



Family Theories

Different Families

Different Views

Different Lenses



??? Theories ???

- Theories are NOT facts – they are attempts to explain evidence
- Researchers and academics have different ways of explaining something that others are also studying – these explanations are theories
- Different theories attempt to explain the same set of observations but from different viewpoints
- Different theory = different explanation = different solutions or ways to create change

??? Micro or Macro ???

- **Macro** theories study the
 - Look at the way society functions as a whole



- **Micro** theories study families or groups more close up
 - Emphasize the relationships within individual families

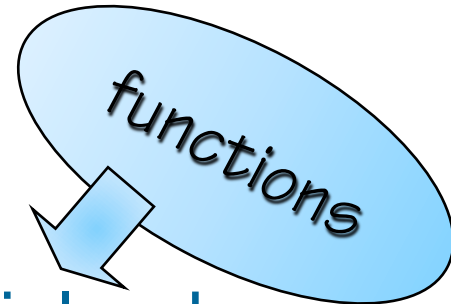




Structural Functionalism

1. There are functions that need to be met for any society to work

- procreation, production of goods, social order, socialization, physical care and nurturing

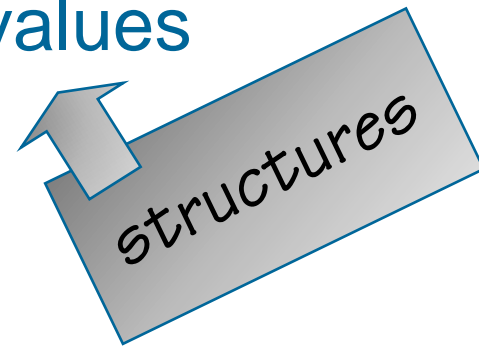


2. This is true for families too Macro approach

3. Also, society is structured in ways that work

- rank, power, rules, beliefs, norms & values

4. This is true for families too



Families fulfill important functions in society by providing all of the needed roles

Talcott Parsons - separate spheres

- Families that fulfill all the needed functions are helping to keep society stable Know your role!
- So, if families have a role in keeping society going, individuals in families have roles to keep families stable

Families fulfill important functions in society by providing all of the needed functions



Dad – task leader Mom – emotional leader

Pros and Cons

- Helps explain how families meet required needs in the family and in society
- Provides clear gender role expectations
- Criticizes deviant or alternative families
- Change is slow and happens at a pace that will not upset the balance
- Does not take a critical look at what structures are being maintained and whether or not the roles being performed to meet the needs are equitable



Symbolic Interactionism

Micro



- Psychological theory that attempts to explain how individuals choose how they will act based on their perceptions of themselves and of others.
- Individuals interpret or give meaning to everything based on their experiences, feedback from others and family history
- Attempts to see things from the point of view of a person within a family

Mead & Cooley

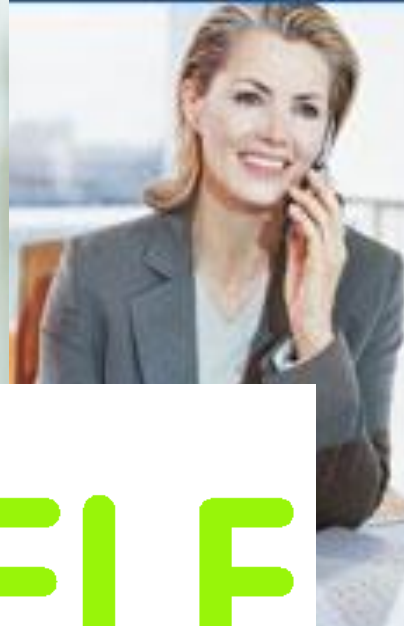
- Role Taking - George H. Mead
 - allows us to understand the point of view of the “actor”
 - Which can help us to understand others
ex. Men are from Mars Women are from Venus
- Charles Cooley - Looking Glass Self
 - “I’m not who I think I am, I am not who you think I am, but I am who I think you think I am”

