



Association for the Teaching of the Social Sciences

Teacher Support Materials

Booklet 18

The Family: Revision and work sheets
Critical views of the family

Written by PGCE Students at Leicester University 2001-02

For the ATSS

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Note to Teachers

This pack has been produced by the University of Leicester Social Science PGCE student teachers (Sociology) 2001-2002 with the support of Tony Lawson. It was edited by Molly Rose, with contributions from Claire Flannery, Erum Mahfooz, James Pearson, Darren Rushin, Ryan Smith and Tony Lawson. This pack is one of a number that have been on this topic. All contributors are members of the ATSS.

The ATSS is an organisation designed to support the teaching of the Social Sciences in schools and colleges. Among its members are many serving teachers and lecturers in schools and FE. If you would like further information then please contact the ATSS at ATSS Ltd, PO Box 6079, Leicester, LE2 4WB.

Visit the website that is run by Tony Lawson at

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Among the services, which the ATSS offers to teachers and lecturers, is the Annual Conference that is held at a different venue each year. The journal, ***Social Science Teacher*** offers a forum for academic articles and teaching ideas. In addition, there are a variety of teaching resources and marketing materials to support the teaching of social sciences.

This Booklet

This booklet is designed to support teachers who are teaching family and identity modules. The information and worksheets produced are relevant to either the AQA or OCR Specifications. The booklet contains a series of worksheets that are designed for a teacher to present in a classroom or for a student to use as part of the revision process. The worksheets are self-explanatory, however, you may need to provide some additional resources and teaching materials to supplement this work.

If you feel that you would like to contribute work to this series, please contact the Resources Editor c/o ATSS.

Negative Aspects of Family Life: The Critical Perspective

Introduction

The critical approach to the family is also known by two other names: Radical Psychiatric or the Phenomenological approach. The best known writers are RD Laing *The Politics of the Family* and David Cooper *The Death of the Family*. They acknowledge that family life can be emotionally painful and unhappy for its members. Both writers highlight the way in which the process of socialisation is essentially harmful to people. As such they are highly critical of functionalists such as Parsons who saw socialisation as a positive feature of the family. Laing and Cooper both see individuals, especially children, as trapped within the family.

Individual Research Exercise

Using textbooks and the Internet, make notes on R D Laing and David Cooper's views of the family.

Activity

Copy out the passage and fill in the gaps in the text below using the following terms.

Capitalism	Support	Ideological conditioning device	Controversy
Evident	Ruling	Abolition	Method
Stereotyped	Treatments	Damaging	Response
Labelled	Schizophrenia	Marxist	Ineffective

R D Laing – The Family causes madness

Laing claimed to reveal the reality of family life, concluding that the family is *** to individuals and can even cause ***. This condition is frequently *** as the 'split-personality' but there are various types of behaviour which are called 'schizoid'. For Laing, behaviour disorders such as schizophrenia were a *** to intolerable family situations such as the conflicts of parents, incest or emotional abuse.

'The experience and behaviour that gets *** 'schizophrenic' is a special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unliveable situation.'

R D Laing

Laing's approach was referred to as anti-psychiatry because he believed that the usual *** for schizophrenia (giving patients electric convulsions, strong medication and putting them in

straight jackets) would be *** since the problem was in the family relationships. His preferred *** was talking about the situation.

By blaming the family for schizophrenia and other illnesses, Laing created a social and sociological ***. Today, most psychologists accept the view that schizophrenia is a biological and genetic disorder although Laing's ideas still have some ***.

David Cooper

Cooper (1972) took Laing's theories a step further, using a *** perspective. The tension and guilt of family life is due to the contradictions of ***. The family is seen as an *** *** because it reinforces the power of the *** class and crushes individual identity. The family form is *** in social structures of factories, schools, businesses and churches. The *** of the family will be part of any destruction of capitalist social relations.

Activity

Rank the following criticisms of Laing and Cooper in order of importance with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least. When you have made your choice discuss this with your partner. There is not a right answer, but you must be able to justify your opinion.

