

The changing nature of the family sociology essay



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In virtually all cultures, the family is considered the basic societal unit, however the nature of the ' typical' family has changed over the decades. Families are no longer comprised of the same number of individuals as they used to be and it is thought that this is due to the impact of contemporary social forces upon individuals and their consequential effect on family structure. There are a number of different psychoanalytic hypotheses which address the possible causes of this change in family nature however it appears that all of these hypotheses emphasize the effects of social factors upon individuation and autonomy. The literature seems to hold several propositions for change in the family dynamic and nature. Schmidt has explored this changing nature in relation to adolescence in a totalitarian society; Chasseguet-Smirgel described a heightened and pathological self-sufficiency which can be related to the breakdown of family structure; and Chodorow considered the difficulty that women encountered, in a society where many choices were open to them, in consolidating a generative maternal identity freed from impingement by early relationships with mother and siblings.[1]

Chasseguet-Smirgel was of the opinion that drug and alcohol addiction, eating disorders and certain kinds of sexual conduct could all be classified as behavioral changes which have enabled individuals to become more independent in nature and as such, have led individuals to have the ability to do without family members through an acquisition of control over their own lives in another sense. In a study conducted by Chasseguet-Smirgel, a description of two male patients, of which both were alcoholics, was

described. These men's dependency on alcohol had replaced come about as a substituted for the nurturance, which they had not received in childhood.

Patients with eating disorders were also described and these were seen as a representation of a refusal to enter the biological order of female development. It has been suggested that for an anorexic woman, restriction of food intake could be seen to represent a triumph over the need for the food whereas for bulimic individuals, bingeing and purging re-enactment of a self-sufficient cycle whereby ingested food was felt to represent the bulimic's own faeces. From this point of view, sexuality could be viewed upon as a process which involved a dehumanisation of the object as a defense against intimacy, dependency and loss and as a consequence of this view point, all individuals with such mindsets, as described, would be all likely to have multiple partners and in some cases, multiple children. Thus, this would ultimately led to a large change in the dynamics of these families which would be the result of the multiple partners, as one male could not possibly reside in a home, which would encompass the traditional family household: one male, one female and two children.[1]

Thus, this hypothesis of the changing nature of the family highlights the effect that pathological disorders, which have come about as part of contemporary society, have had on the family structure and nature. This has been thought to have been brought about via the development of technology which has enabled individuals to gain more control over their body and their image, so that they have been ' set free' from the powers of nature, leading one to believe that ' anything is possible' and most likely would have brought with it the feeling of ill-contentment with other elements of ones life, <https://assignbuster.com/the-changing-nature-of-the-family-sociology-essay/>

[2]such as their possible spouse or family, leading to a disruption of a likely family home and the formation of more single-parent families or multiple partners. (Wood et al, 2000)

The blurring of parental roles and the breakdown of paternal function can also be viewed as another change in the nature of the family.[3]Father no longer fill the same paternal role which would have traditionally been seen and thus, this could be seen that children are no longer disciplined as fully as they might have been in the past.

Chodorow explored the interplay of cultural forces, which have lead to the failure of some contemporary women to wish to conceive children. In the literature, According to Lafarge¹¹, Chodorow mentioned three beliefs which were supported by contemporary culture and where thought to reinforce and mask women's unconscious ambivalence towards motherhood. These were the idea that motherhood and professional life were in- compatible; the sense that the women' s own mothers had been trapped and passive and that they themselves should only become mothers if they could negotiate entirely different and egalitarian partnerships with men. Finally, the concept of remaining youthful led to a disavowal of natural ageing processes and declining fertility. Thus, these The cultural themes could be seen to be pivotal in the fact that a number of women no longer have children, and as such, the ' family' home would have comprised of a male and a female without any children or of no companion at all, and instead, simply a male or female living alone. Within modern day society, the passage of time, and the fact that women are more likely to have careers and thus have children later on in their life, changed the family dynamic and nature in itself. Furthermore,

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the unconscious denial of the passage of time can be seen to act to enable individuals to miss the time to have children and thus not have any children or, indeed have children very late on in their lives, which ultimately would lead to a lower number of children being born to one couple, reducing the number or the traditional family to one child from two (or, in more early times, more than two children.)[4]

Schmidt presented the results of a research project in which adolescents from a former communist society were compared with those from a Western capitalist democracy. Eight adolescents from each country were interviewed. The findings of this study showed that there were features which were typical to only some of the members of those interviewed and not to others. For example, features in the Russian adolescents which were associated with growing up in a communist society were witnessed. These adolescents tended to put forward an unchallenging conformist identity which assured their safety within a totalitarian regime. Individual wishes, criticisms and disruptive feelings were denied or projected; the adolescents appeared somewhat frozen, unable to compare present, past and future, or to work through painful experiences. It was thought that the 'impersonal self' which these individuals projected arose both as a direct effect of the totalitarian society upon individual development and as an indirect effect, mediated by the effect of the society upon the family. It was thought that Western societies valued private life and the continuity of personal and family identity and that this was different to the values observed within other regimes.

For example, in communist societies, the individual and the family were less privileged, and were subordinated to the needs of the state. Even if the

child's earliest development took place within the individualizing setting of a nurturing family, the state quickly assumed responsibility for the child and placed a collective stamp upon his development. Furthermore, the literature presents the findings that in the totalitarian state this eroded the family structure, and in particular this damaged the paternal functioning.[1]It has been noted that the father receded into the background in most of the Russian adolescents. In such individuals, the boys tended to have a stronger personality and this has been thought to effect the way in which the individuals would act as part of the family and would alter the nature of the family in this setting.

Thus, from an assessment of the literature, social structure, family structure and personality structure stand in a complex relation to one another. Adult development does not give women sufficient social changes that they encounter before they encounter the limits of their fertility and this has lead to a decrease in the number of members found within a typical family in contemporary society. Hence, factors such as social change, changing family structure and the fantasies and personality structures that are linked to them may all be responsible for the changing nature of the family which can be seen within today's society.