We see how people see us and the expectations help shape us

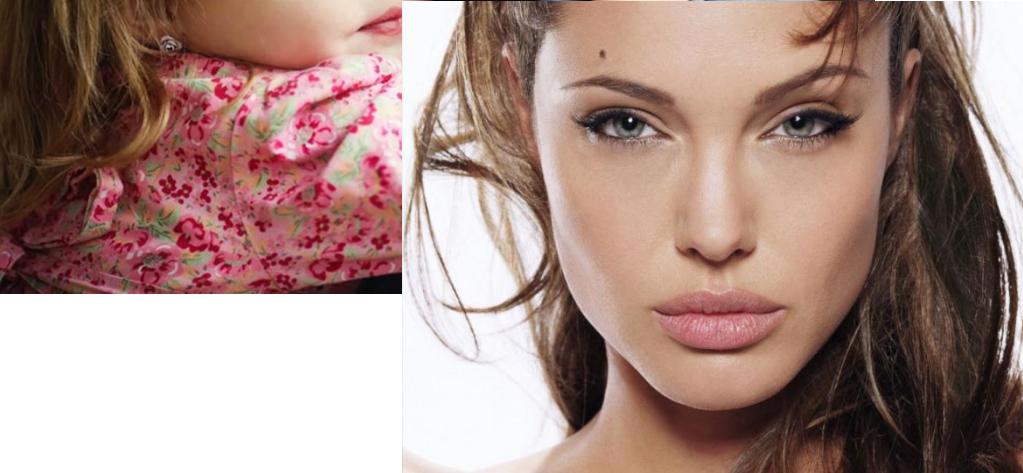


We interpret the family roles we think we are expected to play

We see how people see us and the expectations help shape us



SELF



Pros and Cons

- Helps explain social interactions in families
- Provides insight to marital success if you can come to understand others
- Helps us understand the development of self concept
- It is so micro that it doesn't look at the family in the context of society – dysfunction is internal
- Person or researcher can misinterpret, have personal bias and so on



