

# BRAVE NEW FAMILIES- STACEY (1998) DIVORCED EXTENDED FAMILY AND WIVES IN SILICON VALLEY



Judith Stacey, a renowned sociologist, conducted influential research on the evolving nature of family structures, particularly focusing on the concept of the **"divorced extended family"** and the lives of wives in Silicon Valley. Her work is a cornerstone in understanding how families adapt to societal changes, such as divorce and economic modernisation, and how these adaptations challenge traditional norms of the nuclear family.

## Divorced Extended Family

Stacey's concept of the "divorced extended family" highlights the fluid networks that often emerge following a divorce. Rather than viewing divorce as a rupture that weakens familial ties, Stacey argued that it can lead to the formation of new, functional family configurations. These networks include relationships between ex-spouses, their new partners, step-relatives, and extended family members such as in-laws, who may remain involved in each other's lives. Her research emphasized that these family forms are not bound by biological connections but are instead sustained by emotional support and pragmatic needs. Through these findings, Stacey demonstrated that families are resilient and capable of restructuring themselves to meet the emotional and practical demands of their members.

## Methodology

In her research on wives in Silicon Valley, Stacey conducted in-depth studies of predominantly white, middle-class women navigating the pressures of living in a high-tech, economically competitive environment. Using ethnographic methods, including in-depth interviews and participant observation, she explored how these women managed the intersecting demands of professional ambitions, caregiving responsibilities, and the traditional expectations of supporting their husbands' careers. Stacey found that many of these women experienced tensions as they sought to balance their roles within the family and the workplace. This tension was compounded by the unique challenges of Silicon Valley's culture, where success is often tied to intense professional dedication. Her research revealed how women negotiated their roles in these "postmodern families," where traditional gender norms were increasingly questioned, and family roles were more fluid and negotiated.

Stacey's methodology was rooted in qualitative, ethnographic research, allowing her to capture the lived experiences of her subjects in great depth. By focusing on personal narratives and case studies, she provided a detailed understanding of how individuals and families responded to societal pressures and structural changes.



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## Findings

Her findings challenged the notion of the nuclear family as a universal and unchanging model. Stacey argued that in a postmodern society, family structures are marked by diversity and adaptability. She emphasized that the changes brought by divorce and shifting gender roles did not weaken families but transformed them into new, flexible configurations. These insights underscore the resilience of families in navigating broader social and economic shifts.

## Summary

In conclusion, Judith Stacey's research provides a nuanced understanding of contemporary family life. Her work on the divorced extended family and the experiences of Silicon Valley wives revealed the complex ways in which families adapt to the challenges of modernity. By highlighting the diversity and flexibility of postmodern families, Stacey contributed significantly to sociological discussions about gender, marriage, and the evolving nature of familial relationships.

## Student Questions:

Q1: Why might Stacey have used ethnographic methods for her research into divorced extended families?

Q2: How do Stacey's findings about divorced extended families apply to contemporary society?

Q3: How did Stacey's study of wives in Silicon Valley illustrate broader social trends?

