

Families Knowledge Organiser

Functionalist

The family is a key social structure as it performs several essential functions for individuals and society. Murdock (1949) argues four vital functions:

1. Sexual Function: regulates sexual behaviour that is approved by society.
2. Reproductive function: New family members- procreation & childrearing.
3. Economic function: providing shelter, food & clothes. Economic cooperation between husband & wife.
4. Educational function: primary socialisation and discipling.

Marxist

The family is one of the key institutions that social inequalities are passed on through the generations.

- The bourgeoisie pass on their wealth to family members
- Educational advantages are passed down as people from wealthy backgrounds can afford to send their children to private schools
- Through the socialisation process people learn to accept their position.

Feminist

Families have a negative impact on the lives of women. Families socially construct gender differences- canalisation. Children also learn gender expectations through the division of domestic labour e.g. Mum cleaning up.

Segregated conjugal roles:

Clear division of tasks divided into male and female tasks. Husband & wife spend little time together.

Joint conjugal roles:

Do not have a rigid division of household tasks. Husband & wife spend time together.

Parents are now less **authoritarian**

Families used to rely on children's income until the **Education Act of 1918** and childhood began



Children are seen as important members of the family and their opinions are listened to.

Household:

Consists of one person who lives alone or a group of people living at the same address.

Reasons for increase in one-person households:

- Remain single and childless
- Divorced
- International migrants
- Living alone through choice
- Cohabiting (potentially before marriage)
- Choosing to live apart from partner.



How have families changed?:

- Smaller (less children)
- Marriage is less likely
- Parents are older
- Joint Conjugal roles
- Family diversity
- Increase in divorce, rise in reconstituted.

Why have families changed?:

- Laws (gay rights, divorce is easier.)
- Rise of feminism
- Diversity
- Technology (contraception, fertility)
- Changing norms & values
- Secularisation- religion is less of an influence.

Contemporary social issues:

- The quality of parenting
- Relationships between teenagers & adults
- Care of the elderly.



Boomerang children: Young people who leave home (for university or travelling) & return to living with their parent(s)



Patterns of marriage:

- Decline
- Later in life
- Civil partnership/same-sex
- Increase in cohabitation
- Increase in births outside of marriage



Patterns of divorce:

- Changes in the law
- Changing social attitudes & values
- Impact of secularisation
- Changes in the status of women
- Influence of media.

Consequences of divorce:

- Emotional distress
- Financial hardship
- Remarriage

Nuclear Family

(cereal packet)
Father, Mother & Children

Same-Sex Family

Gay or lesbian couple living in a house, possibly with children.

Extended family

Includes relatives beyond the nuclear family

Beanpole Families

Multiple generations of older people and few children

Lone-Parent Families

One parent and child(ren) who live together

Reconstituted Families

Sometimes referred to as a step family. Children from a previous relationship so one adult is a biological parent, the other is a step-parent.