Systems Theory

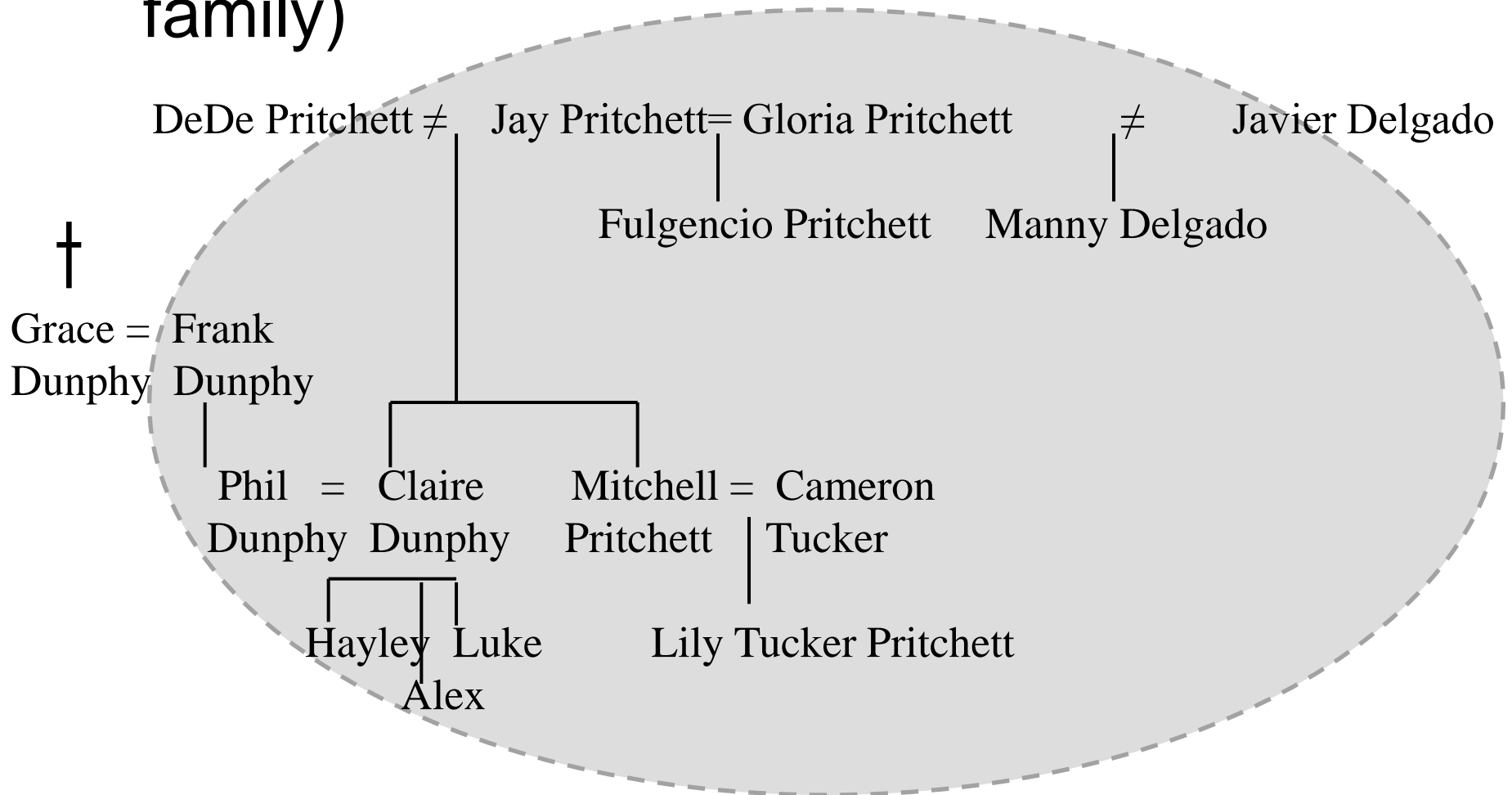
there are 8
key tenets to
this theory




- The family is a system

1. Wholeness: the family needs to be assessed together as a **whole group**
2. Changes: in one area of the family effects change in other areas
3. Hierarchy: families have **subsystems** – some of the sub systems have higher status [example parents over children]

4. Boundaries: rigid, flexible or diffuse (boundary is permeable to a greater or lesser degree depending on the family)



5. Rules: overt [spoken] or covert (unspoken but understood)
ex. [No drinking & driving] (If it is okay to have sex in the house)
6. Balance: you need to maintain stability in the family which happens through feedback or communications back and forth between members - this can cause negative cycles
7. Causality: linear causality occurs


things don't happen in a vacuum when something happens to one there is an impact on the others
8. Size Matters: the size of the system affects the rate at which changes can occur for bigger families change is difficult but it is easier for smaller ones

Pros and Cons

- Helps explain complex relationships and change
- Micro approach – sort of a bridge between structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism
- Biological approach makes sense to some
- Explains the behaviour of the group as inseparable from each other
- Assumes all members play a role in maintaining a dysfunctional system ex. abuse or addiction



Social Exchange Theory



- Psychological, micro approach that looks at how individuals make decisions to maximize benefits

Micro approach

- These theorists look at the costs and benefits of family life to its members
- They feel that family decisions and decisions made while choosing a partner are based on assessing the costs versus the benefits

Relationships are the most stable when the benefits that each person receives balance the costs of the relationship



example...

- George Clooney married in 1989 which only lasted 4 years - since then he has remained single for most of his adult life to date, he recently married – he had several beautiful girlfriends prior to this engagement, what benefit did this woman bring to the relationship that the others may not have?
- What benefits does he bring to her?



