

# Sociology of the family and social change sociology essay



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Throughout history society and families have undergone huge changes and these have been argued by many different sociological perspectives. The reasons for the argued changes are as diverse as the theories themselves. In this essay I aim to raise, evaluate and analyse the arguments raised by Functionalist, Marxist and Feminist theories with regards to why and when these changes occurred and their impact on the family and society in general. Economic factors, war, changes in women's rights, reduction in religious beliefs and increase in divorce and a more recent era of technology are just some of the factors that have affected society and thus changed the structure of the family as was previously known. All of these could be said to have being responsible for what is seen as a breakdown in the family unit as it was known but in this essay I will be looking at the effects of industrialisation on the family.

Families have always been the foundation blocks from which we grow and learn, a means of support, who's components can change differently over time depending on where the families exist. The extended family included three generations of kin. The members didn't only share a household but also an important economic role which was to work together as a collective group, the purpose was to help keep the family alive and well, for example, the men would do more intensive labour such as subsistence farming, hunting and gathering, whilst the women would do crafts trades and domestic duties like cooking, brewing, caring for the offspring as well as perfecting the role of a successful wife and mother, which kept their husband happier and motivated to work hard for his family.

Eventually, the era of technology was introduced to society. This made a vast alteration in history by replacing most manual and animal labour in many countries across the world, which eventually forced the agriculture industry into an industrial working society.

In the 18th Century, industrialisation hit Britain and small industries started to rapidly grow across the country, specializing from metal production and mining to spinning, weaving and food production e. g. slaughter houses. More additional opportunities for employment were offered, altering the family structure dramatically, from as little as the age four, they were capable of working in factories. The growth of industrialisation resulted in more work for the unemployed. Wages were low, yet the house rent, food and living expenses increased. Many workers had no intentions of limiting their family size as their infant children continued to contribute to the family economy. Eventually the small cottage business's started to grow into proto-industrial business' and families started hiring more workers other than kin.

Functionalism was the main branch in society up until the early 1960s, since then it has been increasingly criticized by other sociologists who favoured different sociology perspectives (Martin Holborn and Liz Steel -Collins Publications). Institutions such as schools and churches played a big part in society according to Functionalists and these institutions were functional for societies as a whole.

The first main functionalists were G P Murdock and Talcott Parsons. Firstly, Murdock argued that the society was held together by four functions; Sexual, Reproduction, Economy and Education. Later on, Parsons' theory (which was

widely criticised by historical evidence, notably studies by Laslett and Anderson) was to study nuclear and heterosexual families, Parsons' Fit Thesis states that the Modern Nuclear family evolved to meet the needs of an industrial society, Feminists argued that traditional roles of the family restricted opportunities in employment. They also argued that although women were employed, that they were also expected to carry out the triple shift at home, which consisted of housework, child care and emotional work. Marxists argued that family helped a lot of children accept authorities without questioning which prepared them to accept capitalist authorities in work places. Another Marxism argument was that without the growing population of the family, the demand for products would decrease capitalist profits.

Marxist feminists agreed with these arguments but also pointed out that it was the women who were exploited most of all, they explained that the traditional role of the mother and housewife figure wasn't fair, but as they are prepared for this role, it provided help to their husbands at low prices which resulted to male workers being employed at low wages.

Marxists assumed the family had many roles which were beneficial to the Capitalist society, they believed that the family helped capitalism by being the major consumers of paid goods, this helped the bourgeoisie a great deal and proved that whilst the family exists, then the bourgeoisie would resume to make more profit. They also believed that the next proletariat generation were created by housewives, as more children were produced, more jobs were filled which were currently left open by the retired. They believed that the family helped the main income provider, which was usually the husband

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by relieving pressure from the previous evening allowing him to attend work the next day working and allowing the bourgeoisie to obligate a guaranteed workforce resulting in a beneficial outcome, the proletariat were less likely to rebel against the system due to little stress.

To Marxists, education was considered the main source of socialisation, this was also beneficial to the bourgeoisie since the family and education system would teach the children how the society they live in is precise. Education made the proletariat believe the ideology of Capitalism which encouraged children to believe in the myth of meritocracy.

Marxists believed that the bourgeoisie discouraged the proletariat extended family that once existed. Marxists believe that the proletariat had a mutual support system and acted communally as a support unit, which lead to many people becoming aware of which class they were in. This lead to the proletariat protesting against the capitalist ruling class for power, but as this was brought about by the extended family, the bourgeoisie taught the extended family to be immoral.

Engels saw industrialisation negatively as it increased exploitation of the workers, but also in a positive light as it would eventually cause a communist revolution.

The Marxist theories I have raised suggest that while Marx's theory makes sense, it has also been disproven throughout history as almost all of the countries that were introduced to the communist revolution eventually collapsed and became capitalist governments

Communists didn't lead to freedom for the workers, but only to exploitive tyrannies that abused the proletariat more inferior than any bourgeoisie ever did, which concludes that although communism may well have been a great theory, it was never a practical one. '

Historically the feminist approach is primarily aimed at men, their view on the family has an economic system which encompasses an array of labour relations in which men benefit from the exploitation of women.

" Marriage has existed for the benefit of men; and has been a legally sanctioned method of control over women ... We must work to destroy it. The end of the institution of marriage is a necessary condition for the liberation of women. Therefore it is important for us to encourage women to leave their husbands and not to live individually with men ... All of history must be re-written in terms of oppression of women." (" The Declaration of Feminism" November, 1971)

Many feminists came to the conclusion that when a member of the household worked, the income wasn't to contribute towards the household, but to the man. They saw the family as a way for the man to dominate the woman, as he would benefit from all the work the woman does to contribute towards the family e. g. cleaning, cooking, and bringing up the children and more.

Which also includes other views feminists had involving the 57 varieties of unpaid service.

Radical feminists believe that the main problem in society is patriarchy, they believe that a man's point of view is dominance and power, that they aren't respected like they should be.

A Marxist feminist believes capitalism is to blame for the problem, they believe that capitalism weakens the society ( mainly women ) , and if they eliminated capitalism and introduce communism.

A Liberal feminist believes that over time, sexism has started to diminish and society has started to improve.

In conclusion there are many arguments regarding the industrialisation of the family and its affects. Many factors come into play and the many combinations of these along with the diversity of what family means to different people, I feel it makes it hard for any theory to, on its own, explain how and why these changes happened or to know if they would have anyway and are possibly down to evolution. External influences affect us all differently dependant in class, financial, social and emotional factors within a family unit. There is no norm and so to claim any one theory alone correct would not take this in to account.