

Sociological theories of the family essay



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Sociological theories are usually thought of as, “ systematic sets of ideas and statements about the social world that aim to make sense of the social world”. {<http://uregina.ca/~gingrich/j799.htm>}. The conclusions drawn from empirical observation and testing help individuals and society to be improved in the ways they lead their lives in this world. This essay is going to explain three mostly commonly mentioned sociological theories of the family which are Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism.

Functionalists believe that each part of society has a function, and they are very positive about society so they always see the good in all things. By looking at society on a large scale they argue that society is based on consensus, meaning that we are socialised to agree on the norms and values in order to survive. Functionalists believe that the family should be seen to perform functions which benefit both its members and society in general. According to Murdock (1949), “ the family is a universal institution with universal functions”. {Haralambos M & Langley P. (2003) page 76}.

In other words, families are found in all societies regardless of for example culture differences. Functions performed universally are; reproduction which keeps the human race, primary socialisation which teaches children the norms and values of society, economic and educational. Functionalists believe that the following functions are important for the wellbeing of society. Murdock strongly believes that the nuclear family represents all the above functions and he argues that no adequate substitute can replace it. In other words all other family structures are damaging to society.

However, Marxists refuse the functionalists views. They are very negative about the society we live in and see the bad in everything. They believe there will be a revolution, because of their belief that society is being dominated by the ruling class, therefore because of the working class being exploited they will get rid of the ruling class and capitalism. They believe in equality though their main interest is on capitalist societies such as; Britain, Western Europe and America. Their main argument is that institutions such as families are shaped by the requirements of capitalism and serve to support and maintain it. Main emphasis is on the nuclear family, Marxists argue that female have no rights and that men have all the power.

Marxists believe that society is based on differences between the working class and ruling class. The family makes it easier to uphold class differences in society as the rich can be able to give their children a good beginning in life than the poor, for example by paying for good education and getting them good jobs either in their own business or their friends businesses, whereas the unemployed and poor families would struggle in those terms. Marxists believe the family socialises the working class to believe that it is normal that the classes are not the same.

Feminists on the other hand see the family as patriarchal (all is dominated by men); some of them are negative about society. They look at society on a large scale, and they do generalise their ideas about males and female to the whole society. Overall they see the family as one of the main areas in which women are oppressed by men. They argue that domestic labour is done by women, regardless of being in employment or not. " Women make

the main contributions to the family life, men receive the main benefits”.

(Delphy & Leonard, 1992) {Haralambos M & Langley P. (2003) page 80}

Feminists believe the family is bad for women, they argue that units like the nuclear family influence girls and boys to learn their different gender roles within the family through socialisation. Mothers' are role models to the girls who learn all house chores, whilst boys learn from their fathers, to do male duties. They then gain knowledge of how male and female roles should be. The purpose of the family is to reinforce the dominant position of men within a patriarchal society. The nuclear family is not an ideal family according to the feminist, lone parent families especially those headed by women are seen as the ideal families.

Overall, the family unit today has changed since the time of Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism, however, they are relevant issues to some part of family life for example; roles of men and women are different because of anatomy. Men cannot physically be pregnant so they can go to work without any ties on the other hand women are biologically designed to have children. Marxism and Functionalism would agree with this statement. However feminists say this should not jeopardise women's right to work, it could be agreed with what feminists say that women can have children and work but should balance looking after their children with employment.

- Haralambos M & Langley P. (2003) Sociology in Focus Causeway Press
- <http://uregina.ca/~gingrich/j799.htm>