Pros and Cons

- Helps explain how people make decisions regarding relationships to stay, or go, to make it work
- Parties in the relationships can negotiate needs so a balance is met
- Some feel it is not very romantic, too pragmatic and business like for love
- It is difficult to weight intangibles – we might think the costs are too great for us, but we can't assess what the benefits are if we aren't in the relationship



Developmental or Life Stages Theory

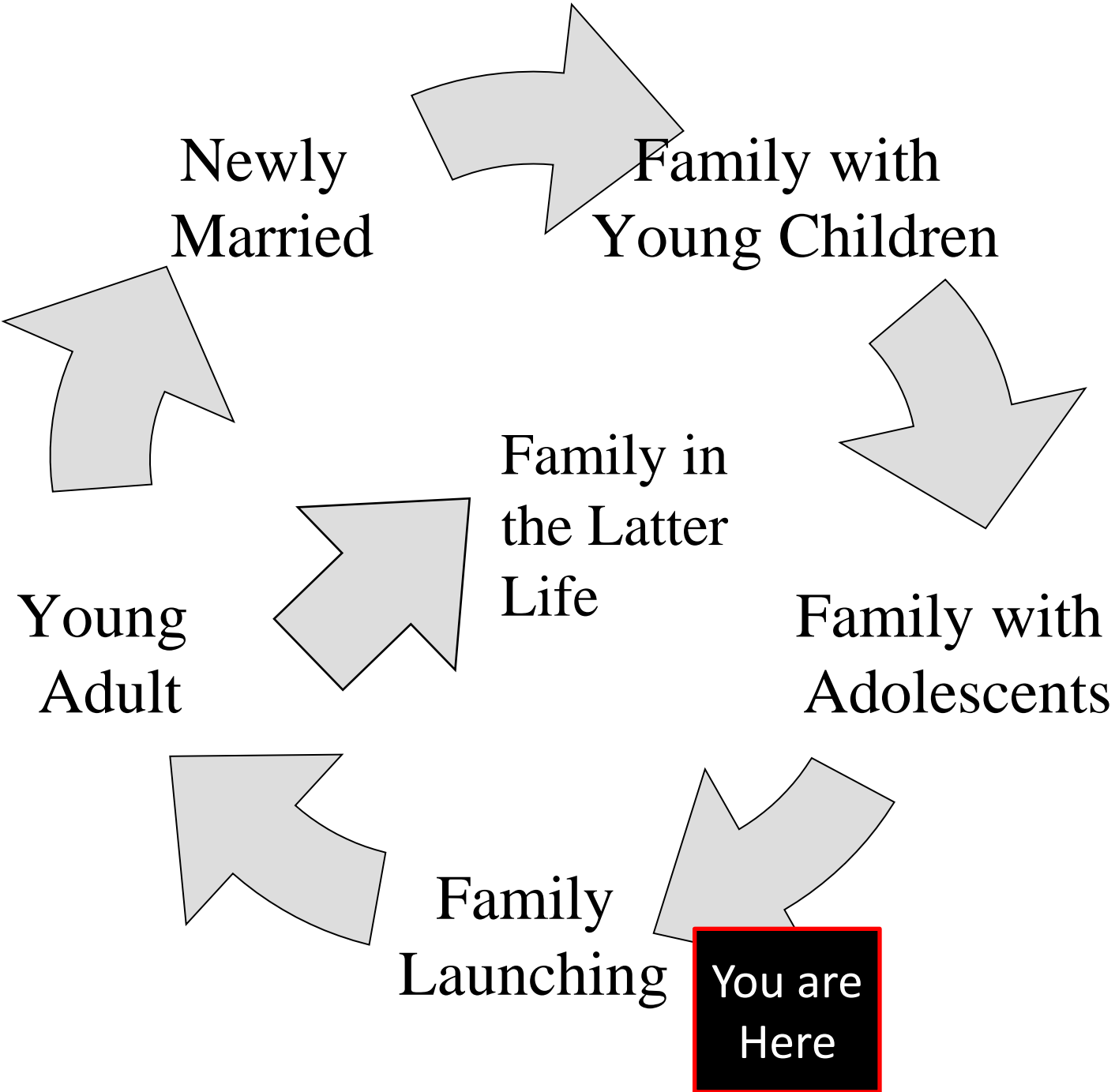
- This theory looks at families from their formation to their end through a series of sequential stages
- Development happens in a predictable order
- Social, political and economic factors can affect a family as well
- At each stage there is a key transition or change to sort out, and 2nd order tasks that need to be accomplished by the family



Both Family **Micro**
Society Macro approach



All families go through stages of growth



Pros and Cons

- Provides a tool for looking at changes in the family and in patterns of family interaction over time
- Acknowledges that cultural and social factors can influence family development
- Provides a guide for family therapists regarding key challenges typical for each stage
- Does it fit all families? What if they don't follow this growth pattern and divert?
- Are the similarities actually a cohort effect and not a stage of development effect?



