

# Dealing with conflicts within a family



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [Consensus and conflict theory \(Task 1\)](#) \n \t
2. [Functionalism and the Family](#) \n \t
3. [Marxism and the Family](#) \n \t
4. [Feminism and the Family](#) \n \t
5. [Evaluation](#) \n \t
6. [Gender Roles \(Task 2\)](#) \n \t
7. [Domestic Abuse \(Task 3\)](#) \n \t
8. [Elder Abuse \(Task 3\)](#) \n \t
9. [Feminist Critiques of the Traditional Family](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Most families in today's society will have to deal with a wide range of conflicts and issues concerning the sociology of the family. The purpose of this is essay is to evaluate the consensus and conflict theories of the family and to analyse the concept of gender roles within the family. It will also focus on the feminist critiques of the traditional approaches to the family, and examine two sociological explanations for domestic violence/ abuse within the family

## **Consensus and conflict theory (Task 1)**

Consensus can be described as an agreed position or a set of values that stresses the importance of behaviour by learning to adjust to society and conforming to a set of norms and values. Whilst the conflict theory focusses on the uneven sharing of power within society and groups such as the

workforce, which are in conflict with each other in terms of status and power. However both theories see the origin of human behaviour as being one that is shaped by structure rather than agency. Therefore it can be argued that consensus is a concept in which a common group is founded, whilst conflict can be said to be a disagreement of ideas and principles between people or society. (Giddens, A, 1997)

## **Functionalism and the Family**

Consensus theory can be related to functionalism. Functionalism focusses on the need for people to conform to an agreed set of norms and values regardless of wealth, culture, race, sex or religion. This theory is carried through to their view of the family. Functionalism focusses on the “ Nuclear family” which is one who’s structure comprises of two generations, those being the parents who are joined in a monogamous marriage, and their children. The Nuclear family which evolved through the need to retain property within the family that could then be passed on to future generations supported an industrialist society as the set up of a two parent house hold would enable the father who is looked upon as the head of the house to go out and support a work industry in order to provide for his family, whilst the mother who remains at home would take care of the house and raise their children. (Giddens, A, 2006)

Functionalism sees the family as a harmonious unit with the husband and wife living in agreement, and any future products of this marriage (children) being taught through primary socialisation which takes place within the family, the norms (e. g., accepted forms of behaviour and common culture) and values (e. g., value of life and money) of the society in which they are to

grow up in. Moore (2001: 324) states that " the basic socialisation takes place in the family and it is here, through parents and relatives, that we learn the accepted morality of society".

## **Marxism and the Family**

Marxism which can be related to the conflict theory, like functionalism views the family as an institution which socialises the children that are born into it. However, unlike functionalism which focuses on the family working to promote a consensus society which works as one to benefit everyone, Marxism has a different view of the family. They believe that opposition between profitable establishments such as manufacturing plants (which form a ruling class through individual possession and finance) and the majority of the population who will provide the labour for these institutions, exists. Marxism views the family (which produces the workers who will provide the labour for these economic institutions) as a unit which enables the class differences between the workers and the ruling class to remain and one which also allows for the exploitation of the workers as the status of the ruling class is maintained through the profit they receive from the products of the workers labour. Haralambos and Langley(2003: 39) states " institutions such as the family, the education system and the political system are shaped by the requirements of capitalism and serve to support and maintain it".

Marxists are of the opinion that patriarchy (which sees the husband adopting the role of the head of the home) exists within the nuclear family. They believe that patriarchy in the family evolved within a capitalist society due to the ownership of private property. Any of the wife's property once married

came under the ownership of her husband and could then be passed on to lawfully-begotten inheritors, leading to the wife having no means of living independently from her husband. As cited in Haralambos and Langlely (2003: 39) " In The Origin of The Family, Private Property and the State, first published in 1884, Friedrich Engels argued that the modern nuclear family developed in a capitalist society. Private property is at the heart of capitalism and it was largely owned by men. Before 1882 in Britain, Married women could not own property- it passed on to their husband on marriage".

Patriarchy within the home allowed the husband who feels inferior in the workplace to assert his authority over his wife and family who are dependent on him as the bread winner in the family. He would take out his frustrations of work on the family and used dominance as a means of order and control. Moore (2001 167) states that " It is women who have their careers interrupted by childbirth and women who carry the main responsibility for childcare. Women are therefore more likely to be financially dependant on their partners, which gives them less power over decision-making in family matters.

## **Feminism and the Family**

Feminist Sociology is a controversial subject with wide and difficult boundaries. It is an issue that is not just about women, but one that is for women. It is believed that feminism started in the early 19th century due to the increasing perception that women face injustice and inequality in a society they feel is dominated by men, be it the workplace or the home.

