

There is a gradual sharing of gender roles within the family essay sample

[Family](#)



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Functionalism theories argue that society shapes its men and women into different spheres, these differences can be seen as functional to the maintenance of social stability and harmony. Functionalists argue that the traditional view of family in Britain was that of the Nuclear family, this was one in which married women were seen as housewives, they performed the domestic tasks and cared for their children. Their husbands were seen as naturally assertive the dominant male, the bread-winner and perform economically supportive tasks. Edmund Leach (1967) termed this view of the family as The Cereal Pack Norm, and criticised “ the laundry secrets” of the nuclear family. This view of gender roles and the family is a debate shared by many theorists. Young and Willmott (1973) accepted the view of the nuclear family and announced the arrival of the symmetrical family. They suggested that there was a movement towards symmetry, meaning joint conjugal roles, a sense of balance between the duties of gender tasks within the family.

Conjugal roles can be jointly carried out, segregated or integrated. Ann Oakley (1974) and other feminists disagreed that conjugal roles were joint but were socially constructed, after the industrial revolution new laws were brought out restricting women and children’s working hours. Women were forced to become housewives and mothers, men were seen as the macho male. Some feminist theories suggest that society is patriarchal, a system of male power and control. Feminists argue women are pushed to the margins of an industrial economy by male dominated institutions, suggesting males are therefore insured power and authority within gender roles and the family. The Media made many references to the New Man; this was a term

applied to those men who have allegedly moved away from the stereotype image of the macho male, they allowed their natures to be more expressive, and would also share domestic and child-care tasks. Is this New Man a reality or a myth?

Gender roles within the family our gradually changing but to what extent are male and female roles egalitarian? Young and Willmott (1973) published research findings, which suggested that the symmetrical family was now the typical family form in Britain. 72% of men were helping in the house and spending the equivalent amount of time on home-related tasks. It was found that gender roles did exist with more equality than in the past. Decisions about family life were shared moving towards more integrated conjugal roles. Ann Oakley (1974) criticised this as she found that full time housewives spent 77 hours a week on housework, she dismissed the caring sharing role of the new man. Ann Oakley disputed Young and Willmott's methods claiming they were biased, as the only question they asked was, do you help at least once a week with any household tasks like washing dishes, making beds, ironing or cleaning.

The answer given could overstate the amount of domestic labour that was actually being carried out. A man ironing a shirt once a week was hardly a big contribution to the sharing of gender roles. Oakley's research showed a clear division in labour as regards to housework, she interviewed forty women with children under the age of five from different social class backgrounds, her research showed a clear division in labour with women spending more time n housework 77 hours and 30 % of men contributed to

childcare tasks. Males were helping more with the children, gender identities were starting to evolve.

There is evidence that there is a gradual move towards integrated roles and equality Devine (1992) carried out a small study of car workers it showed that men's contribution to domestic labour increased when their wives re-entered paid employment. It is suggested this only came secondary above all women still remained responsible for childcare and housework. In the same year Gershuny's research revealed a gradual increase of domestic labour tasks done by men when the wife was is in full time employment , thus a gradual move to equality. The changing roles perspectives assume a gradual sharing of gender roles within the family. In recent years there has been a wider acceptance of these interchangeable gender roles. Seven out of ten women with children under the age of five are now in employment. The Equal Opportunities Commission show a Surprising 36% of couple's say that the man is the main carer.

Paid employment would seem to empower women within the family.

However in more recent years The N. I. Social Attitudes survey (1994) and The N. I. Life and Times Survey (1998) show that even when women were in paid employment, the self reported hours on household and the provision of childcare tasks were greatly divided, with women carrying out 17. 15. hours of housework compared with men's contribution to only 5. 92 hours. DETI (2003) also show inequalities with 69% of women without children working outside the home, these figures drop to 50% when women have three or more children, suggesting that women still primarily see childcare as their

responsibility. O'Brien and Shernit (2002) in their study for Equal Opportunities Commission in Britain suggest that fathers are less likely to avail of family friendly working policies that are in place. The Family Policy Studies centre showed reports of new manism were greatly exaggerated with 90% of women still working part time. This also shows an imbalance, suggesting that women carry the dual burden of work. Research points towards women still suffering gender inequalities within the family.

There is evidence that even while working women still have the burden of emotional and domestic work. In (1993) Duncombe and Marsden research revealed gender inequalities in power and domestic responsibilities. They add to their finding that women believe they make the primary 'emotional investment' in the family and marriage. Many of their female respondents complained that their husbands were indifferent to their role in holding the relationship together. In other words women are frequently responsible for the 'triple shift' meaning outside work, housework and all emotional work. Thus women suffered what they termed as emotional loneliness it was suggested men would rather bring in a wage as supposed to give emotional fulfilment. They were hesitant to discuss or show their feelings of love for their partner. Men did not recognise that emotion work was needed to keep a relationship together. Women's larger involvement in emotion work can be a major dimension of gender inequalities in couple relationships.

Edgell's study in (1980) showed an imbalance when it came to power more important decisions were more likely to be taken by men. It was suggested that when it came down to important decisions like buying a house, car or

other financial decisions the men had the power and authority they were the hierarchy the dominant male. Women may have had decisions on trivial things such as what colour she was going to paint the house or how much she was going to spend on the children's clothing or the shopping. When it came to major decisions women views were secondary, gendered roles were segregated, men had the dominant role and the decisions of power.

Domestic violence is another key element to conjugal roles; many radical feminists say that patriarchy still exists within married and cohabiting couples. The family statistics show that domestic violence accounts for a quarter of a percent of all assaults in the UK. Also one quarter of all women in the world experience this. Debash and Debash argued that wife beating was an extension of the husbands control over his wife. These percentages suggest that men used violence to gain authority over their partners. This may be misrepresented as not all assaults are reported and men also can be victims of domestic violence. In the 1970's the feminist movement brought equality issues forward. The Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equal Pay Act (1970) were introduced these acts were a product and a cause of more women working. These acts led to some women to reject the traditional housewife role and encouraged them to have fewer children and put a career first. Women's roles started to have more of an equal status to that of her male partner.

Feminists like Ann Oakley criticised Young and Willmott's view of the symmetrical family and joint conjugal roles she thought they were biased and used incorrect methodology. Although Oakley's own research found a

gradual sharing in childcare tasks, women were still predominately responsible for housework. Feminists argue men seem to have less emotion work, more power and authority thus they benefit more from family life. Duncombe and Marsden and Edgell's research back this theory up. Functionalists like Young and Wilmott (1973) and the Media suggest that gender roles are becoming more integrated.

Devine and Gershuny's research in (1992) suggest there is some evidence to a small move towards egalitarian relationships, with men contributing more when their wives were employed. Evidence from the Equal Opportunities Commission show a staggering 36% of males are now the main carer, this sharing of child-care presents us with evidence to a degree the new man exists. Gender roles are changing with more women joining the labour force and male attitudes towards sharing of domestic labour are gradually becoming egalitarian. Sociologists and theorists in the 21st century argue that perceptions of gender roles within family and diversity have changed cross culturally and within societies, they suggest new families and gender roles are starting to emerge.