

Assess the
functionalist view that
the family performs
important functions in
tod...

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Functionalism is a consensus theory which originated with functionalist writers (Durkheim and Comte) in the 19th century. They were influenced by what they SAW as the progress which was made during the industrial revolution. Functionalists believe in two important concepts - Social Systems, were just like the natural world, society is a complex system and also - Organic Analogy, were they compare society to an organism, such as the human body, which is a complex system which fits together. They believe that all parts of society such as religion and the family work together to create social order and stability. Functionalists believe that society IS based on a value consensus into which society socialises its members. Social structure is also important to socialists because they believe that human behaviour is shaped and determined by it. Many people believe that that functionalism is too positive because it over emphasises social order and ignores conflict in society.

This can be compared to Marxism which is seen as being too negative and over emphasising the negatives of capitalism. A nuclear family is defined, as a social institution consisting of a father, mother and their children who are all living in the same household. Functionalists stress the positive role of a nuclear family. The functionalist view on the family is mainly based on the American sociology of the 1940s and 50's which says that the nuclear family is essential to the survival of society. One of the functionalists who wrote about the family was G.

P. Murdock, he created a very definite description of a family based on what he saw around himself, however his very rigid view of the family has been criticised because it does not include the wide variety of family types which <https://assignbuster.com/assess-the-functionalist-view-that-the-family-performs-important-functions-in-todays-society-essay/>

exist, including same-sex couples, and lone parent families. He considers only nuclear families as the norm. However even though Murdock's view is now criticised, at the time he was carrying out his work a lone parent household (except, maybe in African-American households) would have been very rare and a same sex household would have been impossible to find. One of Murdock's findings was that, after looking at 250 different societies throughout the world, the nuclear family was a "universal social grouping", although he did include extended families in this definition. Although Murdock believed that this was the norm in all societies, there are societies such as the Nayar people who have been used to criticise Murdock's view.

Parsons, another functionalist who was writing at the same time as Murdock during the 1950's identified two 'basic and irreducible' functions which the family perform in modern society..." the primary socialisation of children, were they 'internalise society's culture'" and "the stabilisation of adult personalities". He believed that nuclear families were "a factor which produces human personalities". Parsons said that in a nuclear family women played an "expressive role" meaning they took on the caring and emotional aspects of family life, were men are "instrumental" meaning they are the authority figure and "the bread winner". Parson's believed the nuclear family was very important as it meant that the nuclear family became isolated from an organised kinship network, meaning that a nuclear family was self-contained and was no longer dependant on material or emotional support from other kin.

Parsons believed that this isolation in nuclear families worked best for the industrial society as it meant that four important factors could take place; Geographical mobility, meaning that a nuclear family could move around to find work, Parsons believed this was important because Industrial economies function best when there is considerable movement between jobs; Social mobility meaning that members of the nuclear family find it easier to climb the social ladder, Ascribed Status meaning a person is assigned their social status at birth and Achieved status Parsons believed that this could be achieved through a nuclear family as through education and hard work a member of a nuclear family could become a manager even though his father was an ordinary worker. However, in this theory parsons ignored the fact that parents will still help their adult children and those adult children often have to help care for their elderly parents. There has been a lot of criticism of this functionalist view of the family, especially because they do not look at family diversity and because they believe that no other type of family can provide the same as a nuclear family. These theories have also been criticised because they do not acknowledge the “darker” side of family life, such as divorce, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect.

The New Right movement in the 1990's was a way in which functionalists looked to addressing these critics. One writer Charles Murray, argues that the nuclear family is best for society and that the rise in family diversity for example, Lone Parent Families (which Murray called Single Parent families to emphasize it is the mothers choice) have led to higher crime rates. He says that without a father figure young males lack the role models to show them how to live in society correctly and that because their mothers have been

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welfare dependant, this has led young men having a lack of work ethos and forced them into a life of crime. He has called Lone Mothers “ Irresponsible” and says that they are unable to socialise their children properly. Although Murray had tried to acknowledge the criticisms of 1950s functionalists, he received a lot of criticism himself, especially because of his very strong negative stereotypes of loan parents.