Feminists are of an opinion that the family is one which allows for the control of women by men, through patriarchy. They believe that the ownership of property that is bestowed to men leads to domination of women within the home. The wife cannot cause conflict within the family unit by having a difference of opinion to that of her husband as she has no means of living independently from him, due to lack of the ownership of assets. Feminism sees the free labour a woman undertakes whilst raising her children as an injustice as a capitalism will gain from the fruits of her labour, due to the belief that her children will be a beneficial asset to a capitalist society as prospective workers. Feminism also argues that the wife will provide support (which is classed as emotional labour) to her husband by listening to his complaints about work, all the while appearing to be in agreement with him, thus soaking up all of his frustration, which will again allow him to go back to the workplace and provide the labour which benefits a capitalist society. (Scott, J, 1996)

## **Evaluation**

Although Functionalism, Marxism and feminism are all in agreement in their belief that the family plays a major role in society, each theoretical perspective has an individual perception of what the family stands for. Functionalism which focuses on consensus within the nuclear family does not take into account the fact that the structure of the family unit has evolved over time, and in today's society that unit may consist of single parent families and same sex marriages and Marxists would argue that functionalism promotes the sustenance of an unfair system within a capitalist society as they ignore any inequalities that exist in society.

Marxists would argue that rather than being a unit of harmony, the family is an institution which exists in a society that consists of conflict due to inequalities of power, class and ownership of property in a capitalist society, and that patriarchy within the family evolved in a capitalist society due to the husbands need to assert control over his family due to his lack of power within the workplace. However Feminists would argue that Marxism accepts the dominance of women within the family, and that patriarchy is an excuse for a husband to have control over his wife.

However, although feminism advocates for equal rights of women to men, critics of feminism believe that feminists have a pessimistic view of the family, which does not accept the fact that some women in society embrace their role in the family which enables them to nurture their children and provide moral support to their husband. This critique is evident in Haralambos and Langley (2003: 41) which states that “ Critics argue that feminists are preoccupied with the negative side of the family life. They ignore the possibility that many women enjoy running a home and raising children”.

## **Gender Roles (Task 2)**

Gender roles can be described as cultural and personal. We learn the roles that are deemed as acceptable by society, primarily, from the family and the culture we grow up in and then secondarily from outside influences. Gender roles have a huge impact on behaviour and define the way that both male and females think, speak, dress and communicate within society. Parents tend to treat male and female offspring differently, thus instilling the primary socialisation of gender roles in children from when they are born. where the

preference of parents is concerned, male children can be deemed as having an edge over their female siblings as majority of parents (especially fathers) would prefer to have a male child rather than a female child as this allows for the continuance of the family name.

Secondary gender socialisation is learned through the influences in society such as peers and the media. This is done through the way the children are spoken to and the toys they are given to play with. Boys will often appear more boisterous when playing will act out scenes related to heroism, whilst girls will often take on a more demure role when playing, seeming to act out roles relating to carrying out domestic chores and childrearing. As cited in Giddens (2006: 460-461) " The toys, picture books and television programmes experienced by young children all tend to emphasize differences between male and female attributes. Although the situation is changing somewhat, male characters tend to outnumber females in most children's books, television programmes and films. Male characters tend to play more active, adventurous roles, while females are portrayed as passive, expectant and domestically orientated (Weitzman 1972; zammuner 1987; davies 1991)

The gender roles that are embedding into boys and girls through primary and secondary socialisation when young influences the roles they adopt within the family unit. It has been suggested by functionalism that men and women's roles within the family are different. This can be evident in functionalism's view of the family. They focus on the belief that men perform instrumental roles, whilst women play an expressive role, and the fact that the consensus theory of functionalism saw education and professional



qualification being afforded to the males within the family as they were to be the providers and would have a superior role which involved making all the decisions within the family, whilst it was deemed that females had no use for education as they were to remain at home and carry out the domestic chores within the house, and nurture and raise the children.

Marxism too saw the woman taking on a more domestic and caring role, tending to her husbands needs and rearing their children, whilst the husband who was the patriarchal figure in the family unit who owned all their property, went out to work to provide for his family. However, as a result of the emerging feminist movements, women's roles within the family has taken on a more liberal view. Education and professional qualification are now achieved by both men and women. Things that affect the family unit are now discussed between the man and the woman within the home and decision are made in agreement. Housework is now done on more even terms between men and women, and although women still carry out slightly more household chores than men. As cited in Giddens (2006: 760) " Surveys have found that women still spend nearly 3 hours a day on average on housework (excluding shopping and childcare). This compares with the 1 hour 40 minutes spent by men. (Office of National Statistics 2003).

### **Domestic Abuse (Task 3)**

Domestic abuse can be described as the oppression and dominance through threats and acts of physical harm against one family member by another. It is used as a means of control and can be exhibited in a variety of ways ( these being verbal and non verbal) which range from low level acts, e, g, cursing, pushing and continual harrassment for sex, to more physical acts

<https://assignbuster.com/dealing-with-conflicts-within-a-family/>

such as, the pulling of hair, punching, kicking and in extreme cases, violence which results in death. Although domestic abuse is said to be a deviant form of behaviour that is majority of the time perpetrated by men against women, domestic abuse of men by their female partners is becoming more recognised even though many cases of male abuse goes unreported due to the fact that men see admission of being a victim of abuse as an a loss of masculinity. Giddens (2006: 221) states " Most violent episodes between spouses reported to the police involve violence by husbands against their wives".

