-harm-than-good-on-institutions-like-the-family/)

[](https://assignbuster.com/)[Family](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/family/)

According to Marshall Berman, modernity is a mode of vital experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils-that is shared by men and women all over the world today. To be modern, he suggests is to find ourselves in anenvironmentthat promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world-and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.

Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, " all that is solid melts into air." ( Marshall Berman, www...)

Modern lifehas been characterised with great discoveries in the physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge intotechnology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, generates new forms of corporate power and class struggle; (Marshall Berman, www...)

According to Giddens, modernity refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the 17th century onwards. It is an era distinguished by discontinuities which separate modern social institution from traditional order.

The characteristics of this era are;

- the pace of change- rapid change in modernity i. e. technology

- the scope of change

- particular institutional forms (e. g. capitalism, nation state and the differences in the nature of institutions between modern and traditional ones.

According to Giddens, the modes of life have moved us away from all traditional types of social order. This is because they have served to establish forms of social interconnection and they have come to alter some of the most intimate and personal features of our day-to-day existence, (reading).

As we can gather, modernity is about change from traditional ways to modern ways of doing things. In this discussion, I discuss the impact of modernity on institutions most especially thefamily. Has modernity brought more harm than good?

Traditionally as most of us believe, life at the very beginning evolved very much around Christianity and belief in God. This shaped people's lifestyles, ways of living and thus the society. Christianity and the belief in God is the tradition that has been abandoned as a result of modernity, as put by Kirk Thomas, "... the tradition which promised to become fruitful some 350 years ago proposed that the best hope for authentic human flourishing would come through diligent attention being given to two sources of truth; the word and the world of God. Human beings would understand their true destiny and be able to enjoy it to the full only as they read and lived on the basis of two books; the bible as both the record of both God's action within and the interpretation of the whole reality and nature as a source of human nourishment and pleasure, (K. T, www...).

This tradition Kirk continues was 'sabotaged from within and distorted from without'- from within, the tradition was vandalised by a 'will to power' due to conflict between forces of the reformation and the counter reformation and from without, the tradition was deformed by the 'will to independence', (K, Thomas). As time progressed, the word was not seen as the only source of knowledge or truth. Slowly there was the realisation that reasoning could occur without having to depend on faith- thus there was the development of scientific knowledge in the attempt by humans to separate truth from falsehood, reason from unreason and fact from fiction. This was seen as the way to examine causes of human problems and analyse them.

As a result, human'sdreamsof the future dominated their imaginations- the dream of a society of social harmony free from oppression and ignorance. By contrasting such a bright future and the past- the dark ages to be overcome, it seemed development was irreversible, there was no turning back, (Catrell). Human's desire for reason made it become the sole action in society, then it became an autonomous power which carried other oppressive powers within its bosom- capitalism, colonialism, technology and state bureaucracy- this was the birth ob modernity. The book of the word was shut and the world became more important. Transition is ongoing, humans are striving to achieve more and more. What are the effects of this on modern society, institutions and the individual?

Modern era exacerbates the changes triggered by the industrial revolution that mainly affect economic life, cultureand the family. Postmodern life is characterised according to Peter Berg as;

a) suffering from time- famine- this is because the requirements of capitalism are too demanding and occur at other spheres of life, i. e. leisure, spiritual life and the family

b) because the other spheres of life become less important to man, he becomes hyper- individualistic where individual self- fulfilment is the life long quest and priority. Family therefore becomes less important than it was before 'modernisation. As a result, it becomes more single headed as unwed parenthood becomes normal, where as during the pre- modern era, family was very crucial to people's livelihoods as they depended highly on each other. The community was much more important than the individual. People held close bonds in the beliefs they shared and the norms that they were careful not to break. Modernity therefore has been a complex cultural and social movement that has/is changing the shape of the society today.

Let us look closely at the effects of modernity on the family. There is the dissolving of thenuclear familyshowing that people are not as highly dependent on each other as they were before modernisation. Today is mostly every man for himself, looking after mainly his immediate family because of the high demands the society has on the individual, the push it has for making the individual strive to better himself at all cost. Today there is an increase in the use of birth control andabortion. In the past, a young woman that fell pregnant had to be hidden from the society or chased from her home because she was seen as such a disgrace, but nonetheless, people, valued life so much that abortion even in the most difficult circumstances was not an option. Today in modern times, it is legal.

Could it be because modernity has resulted into us putting such little value on children and family than our ancestors? The move from tradition to scientific has given a licence to man to play God. For example, there is the issue of cloning and an increasingly permissive attitude towardseuthanasia. Whether these are 'harms or good' brought by modernity, one has to decide. Modernity has provided us with a lot of choices that our ancestors didn't have. As put by Marshall Berman, " the promised land into which we have crossed flowing with rapidtechnological progressand endless consumer goods seems like a splendid world indeed- but is there an underside to the bewildering options before us? Does too much choice become unhealthy? Does choice ever become dangerous'.

Our fundamental identities as men and women he writes are matters of choice and construction. He states that in our age, we have moved from fate or destiny to choice. Simply put, we have choices to make where our ancestors did not. We choose oureducation, our profession, our spouses and our places to live. 'Modernity has made us turn our children into acquisitions. Modern technology has made a reality what the pre modern mind could only imagine as an utter oxymoron: planned parenthood and genetic engineering will soon manufacture for us the blonde- haired, blue- eyed designer child that we order. Modernity has seduced us into exploiting the institution of work and family to fuel the appetites of the self, but that appetite is impossible to satisfy'. The question therefore is, is it good or bad that the individual is slowly and rapidly achieving the perfection he strives for? He has so many alternatives than did our ancestors.