1.	Fletcher criticises both writers for making generalisations about all families when they only studied a few, abnormal ones.
2.	Laing retracted many of his ideas before he died.
3.	Feminists have argued that it is not necessarily the family as such that creates oppression and unhappiness, but the patriarchal nature of the family.
4.	They focus entirely on the negative view of the family and do not see the positive.
5.	There are no normal families studied for a control sample or comparison.

Use the above exercise and your own sociological knowledge to plan an answer to this essay.

Evaluate the case for the abolition of the family with reference to the work of Laing and Cooper.

Families: The Marxist Perspective

The Marxist perspective on the family has two main themes:

The influence of the economy on the family

The role the family plays in maintaining the capitalist system

It argues that the economic system (capitalism) influences a family's:

Functions (the way it meets the needs of society)

Structure (the make up of families and households)

Roles (the work-role each family member takes on in the household)

Item A

The Development of the Family

Marxists argue that it was the requirements of the economic mode of production (capitalism) that shaped the development of the family in western industrial societies. **Friedrich Engels** (1820 –95) examined the emergence of the nuclear family, and male dominance within it, in an historical context. He explained the development of the family as evolving alongside the development of capitalism. The family structure went through a series of stages, from primitive communism, characterised by sexual promiscuity, shared labour and communally-owned means of production; through to capitalism, where marriage is based on monogamy (one man and one woman) and private property was owned. He therefore argued that the growth of private property, nuclear families and male dominance evolved together. Because monogamous marriage is the most effective means of ensuring that private property could be kept within a family's bloodline – since men could ensure that they had legitimate offspring to inherit their wealth – nuclear families became the dominant household.

Item B

Maintaining Capitalism

Marxist thinkers focus on how the family contributes to maintaining the unequal and exploitative relations of production in a capitalist society. They argue that it does this by:

- Reproducing the labour force (the next generation of workers)
- Socialising children to conform (to obey laws and authority)
- Being consumers (purchasing 'family' cars and 'family' homes)
- Providing love, refuge and other support for the labour force

Item C

Marxist-feminists

Marxist feminists see the nuclear family as an institution that oppresses women, since housewives are seen primarily as the producers of children and are largely economically dependent on their husbands. Rather than simply blaming patriarchy (male domination) for female subordination, they relate it to the economic structure of society. Like Engels, they suggest male domination and nuclear families are essential for the smooth running of the capitalist system and therefore advocate its demise (want it abolished). They argue that domestic labour (unpaid housework) adds to workers' labour power (a husband's ability to work). By cooking and washing for him, offering emotional support and even satisfying his sexual desires, a wife makes her husband a more productive worker. Also, by producing and rearing children (the next generation of workers) at no cost to employers, she plays a vital role in the reproduction of labour power. Marxist-feminist thinkers also suggest that the family plays an ideological role. The family conditions (socialises) children to accept an authoritarian, unequal and exploitative society. By learning to accept the authority of its parents, especially its father, the child learns to accept the authority of schools, employers and the capitalist system.

Item D

Marriage as Prostitution

Marx himself claimed that marriage was a form of 'exclusive private property', and Engels suggested that a housewife's position is one of 'glorified prostitution'.

Tasks

1. Using your own words, explain the relationship between the family and the capitalist mode of production according to the Marxist perspective.
2. Refer to past notes and worksheets on the functions of the family as identified by functionalist thinkers. In no more than two or three sentences for each, comment on these functions from a Marxist and/or Marxist-feminist standpoint.
3. In a short paragraph, and with information from the items and elsewhere, identify any similarities and/or differences between the Marxist feminist perspective and other feminist approaches.
4. What do you think that Marx and Engels meant by the quotations in Item D?
5. How far do you agree that the family 'maintains the unequal and exploitative relations of production in a capitalist society'? (Item B)

Families: The Feminist Perspective

Feminist theories of the family focus upon the relationships which exist between adult partners, usually a man and a woman.

Feminist theorists hold many differing opinions concerning the family and these they are often split into the categories of Liberal feminism, Radical Feminism and Marxist Feminism. Note that these categories are more a guide to differing types of feminist thought, rather than rigid groups – there are other types of feminism too. You may be aware of Black Feminism.

