

“Assess Sociological Explanations for the Relationship between the Family and Industrialisation”

There were several different views on exactly what the relationship was between Industrialisation and its effect on the family. Most sociologists accept the idea that before Industrialisation, trends in the family suggested that they lived and worked together as an extended family. This type of family unit and how it changed is central to the arguments of several key researchers.

Parsons, a functionalist, argued that pre-industrial (extended) family performed many of the functions that modern society now serves. (Such as education / support / and health). He believed that in the present, due to structural differentiation, more specialised institutions have risen in modern society. Parsons argues that there are now only two basic family functions left today: The primary socialisation of children and the stabilisation of adult personalities

Parsons' view is fairly controversial as he is criticised by many other sociologists that have formed strong arguments against his ideas. Laslett, a historian, revealed that there was no solid evidence that the extended family was ever dominant in the pre-industrial society, that modernisation took place so easily because the family was already mobile. He uncovered historical evidence that between 1504 and 1821, only 10% of families could be described as extended. Other sociologists such as Fletcher and Short claim that the pre-industrial families simply neglected their many 'non-basic' roles (such as health and education) due to poverty. They have linked this to society today convincingly, by revealing that today parents dote over their children much more, and would never let them degenerate into what pre-industrial parents would be happy to see their children as.

Fletcher believes that family became a unit of consumption instead of production. Marxists agree with this stand, and also add that the idea of consumption is the way post-industrial/modern society motivates its workers, by making them buy frivolous items with their wages, earned at dissatisfying and irrelevant occupations.

Willmott and Young believe in the privatisation and promotion of the nuclear family. A new institution, much smaller and self-contained, mainly with the individuals expressing themselves within this unit. They agree with Parsons' idea of specialisation of the isolated nuclear family, yet they also produced their own theory: The Three Historical stages of the family. (Pre-Industrial, early industrial, and symmetrical stages).

Authors such as Parsons, Willmott, Young, and Fletcher have all suggested that it was the process of industrialisation that brought the later symmetrical stages, which contrasted to their prequel stages. They believe that along side the isolated nuclear family, there emerged the modified extended family (in which through the use of technology such as the phone, there can be maintenance of contact and support across great distances). Anderson did research based on the historical research carried out by Preston, intent on showing the rise of the Modified Extended Nuclear Family that came about due to hardship in early industrial times. Parsons argues the dominance of these two family groups in modern society has come about due to the particularly forms being well adapted to meeting demands of industrial civilisation as well as private individuals on a personal level.

In contrast, Marxists would argue that the private nuclear family is a symbol of the workers isolation, as the Bourgeoisie class uses their Proletariat employees in demeaning work that has been made possible by the process of industrialisation. The family is a tool of the controlling class to get their employees back on their feet, and also to tie them down. The men must work as they have a commitment to single-handedly providing for their nuclear family.

In conclusion, it seems that there are plenty of points that sociologists overlap on. Sometimes in agreement, sometimes in strong criticism to each other. I believe that the industrial revolution brought about a massive change in the structure of society, and that the fact that the family *has* changed is agreed by all. Functionalists believe that family adapted smoothly so as to fulfil the demands of the industrial society while surviving. To do this it needed to modify the extended family, and become more dependant internally for support. Marxists believe that the revolution preyed upon the working classes by locking them into dull, alienating roles of work. The integration of unfair employment terms and the new machines, allowed capitalism to rise and dominate in modern society.

Whether either is right, it is true that the nuclear family is common today. The working class has not revolted in most industrialised countries, and the fact that society continues to function without visible friction, suggests that a state of harmony has been achieved. Marxists would suggest this harmony is a mere illusion, but I believe the functionalist approach of adaptation and indefinite stability is the most relevant, and well backed up here.