

# The family essay

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



## **The Family**

Today we can witness a unique event of reshaping and redesigning traditional family concept. The majority of sociological theorists suggest that such process can be explained by progress and development of society. As far as family is a basic social unit, it constantly reflects all the changes, which happen in our society. However, there is no single opinion concerning rejection of traditional family concept. Various social groups show absolutely different opinions concerning this fact.

In terms of this paper we will speak about the concept of family, its contemporary issues and debates. We will discuss traditional family concept and the way it has changed over time and across cultures. Moreover, we will discuss modern concept of the family and its diverse nature. Finally, we will focus our attention on sociological theories of the family and evaluate them.

To begin with, it is necessary to say that family is a social element, which links generations of people. In the majority of countries under the notion of family is it implied that several people are united by such reasons as marriage or blood relation. Living together in the same place is an inevitable component of each family. Such definition strictly regulates composition of family. Moreover, it excludes any non-marital unions. However, as it can be observed, in our days understanding of the family is much wider if compared with the traditional definition.

Indeed, contemporary understanding of the family is one of the most incredible changes of our times. Traditional concept of family has undergone

numerous transformations and today family is an absolutely new social unit. It is obvious that nowadays the number of typical families is rather small. Families exist, but they are absolutely different and unusual to our understanding. Typical nuclear families are replaced by such social units as one parent families and childless families. There is also a place for such quasi family units as gay partnerships and cohabitation.

At the time, when the concept of traditional family continues to vanish, it is necessary to say a few words about the most influential sociological theories of the family. Supporters of structuralism focus their attention on the composition of the family and its membership. In accordance with this theory, members of one family may be related to each other in various ways. Thus, relatives can have real kinship, be united by marriage or adoption. Apart from this, structuralism tends to structure families in accordance with the following criteria: age, gender, relationship with the outside world. Structuralism pays a lot of attention at existing bonds between family members. It is considered that the majority of social bonds can be created with the help of such activities as communication, daily routine work, spending leisure time together.

Adherents of functionalism have another point of view concerning family as a social institute. Their understanding of the family is mainly based on its functional elements. Functional family theorists are convinced that family should perform some crucial function. For instance, one of the most important functions of each family is human reproduction. From the same point of view structural variety of families is analyzed. Families, which fail to

accomplish certain functions, are considered to be dysfunctional and unable to produce good for the society.

Interactional sociological theory focuses its attention on social interaction that occurs within a family. Interactional theorists pay a lot of attention to such aspects of family life as quality of relationship, influence of family members on each other through their activities and behavior. It is remarkable that according to this theory any group of people can be considered to be a family, if its members behave in a proper way.

Symbolic theory represents another view on the family as a social unit. The focus of attention is interpretation of interpersonal communication between family members. Symbolic theorists are convinced that interaction is a key to understanding the concept of family. They analyze both verbal and non verbal family communication. Each detail, including body gestures, clothing, appearance, photographs is important in order to understand the role and nature of family.

I suggest that each sociological family theory represents an interesting and valuable point of view on such central unit of society as family. It seems that each theory focuses its attention on crucial aspects of family, such as its structure, function, interaction, communication peculiarities. Without doubts, it cannot be said that one theory is more important than another one. However, I would like to single out interactional sociological theory, because, in my opinion, it is one of the theories, which reflects tendencies of the modern time.

At present time in many countries traditional family is a rare phenomenon. Today it is replaced by a variety of alternatives to traditional marriage, like cohabitation, civil partnerships, lesbian and gay partnerships. Giddens (2009, pp. 363-364) is convinced that cohabitation is especially popular in the majority of Western countries, where rules of behavior, morality and religion allow living together and raising children without getting married. It is remarkable that cohabitation is popular not only among young people. A. Giddens (2009, p. 363) states “ many older people choose to cohabit following divorce rather than or in advance of remarrying.”

It is considered that there is a complex of reasons that lead to such situation in the world. For instance, it may be changes in economic structure of the world, incredible shifts in morality and culture, fight against gender inequities in families. Each of these reasons and desires is reflected in the nature of families in modern society. A good example is present situation with divorces. Giddens (2009, p. 355) claims that if previously divorce was allowed only in rare cases, today “ legal divorce is possible in virtually all of the industrialized and developing countries of the world.” That is why nowadays we may witness an increasing number of such phenomena as remarriage, step-families and lone-parent families. Allan Graham ( 1999, p. 227) underlines “ as a result of divorce and births outside marriage, there are now estimated to be approximately 1. 4 million lone-parent families, with roughly 20 per cent of children living in such a family.”

In conclusion it should be said that consequences of such tendencies are not known yet. Although traditional concept of family is close to the majority of

people, it cannot be denied that everything is changing, as well as our perception of family.

## **List of References**

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Graham, AA 1999, *The Sociology of the Family: A Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell, viewed 4 May

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