Liberal feminism



It has been argued that liberal feminism is an optimistic theory because it focuses on the social changes that have benefited women in the twentieth century. Liberal feminists claim that social change will continue to benefit women and so the need for any political and social revolution is non-existent.

Tasks

1. In pairs or small groups, research and draw up a short list of both political /legal changes and social changes which have occurred in the twentieth century and which liberal feminists may argue have been of benefit to women.
2. Liberal feminists are of the opinion that gentle persuasion and 'consciousness raising' of their cause can bring about change within the family which will be beneficial to women. Discuss with others in the class as to whether you agree that gentle persuasion can bring about change in this area. Provide reasons for your answers.

Radical feminism

Radical feminists hold varying opinions within their own factions. This is a very vigorous debate. However, the overriding opinion held is that patriarchal society (male power and dominance) is to blame for women's oppression in and out of the family. They claim that patriarchy is embedded within the foundations of most societies.

At one end of the spectrum, radical feminists argue that possibilities of change within the family unit are very real, but militant approaches need to be used in order to bring it about.

At the other end of the spectrum are the ultra-radical feminists. This group sees the possibilities of reform within the family are virtually nil. The family has always been oppressive of women and the answer to this is the abolition of the patriarchal family unit. In essence, ultra radical feminists favour alternative ways of cohabiting such as homosexual couples and communes.

Task

3. Consider the main arguments from each end of the radical feminist scale. Draw up a list of criticisms for each viewpoint.

4. Ann Oakley is probably one of the most well known radical feminists. In her work ***The Sociology of Housework*** (1974), she stated that from the evidence of her research housework is still very much in the female domain with men contributing only a small amount. Oakley's findings are more than thirty years old. Do you think she would have the same results if she conducted her survey today? Discuss this in small groups and write up your arguments. Remember, if you feel that there has been change, then you should be able to consider the causes of that change.



Marxist feminism

Marxist feminists examine the family within the context of capitalist society. They argue that women's exploitation within the family is due to the fact that women are encouraged to carry out unpaid work within the home. This helps capitalism to flourish. Due to women's lack of economic power, they are in a prime position to be exploited.

Marxist feminists do not see the exploitation of women coming to an end as long as capitalist society continues. Capitalism merely encourages women's economic dependence on men.

Task

5. In small groups, discuss reasons Marxist feminists give as to why women who stay at home and carry out household and childcare duties benefit capitalism.



Feminist perspectives on the Family – Teacher notes

The worksheet was designed to enhance student's AO2 skills. Students are required to work with others and form answers to the questions posed. The worksheet contains some information that the students will need but they should be encouraged to use texts and the Internet to gather additional information.

Below is a list of points which should be covered when attempting the tasks.

Task 1

Political and legal changes

- Women gaining right to vote
- Equal pay legislation
- Sexual discrimination in the workplace being made illegal
- Rape within marriage a criminal offence in the 1990s.

Social changes

- Men do more in home than they did previously
- Labour saving devices introduced to homes
- A smaller family means a better quality of life

Task 2

Students should assess the methods of liberal feminists and decide whether they have managed to bring about changes which have benefited women. They might also consider whether all women have benefited or whether some have gained more freedom than others. Other possible reasons for political and social change should also be examined. Are changes actually brought about by feminism, or by the entry of women into the workplace and the economics of mortgages?

Task 3

Students should draw upon other theories in order to provide a critique. Functionalist and new right theories could be incorporated, as could other feminist views. The 'softer' end of the spectrum may be seen as being idealistic and simplistic. Ultra-radical theories could be seen as being detrimental to the continuation of population and the maintenance of the status quo. Is a person's sexuality merely a life style choice or may there be more to human sex than politics?

Task 4

Students could offer their own opinions, but it should be stressed that other research should be drawn upon. Such research could include that by Pahl (1984) and Henwood (1987)

Task 5

Arguments put forward by Marxist-feminists include:

- Men who are sole breadwinners are unwilling to withdraw labour in a strike
- Women provide emotional support for men and this prevents their desire for revolution.
- Women perform the important role of cooking and cleaning, this supports men in work
- Women bring up their children to follow the roles which are needed for capitalism to continue