Feminists state that domestic abuse inflicted on women within the home is down to patriarchy. They believe that through patriarchy the man adopts a role within the home that allows him greater status to that of the woman. This is done through the chances, within, what they believe to be a male dominated society which are afforded to him as a man, e, g, ownership of property, the attainment of educational qualifications and wealth. Feminists are of an opinion that men use violence as a means of controlling a woman's behaviour in terms of keeping her submissive. Scott (1996: 157) states " Theorists of patriarchy have directed the subordination of women and found Their explanation for it in the male ' need' to dominate the female".

However feminists fail to acknowledge the concept that women are also offenders of abuse against men. Society finds it hard to conceive that men can be a victim of abuse at the hands of a woman as since the beginning of society women have always been observed as " the weaker sex". As stated in an article on Elizabethan Women " Elizabethan society was patriarchal, meaning that men were considered to be the leaders and women their

inferiors. Women were regarded as “ the weaker sex”. (www. elizabethi. org/us/women)

However Marxists who also view the man as the main perpetrator of domestic abuse gives a different argument for the cause. They believe that the man who works in a capitalist society uses violence within the home as a means of releasing the stress that surmounts from working in an industrialist society. They also say that the man who is oppressed within the workplace will come home and use violence to assert his authority within the home as unlike the workplace, the family is an institution where he has power. (Giddens, 1997)

### **Elder Abuse (Task 3)**

Abuse of elder members within the family is becoming more general. This type of abuse can be performed through deliberately disregarding the needs of the elderly, e. g., not providing basic care needs to those less able to care for themselves, being verbally abusive towards them or inflicting pain through actual physical violence which include pinching, biting, slapping and punching. It is hard to know just how common elder abuse is as the victims are less likely to report the abuse that they sustain from members of their family unit. (Scott, 1996) .

In Macionis and Palmer’s book “ Sociology, a global introduction” (1998) they provide one explanation of elder abuse as being due to the fact that, more families take on the responsibility of caring for elderly members ( which can be stressful in terms of financial burden and increase in labour within the home) alongside going out to work and raising their own children. In their

book they ask the question " What motivates people to abuse the elderly?" and gives the answer as " often the cause lies in the stress of caring.

## **Feminist Critiques of the Traditional Family**

When society talks about the traditional family, they are in fact referring to the " Nuclear Family", which is said to be one of harmony. The nuclear family's structure is one that consists of, a father and mother who are joined in a marriage (that practices monogamy) and their children. Conservative thinkers are said observe the family as " The Pillar of Society".

The family is said to support a capitalist industry by reproducing the individuals who provide the labour for the institutions which are there to make huge profits from the goods that are produced by the workers. Patriarchy exists within the Nuclear family. The Man is said to be " The head of the family", and any money that is earned or any property that is inherited or bought by the family is said to be his. He too makes all the decisions that relate to the family unit. The woman's role within the family is said to be more of a domesticated one. She will take on majority if not all of the household chores, and this includes the rearing of children. She is said to be the figure in the family who is observed as the carer. Meeting the care and emotional needs of her children and supporting her husband within a capitalist society by ensuring that he arrives home to an environment that is conducive after a hard and stressful day at work. (Haralambos and Lingley, 2003: 39). However feminists view the family different from that of a conservative, as they view it as one that consists of inequality, oppression , patriarchy and violence.

Patriarchy: Gender Feminists conceive that the family is the basis for patriarchal capitalism, which gives rise to the subjugation of women. Liberal feminists consider marriage to be a tradition which needs to be reformed as opposed to extinguishing it altogether. This is evident in Betty Friedan's book "The Feminine Mystique" in which she declared that "Women in their 60's were enslaved by domesticity because of the roles they played as mothers and wives". She advocated for an improved quality of life for women outside of spousal relationship.

Division of labour/ Free labour: Marxists feminists believes that the division of labour that is undertaken within the family unit is an inequality women as they will provide majority of the childcare and carry out a great percentage if not all of the household chores. Feminists see this unpaid work within the home as an unfair as, the woman taking care of the home enables the man to go out to work and earn money to support his family, which reinforces the position he adopts as the head of the family. They are also of an opinion that this responsibility of care in the home reduces the woman's ability to go out and work and earn money which would provide her with a means of independence. Feminists also argue the injustice of the domestic abuse that a woman is subjected to in the home, even though she is the individual who provides the most support to all other members within the family unit.

Gender Inequalities: In "Feminist perspective on Reproduction and the family", feminist critics such as Susan Okin suggest that "...For women to have fair equality of opportunity the family need to be re-adjusted on gender terms". This is a general view which is taken by most feminists, as most families are based on inequality and oppression. Okin also stated that " the <https://assignbuster.com/dealing-with-conflicts-within-a-family/>

family is a "linchpin" for gender injustice" she also argue that, as women depended on men for almost everything due to patriarchy, this allow them to be "...subjected to physical, sexual or psychological abuse".(www. illc. uva. ni...)