

'Assess the contribution made by feminists' sociologists to the study of the family'

Feminists' stress that gender is a major feature of family living, they argue that it should be recognised that families contain both men and women and that gender often has a profound impact on the ways in which the individuals actually experience and understand living in families. They highlighted 'patriarchy' and a need for change and women's independence. However there are a variety of feminisms such as liberal, radical, Marxist and difference which have all made their own contribution.

Liberal feminists' believe that women were once oppressed in the family and society, but now as law changes and attitudes have changed things have improved greatly and will continue to do so till equality is achieved. There is much evidence to prove things have changed to benefit women, for example Domestic violence is dealt with seriously by the police, men are increasingly taking on the primary care role, labour laws make it illegal to gender discriminate, rape within the marriage is now a crime (1991) and women are also improving in education as they are doing better than men.

Marxist feminists' believe that women are exploited due to the economic system of capitalism which breeds inequality not only between the bourgeoisie and proletariat but also between men and women so that the bourgeoisie can make profit. Marxist feminist Margaret Benston believes that domestic labour serves the need of the capitalist society, she argues that the women's domestic work produced profit due to women creating more efficient workers (male) as a result of domestic housework which includes cooking, cleaning, sexual satisfaction. Women are needed by capitalism to raise the next generation of workers. Many Marxist feminists' believe the family is an obstacle to gender inequality in employment. They say women are disadvantaged in employment due to domestic and childcare responsibilities which is stereotyped as a female's duty. They also believe that the family is patriarchal as men and women's role in the family are fundamentally unequal in terms of economic gain and emotional satisfaction.

Radical feminist' (Delphy and Leonard) contend that all families are based on a social structure where there are two roles 1) Head of the family (usually being the man) 2) The dependants or helpers (women or children). Radical feminists' believe that male power is based on the biological physical strength. As referred to in item B Radical feminists' argue that for example, violence against wives is not simply a matter of individual, and possibly abnormal, psychology but is shaped by patterns of inequality between men and women both within the family and within the wider society. To support this is Purdy's suggestion of a 'baby strike' and how she implies there is no compromise with men and that there is a segregation with men and women therefore 'baby strike' is a way for women to get men to understand their needs and wants, she emphasises that it should be women who take the power and be the dominant figure. Delphy and Leonard believe economic and social constraints make it hard for women to escape oppression they believe that women should fight for their rights.

Difference feminists' main emphasis relates postmodernists' ideas to family diversity. Difference feminists Barrett and McIntosh suggests there is no typical family because of the variations that exist in families and the variety of household types and if there's no typical family it's impossible to claim that the family always performs a particular function either for men or capitalism. They believe that the family is anti-social because the family social is the way in which the ideology of the family destroys life outside the family not just because it exploits women and benefits capitalism. Lesbian feminists suggest that lesbians should not form marriage or bear children because women are exploited in heterosexual marriages, marriage and family life are patriarchal, and also lesbians should avoid motherhood as it disadvantages the heterosexual women as it limits opportunity in the labour market. Gay and Lesbian couples are seen as scapegoats in society to disguise the increasingly frequent departures from the norms and values of family life by heterosexuals.

Marxist and Functionalists contribute to criticise the feminists' views. Marxist view the family as a source of social control. Engel's argued that the family is shaped by the economic structure of the society in which it exists; this idea is known as economic determinism. Also Engel's view that the family was invented at the same time in history as private property, crosses over with early feminists. Monogamy was invented to control women in order to establish legitimate lines of inheritance from private property. This was done because fathers needed a stable sense of who their offspring were to ensure property was passed on to their kin and with this patriarchy was invented. Although Marxist failed to acknowledge diversity of family structures such as single parent families and more importantly the contribution of the extended family, they claimed that the extended family would not be allowed to continue by capitalists as it was too cooperative and challenged capitalist idea. Zaretsky safety valve allows for comfort and security, making people feel that society is fine and permitting their exploration and powerlessness to continue which contributes to false consciousness it makes society out to be better than it really is.

Functionalists see the family as a building block of society. They follow the human body analogy which is the model society that suggests that all society's institutions work together to maintain equilibrium and avoid anomie. Functionalist Talcott Parsons claimed that the family retains 2 vital functions for society to remain stable: primary socialization which is the teaching of norms and values of society and internalisation by the child and stabilisation of adult personalities which is Parsons 'warm bath theory' on how the family was the safe haven-warm bath for the man who does the paid work provided by the women who does the domestic work. He basically believed that the man and women in the family are different but have equal roles-instrumental (the man provides the money for the family and is the leader) and expressive (the women provides the family with the emotional and domestic work).

Edmund Leach & Laing are the 2 critiques of the family. Leach suggests that the move from an extended family network to the nuclear family has led to pressure on family relationships. He displays the nuclear family in a negative perspective and characterised the family as a place where parents fight and children rebel.

The family that is continuously talked about in each theory is the nuclear family; this is unrealistic in society's families as there are many other types of family structures such as extended, single parent, reconstituted. From evidence it is clear to see that nuclear family households are decreasing as there are 25% of households that are nuclear families.

It would appear that feminism can be radical at times. Although feminists views have influenced society to think more equally. The fact that there have now been laws that have been passed to ensure women are being treated equally for example the liberals law to make it illegal to gender discriminate women are no able to achieve good examination results and are doing sufficiently better than men in education system. As a result of women receiving equality in some aspects of society they expect the same degree of equality in the home by the man. Equality for women have not have completely been achieved but the feminists approach has encouraged society today to think more openly so that in the future equality will be reached to its fullest so that men and women are completely equal.