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keythinkers

Rapoport and Rapoport (1982)- Family Diversity	Young & Wilmott (1973) (Functionalist)	Talcott Parsons (1956) (Functionalist)	Eli Zaretsky (1976)- (Marxist)	Delphy & Leonard (Radical Feminists)	Ann Oakley (1974) (Feminist)
<p>The Rapoport carried out groundbreaking research into family life. They identified a number of ways in which family life was diverse, in contrast to the idea that the nuclear family was the clear norm.</p> <p>They identified 5 clear types of family diversity. The 5 types of family diversity they identified were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Organisational. This refers to the way a family might organise itself in terms of the roles people perform (e.g. traditional male-dominated families and more symmetrical ones). 2) Cultural. Families differ in terms of their beliefs and values. One example of this is between different ethnic groups, with some ethnicities placing a greater emphasis on family than others, some preferring different gender roles, etc. 3) Class. Much writing about the family assumes that family life as experienced in a middle-class family is the same for other social classes, but this is not the case. Availability of resources, quality of housing, leisure opportunities, etc. all impact the nature of families and family life. 4) Life course. Rapoport and Rapoport point out that we do not live in the same family structure, family set-up or type of household for the whole of our lives. We might be born into a traditional nuclear family. This might change later in our childhood (for example it might become a lone parent family and then a reconstituted family). When we leave home it might be to live on our own, or with flat mates. It might be to live with a partner as a couple without children. A couple with or without children might live with their parents in an extended family, or move away and form their own nuclear family. 5) Cohort. There is also change over time and what is the norm, in terms of family life, for one generation, is not for the next. As such, great grandparents and grandparents may have had several siblings, and later generations have far fewer; more recent generations are more likely than their parents and grandparents to divorce or to be single parents. Since Rapoport and Rapoport were writing family has arguably become more diverse, e.g. same-sex parents. 	<p>Peter Willmott and Michael Young carried out groundbreaking research into family life in the UK over a long period of time. One concept they developed, the subject of a 1973 book, was the symmetrical family.</p> <p>Willmott and Young developed their ideas about family life, following on from the functionalist ideas of sociologists like Talcott Parsons. From their research (much of it based on social surveys) of families in East London, they developed an idea of the family developing through a number of stages through history: a march of progress.</p> <p>They argued that in 1973, families had become symmetrical - that is, that men and women performed similar roles. Rather than the traditional nuclear family described by Parsons where men and women had very separate roles in the family (segregated gender roles) Willmott and Young argued that in modern families men and women both did paid work and both did work around the house, including childcare. They did not find that men and women did exactly the same type of jobs - whether in the workplace or at home - but (compared with earlier periods) family life was becoming more shared and equal. Part of this was also that men and women and children spent more time together in the home rather than separately outside the home (e.g. men going to the pub).</p> <p>Another important concept for Willmott & Young was stratified diffusion. They argued that changes in norms and values tend to start among the wealthier in society and then others start to behave in the same way (the behaviour is "diffused" from one strata - class - to another).</p> <p>This led them to a perhaps surprising conclusion that they predicted that the next stage of the family would be the asymmetric family. They found that richer families spend more time apart and had more segregated roles, with wives not needing to work, and men spending time on the golf course rather than at home. This prediction has clearly not turned out to be accurate, with - if anything - family life becoming more symmetrical since 1973.</p> <p>However, the research was quite widely criticised, particularly by feminist sociologists such as Ann Oakley. She argued that the concept of the symmetrical family was flawed, as was Willmott and Young's data. For example, quite small contributions to housework by men were deemed by the research to mean that housework was shared and therefore the family was symmetrical. Instead Oakley argued that women had now had a dual burden. Yes, more women were going out to work, but they were also doing the bulk of the housework and childcare. As such, she argued that increased female employment had not made the family more equal but just meant that women had to work two jobs.</p> <p>A further criticism is that, certainly in the 1970s and even today, while both men and women went to work, men were paid more than women and women experienced a glass ceiling and were unable to gain promotions. It also presupposes a nuclear type of family with a husband and wife, rather than other diverse households that exist in contemporary society.</p> <p>Despite the criticisms, Willmott & Young's theory has remained influential and the concepts of the symmetrical family and shared and segregated gender roles remain useful ways to consider the gender division of labour in families.</p>	<p>Talcott Parsons is one of the best known functionalist sociologists. His work features in many topic areas in sociology. In 1959, he wrote a classic text on the sociology of families and households.</p> <p>Functionalist sociologists have taken an interest in the functions of the family: what are families for? While some identified several functions, Parsons suggests that there are two irreducible functions: 1) primary socialisation and 2) the stabilisation of adult personalities.</p> <p>1) For functionalists, socialisation is the process through which people learn how to behave in society - what is normal and what is important. This is an essential process for society to work: there needs to be broad agreement about these things to prevent people behaving in an antisocial way. Parsons divides socialisation up into primary and secondary socialisation; primary socialisation takes place in the family, where we learn the particular norms and values of our family and community. Later, we learn universalistic values through school, the media and other agents of socialisation.</p> <p>So parents teach children the norms and values of society, through pre-school education and by example. For Parsons this also strongly involves learning our gender roles. Parsons argued that men were the instrumental leader while women were the expressive leader and that both were necessary. So men carried out discipline and earned money, while women cared and nurtured and raised children. Boys saw the example from their fathers, and girls saw the example from their mothers, and ensured they continued to behave in the same way and give the same example to the next generation.</p> <p>Of course this idea is now seen as rather outdated. In 1950s America, married women were much more likely to be housewives than to pursue their own careers, and the idea of a clear gender division of labour (men and women performing very different roles) was not controversial.