

Examine
functionalism
explanations of
socialisation



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Examine functionalism explanations of socialisation within the family

Functionalists believe in the concept of consensus and that the family is at the heart of society, and is the key attribute in keeping society in an orderly and efficient manner. They also believe that the nuclear family best suits the for an advanced industrial society because it is more mobile to move from different areas than the traditional extended family because there are fewer people making it economically viable, (Parson's nuclear 'isolated' family theory. Their view of the nuclear family comprises of the economic provider 'breadwinner' husband (instrumental superior) and dependent wife (expressive superior) and children. Sociologists such as Durkheim have developed the functionalistic approach towards the family. Most of the sociologists coming from the United States.

Functionalism is a theory that explains the role of the family within society- functionalists acknowledge the positive aspects of society and look at society on a macro scale. The family is a unit which works for the efficiency and stabilisation of society. Functionalism is based on the belief of consensus, for example 'we are socialised on the norms of society'- from what is right and from what is wrong. Early sociologists such as Durkheim (1858-1917) recognized how organic solidarity could be used to explain 'some social institutions and behaviours'

Durkheim stated that there were two types of solidarity, (mechanical and organic) mechanical solidarity being characterised by the division of labour yet this was deemed 'problematic' by Durkheim. Organic solidarity on the other hand is when individuals see society as interdependent which

according to Durkheim is 'essential' for modern society to avoid 'anomie'. Functionalist therefore are of the belief that every institution contributes to the smooth running of society- in particular the family being the most prominent function that keeps 'society from anarchy' by producing social actors that are 'socialised stable individuals.'

The American social scientist Murdock thoroughly analysed two hundred and fifty societies and claimed that some sort of family existed in every form of society and therefore concluded that from his evidence that the family is universal. He refers to the family as a 'social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes 'adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of sexually cohabiting adults.' He argues that the sexual and reproductive functions are essential. If reproduction did not take place there would be no members of society; it prevents 'disruptive effects on social order' that would normally result if the sexual urges were allowed 'free-play'. The family provides control and expression. Murdock also states that without the economic function no 'preparation and provision of food' would take place - his believes that the economic aspect of the family is enhanced when the persons live together.

Despite Murdock's thorough research of societies and observations of the family, his theory of the universal functions of the family have undergone numerous criticisms; many having the similar tone that there are many different types of families for example single parented families - which are just as functional as the 'ideal nuclear family' and in some circumstances <https://assignbuster.com/examine-functionalism-explanations-of-socialisation/>

have a better relationship with the child as there is more trust and responsibility delegated to the child. One critic stated ' the contents of values is culturally and historically specific and variable, and is no way universal.' However Murdock's era also has to be taken into account when considering his theory, as the nuclear family was deemed the norm and he would have been socialised to be compatible with that concept.

Parson is of the belief that the basic function of the family is the primary socialization of children so that they can become civilised members of the society he also believes that the family is essential for the stabilization of adult personalities- as it gives the adult opportunity to express signs of stress for example the family could relieve the adult of a stressful day at work. Parson's view was that these two functions were positively correlated because a child can be socialized into a society ' only if the society was institutionalized and organized into expected role structures' which gives the adult stability.

Parson despite criticism, believed that the patriarchal family was a strong and stable and consisted of a hierarchy which consisted of the instrumental superior father (husband), the instrumental inferior son (brother), the expressive superior mother (wife) and the inferior expressive superior daughter (sister). This role structure is the " normal" nuclear family.

Parsons makes some ' assumptions' regarding the family, especially regarding specific genders for example the woman is better fitted for the home and the man for more manual labour. Radical feminists argue that Parson's view of the female role in the family is an inaccurate perspective

regarding the lives of females – and believe that they are oppressed within the home and ‘ have to be the stereotypical emotive nurturer’ due to such theorists as Parson which make them confined to those roles- without there being an actual choice.

Parson views the nuclear family as being best fitted for industrialisation for example jobs of today demand a desire for increased education, which means too many children on the become ‘ economic liabilities’ because the time taken to nurture children and the costs of schooling is very expensive. Too many children would not be economically viable which is why the industrialised family has been reduced. The reduction in size means the nuclear family is more geographically and socially mobile. Extended kinship is not needed resulting that extended kin are visited out of choice and not obligation.

However this has been debated, it has been argued that specialised jobs such as politicians have to move relocate on demand, the rest of the population which is the majority, can easily remain situated in the same location for a number of years, and that the extended kin remain ‘ a fundamental part of the family’ as they often are in the third generation and pass down their knowledge and culture which in turn is internalised by the children and adults.

Parson’s work has been criticised by some theorists such as Robert Merton (who worked in close proximity with Parsons) he argued that the ‘ social sciences were not yet ready for such sweeping theory but still had a tremendous amount of work to do gathering data and summarizing research

findings with more modest theory.’ Interactionist theorists criticized functionalism for failing to ‘ conceptualize adequately’ the nature of actors and ‘ the process of interaction.’

Parson’s work has been criticized, but has ‘ influenced generations of family scholars.’ Due to Durkheim, the grounds of functionalism were founded, and such social scientists as Murdock and Parsons expanded further of his ideas of the family- that the family socialises an individual through both primary and secondary socialisation, aiding the development of a stable adult character- however the individual is never ‘ fully socialised’ as society is continually ‘ evolving’ society.