

Examine the view  
that 'successful  
families need two  
loving heterosexual  
parents'

[Family](#)



his statement represents the view that the typical family is a nuclear family; that is: 2 generations of parents & children living together in 1 household, & legally married, and that the nuclear family is the ideal.

Murdock claimed that the nuclear family is universal and for any society to exist four basic functions [functional requisites] must be fulfilled. These are

> Reproduction - to produce the next generation.

> Sexual - to control sexual behaviour, to prevent conflict between adult males over women.

> Socialisation - to prepare children for their wider social roles.

> Economic - to survive economically the male acts as breadwinner & the female as carer.

Functionalists would say these are essential for social life, since without the sexual and reproductive functions, there would be no members of society, without the economic function, life would cease, and without education [socialisation] there would be no culture. Human society without culture could not function.

Not all families fit Murdock's definition of family. There are examples of 'social arrangements' or 'families' that contradict Murdock's definition.

One example being the 'new world black family'. Generally these families are Matrifocal and mother-centred and consist of a woman and her dependant children and do not include an adult male. The mother is the main carer and breadwinner and rely's on help from female kin relatives.

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Another example is 'The Nayer' of south India. After marriage the husband did not live with his wife nor was he under any obligation to have any further contact with her. The males in the household would be either uncles or brothers but not the biological father. These male kin would serve the economical & socialisation roles within the family.

Gay, lesbian & lone parent families also contradict Murdock's definition. The lone parent family has only one gender role to follow, - the carer, breadwinner role, is undertaken by one adult, as well as the economic factor again undertaken by one adult. The lone parent can still maintain a sexual relationship outside of the family unit; therefore the sexual factor is still maintained. Reproduction can start without sexual contact, as the lone parent tends to rear the children in the early years, and then educational establishment assists.

Even with only one gender role to be followed, socialisation prepares children for their wider social and gender roles.

It would be fair to say that Murdock did not take into account the various diversities within the family, such as structural & cultural diversities. The family is socially constructed and varies from one culture to another.

To say that 'successful families need two loving heterosexual parents' is a very narrow functionalist view of the family. People are now choosing to have different types of family life, and it is more socially acceptable. Many families are no longer conventional but society still exists.