

Gender roles in society essay sample



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Asses the view that gender roles and relationships have become more equal in modern family life

Gender roles in modern family life have undergone colossal changes throughout the last 55 years or so; rights for women, divorce laws, and many other changes in the law that are constantly shifting the female position from homemaker to breadwinner. There are many things that are starting to balance these conjugal roles between men and women, but there are some people, such as radical feminists that still believe that woman are under constant oppression throughout all aspects of society, and there are those, such as liberal feminists that understand there have been changes within the law and society that are having a good impact of women.

Elizabeth Bott has recognised that there are two apparent conjugal roles within a marriage or relationship. The joint and segregated conjugal roles. The segregated conjugal role is where the stereotypical male breadwinner is the one that goes out to work and comes home and does the more ‘masculine’ jobs such as lighting a fire, and then there is the female homemaker who tends to do the housework, wash the dishes, feed the family and clean the house. These two roles have also been recognised by the sociologist Talcott Parsons who has named the ‘instrumental’ and ‘expressive’ roles. The joint conjugal role is where the couple share the tasks that need to be fulfilled such as housework and childcare and they also spend their leisure time together. In today’s modern family the male is now doing more tasks at home that would have stereotypically been the role of the woman in the past.

This slight shift of roles from breadwinner to slight homemaker has taken place possibly due to a couple of things. The commercialisation of housework has made it a lot easier to fulfil the tasks within the household with incredible ease. An example of this would be the dishwasher, where you simply load the dishes into the machine and it washes them for you. IN the past the female would have to hand wash these dishes. Because it has become a lot easier the male in the relationship has stepped in to fulfil these simple tasks. Young and Wilmott believe that the family is becoming more and more symmetrical in the way that the male is becoming more of a homemaker and women are going out and getting good jobs with a high salary.

The feminist Ann Oakley critiques Young and Wilmott's view that the family is now symmetrical. She argues that their claims are exaggerated. In her own research on housewives, Oakley found some evidence of husbands helping in the home but no evidence of a trend towards symmetry . In society there is a rising amount of same sex relationships and civil partnerships. This is where a male and male live together or a female and female live together. In the case of the lesbian couple Gillian Dunne recognises that the gender scripts within the lesbian relationship do not operate on the same terms as they would within a heterosexual relationship. In her study of 37 cohabiting lesbian couples with dependent children, Dunne found evidence of symmetry in their relationships.

Compared with heterosexual women, lesbians are more likely to: describe their relationship as equal and share housework and childcare equally, give equal importance to both partners' careers and view childcare positively.
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Dunne argues that this is because lesbian and heterosexual couples interact in different ways. Heterosexual couples are under pressure to perform the certain gender scripts applied to them whereas in a lesbian relationship these same scripts are altered and have less impact on the way they behave. Similarly, Jeffrey Weeks argues that same-sex relationships offer greater possibilities of equality because the division of labour is open to negotiation and agreement, and not based on patriarchal tradition.

However Dunne also found that where one partner did much more paid work than the other, the time that each partner spent on domestic work was likely to be unequal. This suggests that paid work exerts an important influence on the division of labour even in same-sex relationships. Along with the increasing ease of divorce there is a lot of pressure on men to be the best husband in a relationship. Some women see the ease of divorce as a deterrent for men to not be the best husband they can be. In the husband's case he may view the relationship that he is in with his wife as one where if he does not fulfil the roles being set out for him within the family, such as housework like doing the dishes and washing, the wife may be put off by this and due to the ease of divorce she could easily be separated from him.

A consequence of this is that men are continuously having to do the jobs that woman would've stereotypically done. There have also been many changes in the position of the women in the family; they used to be, within the traditional nuclear family, the housewife. During the 20th century there have been many changes; increased educational opportunities-girls now do better than boys at school so they are now able to access the much higher jobs that would previously only been available for men, therefore are spending less

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time at home doing housework and more time earning a very good wage. There are also more women in paid employment, and thanks to the law making it illegal to change the amount of pay an individual is receiving due to their gender, they are on the same level of pay as men.

In conclusion, within the modern family, the gender roles are continuously becoming more and more equal. Men are having to do more housework because of women in higher paid jobs not being able to fulfil the housewife role and the gender scripts that are being laid out for men and women are also constantly changing, encouraging women to do more with their lives, rather than just be the homemaker while the husband is the breadwinner. Gender roles are also changing due to the diversity within the family today. In a whole the gender roles within modern family life having become very equal in most cases.