</p> <p>2) Parsons argued that families performed an important role for individuals and society in keeping people stable. Life is difficult and challenging and frustrating; the family can help to deal with this. Family members give each other care and support and help each other through difficult times. Parsons particularly described this in terms of a man coming home from a difficult day at work and relaxing into his family, like a warm bath.</p> <p>Marxist sociologists like Zaretsky agree that the family can perform this psychological role but see it much less positively. They see it as benefiting not society or the individual but the bosses: instead of going on strike, rebelling or having a revolution, discontented workers are restored to return to work by their loving wives. Similarly, feminists see this process differently, as men taking out their frustrations on their wives. Again it could also be seen as rather outdated, as it assumes men will be the breadwinners and women be in the home. It has also been suggested that Parsons was really describing middle-class families and ignored the different experiences of families from different social classes.</p>	<p>Zaretsky's Marxist analysis of the role of the family in capitalist society provides a fascinating contrast with the work of Parsons and Delphy & Leonard. He concluded that the family worked in the interests of capitalism.</p> <p>Zaretsky argues that in society today, there is an illusion that the family is a private space, separate from economics and capitalism. Zaretsky argues that the nature of capitalist society means that this is not really true; in fact it helps to keep capitalism going.</p> <p>Zaretsky was interested in psychology and the idea that the family might perform a psychological function. That is, that people could be nurtured, supported and have their individual needs met by the family. A similar concept to Parsons' warm bath. However, Zaretsky said that the family was unable to perform this function under capitalism. This was because, rather than helping and nurturing individuals, the family cushioned the damage caused by capitalism. The working class were exploited at work. Traditional Marxists argue that the working class needs to have a revolution and overturn capitalism and establish a socialist system. However, Zaretsky says that one of the things that stops them doing this is the family! Parsons argued that the family helps relieve the stress of the working day and prepare an individual to function the next day and Zaretsky agrees. However, Zaretsky sees this as a negative thing; people need to recognise that they are being exploited in order to be able to do something about it. The family doesn't really compensate for the bad effects of capitalism, it just seems to. It also helps support capitalism in other ways too: it provides lots of free labour. Women (housewives) work for the capitalist system for free, keeping the workers fed and clothed and reproducing the next generation of exploited workers by having children. Also, workers who have families are less likely to rebel against their bosses (e.g. go on strike) because loss of earnings does not only effect them, but also their dependents.</p> <p>For Zaretsky, the family could only really start to provide psychological support for its members when there is an end to capitalism.</p> <p>Zaretsky's ideas now seem rather outdated as the nature of both work and families has changed, particularly in relation to women's role in the workplace. Also, some feminist sociologists, such as Delphy & Leonard argue that it is the patriarchy - a male-dominated social system - that benefits from family life, rather than capitalism.</p>	<p>Delphy & Leonard - who are feminists - looked at the role of women in families and particularly at housework and the idea that women were exploited by their husbands.</p> <p>Delphy and Leonard took a feminist look at the family and particularly at the work of women in the home. Some existing sociology - particularly Marxist and Marxist-feminist - looked at how women's work benefited capitalism: the bosses had their workers clothed and fed and looked after for free. But Delphy and Leonard argued that the people who most benefited from women's work were not the ruling class but men.</p> <p>Housework benefited the patriarchy. Patriarchy means a male-dominated society. Indeed they saw the main role of the family as maintaining patriarchy: keeping men in charge.</p> <p>Delphy and Leonard looked at the family as an economic system: who did the work and who benefited from it? It was clear to them that it was women who were exploited in this system. They did the bulk of the domestic labour - regardless of whether they also went out and did paid work outside the home too. Time at home for men was leisure time, whereas time at home for women was also work time. This contrasts strongly with Willmott & Young's idea of a symmetrical family.</p> <p>There is also a contrast with Marxist-feminists such as Fran Ansley who saw the unequal division of labour in the family as benefiting the ruling class and capitalism. They also concluded that men tended to make the big decisions about the family.</p> <p>Delphy and Leonard's work does build on earlier research, such as that of Ann Oakley, who concluded that working women had a dual burden of paid work and unpaid domestic work. Later, Duncombe and Marsden developed the idea of a triple shift where emotional work is added to domestic work and paid work.</p>	<p>Feminist sociologist Ann Oakley is well known for her extensive research on housework and on childbirth, both using unstructured interviews to gain deep, valid data about families and women. In this article, she investigated the nuclear family, and its place as the "normal" or "conventional" family of the time.</p> <p>Ann Oakley defined the conventional family as "nuclear families composed of legally married couples, voluntarily choosing parenthood of one or more children". This is otherwise known as the cereal packet family: the image of a normal family that was portrayed in television advertisements and soap operas at the time when she was writing. Oakley critically examines this idea. She looks at the work of other sociologists and considers where the idea that this was the "normal" way to live came from, and the influence it has over society and individuals. She considered the way the conventional family worked as a form of social control: people were expected to live in these families, and this controlled them by making it harder to live alternative lives. As people got older - especially women - they would be regularly asked when they were going to get married and have children, as though alternatives to this life plan were unthinkable.</p> <p>Oakley noted that, even in the early 1980s, the conventional family was being challenged. People were exploring different ways of living and differing arrangements that worked for them and did not conform to convention. She noted that people increasingly saw the conventional family as a stereotype and an archaic one. Instead some groups understood that they could organise their families differently and, indeed, that they did not have to live in a family at all, but could choose some other form of household or living arrangement.</p> <p>Since the 1980s this challenge to the conventional family has increased and, today, there are great deals of diverse family forms and structures we can choose to live in. Chester (a functionalist) however suggests that we still live in neo-conventional families. That is, that while fewer people are getting married, and people may live with step-siblings, etc. most people still live in a family that is effectively nuclear and most people want to live in that family structure.</p>