It is clear that the family is one of the institutions that has been greatly affected my modernity. According to Gordon Anderson, in the modern era, four behavioural factors undermine the traditional family;

\* the distinction betweenprimary and secondarygroups- the former is the small intimate, effective group exemplified by the family and dominant in the pre- industrial society- the latter is the large scale, depersonalised, rational organisation illustrated by the modern corporation and modern state. Modernisation is essentially the progressive rationalisation of society and the gradual eclipse of primary by secondary relationships. Modern societies he states are planned economies. Bourgeois, capitalism and socialism are dominated by secondary groups and relations and in these case the family is less important. Family in modern times is characterised with low birth rates, high rate ofdivorceand abortion and weak family institution.

\* In the bourgeois society, family is also undermined because there is a drive to move private issues over to the realm of the public policy- that is deviant behaviour, personal relationships, family life and other areas of life that were private become objects of state concerns and involvement.

\* Anderson states that the weakening of the family in modern society stems from the growth of individualism- rather than group- centeredness

\* As a result of medical technology, demographic trends and the materialistic value of the system of modern society, sexual behaviour becomes less of a procreation activity and more of a recreation. For example, single women or gay people may choose to have children even without the attachment of marriage. Sex has become like taking a cup of coffee. Children today can start having sex as early as 12 years old whereas in pre modern times, courtship was the only thing to do before couples got married, ( Anderson)

The causes of family change in postmodern era

Technology and the economy- The family is changing because of the electronic transformation of the post modern era where information and misinformation are transmitted with increasing speed to increasing numbers of people thus also changing the nature of humancommunication. There is no need for families to stay together when they can easily communicate in a short time via emails telephone etc. Giddens also saw this in his characterisation of modernity under what he called the separation of time and space. He stresses on the difference between space and place. Place he says, refers to the physical setting of social activity as situated geographically and that unlike pre-modern societies where place and space coincide, the advent of modernity he suggests tears space away from place by fostering relations between absent others. In other words, modernity compresses everything; communication as a result is fast in reaching those people that one is not living with.

Giddens also talks about time and space under the characteristic of modernity called, disembedding- this he says is the lifting out of social relations from local contents of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite ps of time and space. This he states occurs in two ways, through the creation of symbolic tokens and the development of expert systems. By symbolic tokens he means, the media interchange which can be passed around without regard to those that handle them. Expert systems, he states are systems of technical accomplishments or professional expertise that recognise large areas of test material and social environments in which we live today. All these only show us that the family will keep on changing due to modernity because the individual has other ways of getting by, i. e. through the use of symbolic tokens such asmoney, or through putting trust in expert systems.

Another cause of family change is demographic, for example the decline in population of some countries I. e., Japan, Germany, Italy, etc. Even those countries that are over populated are also trying to reduce population by changing the structure of the family.

Another cause in family change. In the realm of values the following transformations occur, these are;

> The cultural and ideological elite of the postmodern world from old-fashioned economic politics to new identity politics. Social movements pursue psychological and cultural objectives such as gay pride and politically correct language. Feminism'sgoalsincreasingly combine economicequalityand cultural equality

> The search for self-fulfilment now assumes the forms of new age religious, environments and communal movements. All these transformations in society have resulted into changes in the family.

Another cause is the reversal of home life and priorities. Due to the fact that in this era people are 'time bind'- demands of work and parenting clash- the home becomes the arena forstressand work haven to which parents escape to socialise with friends and colleagues.

As we can see, work which was once historically a survival necessity is turned into a good. In agricultural societies, work occurs at home on the farm, industrialisation and the rise of the factory pulls work out of the home thus causing a physical separation between home/family life and work/economic life, ( Anderson). Feminism in this era has also made the modern woman to see a job as not something to put up with, but something desired, a mark of liberation, a source of identity, meaning and self -esteem. Staying at home with babies and diapers is viewed as torture and oppression. Does this show the victory of corporate capitalism which seems to have taken over the working class and has triumphed finally over the family, the home and the private sphere?

What are the consequences for the individual and society?

When reality changes, humans have no choice but to redefine it, i. e. when the original concept family declines, other concepts are formed, i. e. families of gay parents and single parents redefine the family. The issue of whether or not changes of the family are good or bad is debatable. On one hand, one may say, pre industrial families in fact suffered from more severe pathologies that does modern evolving family includingdomestic violence, child abuseand marital rape- the patriarchy family was not kind to all its members, on the other hand to day, there is a lot of emphasis on individual freedom of choice.

Consequences for children- less primary socialisation in the home as there is a lot of single parenting in the modern era and there is also a high emphasis on the importance of work and the increase in day care. Mothers also suffer as divorce causes them a decline in income and bad physical and mentalhealth.

What are the consequences of these for the society?

The rise of mass society- where a society is polarised between a mass of atomised and alienated individuals on the one hand and an overbearing state on the other. In mass societies individuals pay allegiance to themselves and to their nation- nothing in between

The rise of the nanny state- with high divorce rates, single parenthoodand childlessness and increased freedom of choice, a substitute father emerges- the nanny.

Decline of civility- Kirk suggests that the absence of effective socialisation agents will produce a stunted self, thus leading to a decline in civility because he states that the quality of an individual self depends on his/her socialization. The result of an increase in dysfunctional families is an increase in children with criminal activities and hobbies. Dysfunctional families he says produce stunted selves because they fail to do their job, (Kirk Thomas)

Modernity and post modernity have brought a lot of changes to the family and the society as a whole. The major causes of family decline are deeply rooted in major social, cultural, economic and technological trends that have been underway for several centuries. However, whether the changes brought forward are positive or negative is up to the individual to decide.