Conflict Theory

Macro approach



- These theories look at power dynamics in society and within the family
- Basically the view is that conflict exists between those who have power (wealth, authority and so on) and those who do not
- In a family situation, power is examined to see if there are imbalances
- Often the relationship between the man and woman is evaluated and in some cases it is deemed that the woman or children are being exploited by the one “in charge”

If society is unequal, it is not surprising that families will be unequal



Pros and Cons

- Can be used to understand why society or a family is not equal for all members
- Addresses realities of power structures in traditional families that are inequitable
- Negative overtones
- Does not apply to all families as there is a range of power distribution
- Very hard to implement any sort of real shift in power structures



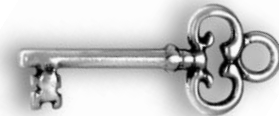
Feminism

Macro approach



- Connected to Conflict theory as it also criticizes the way society works or does not work
- Actually occurred in 3 waves, but the most recent was from the 1960s on
- Partially developed out of a desire to consider issues from the view point of women as well as men

Sees society as having been sexist against women and still inequitable socially, politically and economically.



- Are primarily interested in equality for all genders
 - ex. paternity leave for dads
 - ex. equal pay for women with same education
- There are many subgroups including
 - Liberal feminists – equality politically & economically
 - Socialist feminists – women in families that do hours of unpaid work, could/should be compensated
 - Anti Oppression / women of colour feminists -
there are more inequalities than just gender, they work together and therefore all need to be addressed
 - Radical feminists – difficult to accomplish equity without making radical changes, patriarchy is entrenched in our society

Pros and Cons

- Recognizes inequities exist and that change is desirable
- Wants equality for all genders
- Inclusive of non traditional families
- Generally anti oppression oriented
- Can sour a person if they are concerned about being exploited or discriminated against in a relationship or family
- Predominantly female view
- Negative reputation and misunderstood
- Backlash of those who disagree can be negative & even violent



Post Modernism

Macro approach



- is the concept of rejecting the idea of any one person being the holder of a true theory, more accepting of a plurality of voices
- It is the deconstruction of past thinking and theories to make way for multiple realities, ex. the diversity of the post modern family
- Charges researchers and therapists with working with new methodologies and cautioning against misinterpretation and bias at each step – encourages the researcher to listen to all the voices of those being studied / assisted

Pros and Cons

- Recognizes past flaws and is more accepting of all of today's families
- Taken into consideration, it cautions researchers to question their practice and their interpretations
- What we say, the context of situations, and our biases are important to acknowledge
- Some feel that these theorists throw out the baby with the bath water, being possibly too dismissive of past thinking (academic anarchy)
- Judgmental of past achievements, but yet accepting of new thinking – to the lay person this may seem a little hypocritical
- If we include all thinking as worth considering, this could include immoral or deviant thinking that could be harmful to families or society





Queer Theory

Macro approach

- Challenges the status quo that thinks sexual orientation and gender are both binary concepts
 - Ex. black and white; boy and girl; in and out
- Interested in de stigmatizing homosexuality
- Against heteronormativity which are the expectations, demands, and constraints produced when heterosexuality is taken as normative within a society
- Against a hierarchy that place heterosexual married people at the top as normal and all others below

Pros and Cons

- Recognizes inequities exist and that change is desirable
- Wants equality for all genders and orientations
- Inclusive of non traditional families
- Queer theory's commitment to deconstruction makes it nearly impossible to speak of a "lesbian" or "gay" subject, since all social categories are not supposed to be differentiated groups – all made normative – get rid of labels
- The methodological problem that scholars of sexuality end up restating and consolidating social categories

