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| Theory | Main tenets | Origin | Micro or Macro | | Example | Pros | Cons |
| 7. (structural) functionalism  *“Can you smell what the Rock is cooking? Know your role and shut your mouth!”*  *Dwayne Johnson* | Let’s look at society or family by looking at structure and function  Structure is about how things are organized, function is about how they perform;  Families are institutions that serve specific functions in our society; everyone in a family has a role and society runs smoothly as long as everyone performs their role; we learn these roles through socialization as children, the way the majority roll is the right way | Popular in the first half of the 20th C, moving away from historical and comparative studies to more analytic ones, these researchers figured that social arrangements exist (are organized that way - structured) because they work (function) – these often were based on genetic differences between men and women – they have different roles cause it works that way for the benefit of a society | macro – looks at society as a whole and family is a small part of the larger whole; a sociological theory | | | If everyone is happy with their role, then it seems to work quite well  Functions are met in society and society is kept rolling  Reflected the ideals of the time  Helps explain why men and women are entrenched in social roles or expectations | |
| In the majority of the families in the 1950s the mom stayed home and looked after the family – emotional leader and the dad worked – task leader  Ex. Brady Bunch or Leave it to Beaver | | | Social change can upset the stability of society so I)Social change is bad and II) also if everyone doesn’t conform it is disruptive  Provides norms and expectations that don’t fit everyone  If you don’t fit you are labeled deviant – ex. Blacks, Natives, & working class families – ignores some peoples realities planned or not  Wanting to reinforce social harmony they actually deny unhealthy situations like incest or abuse or inequities | |
| 8. symbolic interactionism  *“I am not what I think I am, I am not what you think I am, I am what I think you think I am.”*  *Charles Cooley* | Families are groups of individuals who are interacting personalities, these groups are shaped by the people in them and the way those people see or interpret their roles; we modify our behaviours when given feedback  How individuals act is based on their perceptions of themselves and others, we experience the social world and come up with our own interpretations or meaning | Most researchers looked at the way the family acted as a unit, and didn’t really look at the way individuals act; Mead assumed that there was more to the picture, didn’t disagree with functionalists but felt that people are not passive recipients of influence or pressure, but instead were active participants | micro and psychological because it focuses on individuals and the way they process or perceive information (brain) | | | Try to understand the point of view of the individual and explain why we act the way we do  If this is true we can use help like the book to improve relationships in families | |
| A study could look more specifically at how mothers and newborns bond or how husbands and wives interact and affect each other  Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus – book in the late 90s that helped men and women fix relationship problems by helping them see how men and women interpret the world differently | | | A researcher’s observations could be influenced by his or her own self-image and beliefs or ways of understanding life and he or she could be wrong  (according to post modernists researchers are undoubtedly wrong that is their whole point there can be no real truths just people’s interpretations of it)  Not a great theory for explaining family violence, which most agree is not just a quirk of personality, but perhaps connected to a bigger societal issue – can’t look at the whole to sort out society – have to do it from the point of the individual | |
| Theory | Main tenets | Origin | Micro or Macro | Example | | Pros | Cons |
| 9. systems  *Meet the Fockers*  *“The circle of trust, if you lie to me you can’t stay in the circle and once you’re out, you’re out”*  *Jack Byrne* | Assumes that families are relatively closed boundary maintaining systems or groups (structures); they are systems of relationships and interactions (interpretations)  The family is more than just the sum of the individuals it is its own entity  Looks at how groups of individuals act as a system; looks at family processes; family systems are complex; individuals within the system provide feedback and members learn how to interact  Members are added to system by birth, adoption, marriage or common law  There are subsystems within a family | Developed in the 1950s influenced by structural functionalists and symbolic interactionism and by family therapists  Unlike functionalism which explains the actions of individuals within groups, systems theory explains the behaviours of the individuals as inseparable from the group | micro – the family system & individuals  mezzo – the extended family & community  macro – the rest of society  they are all relevant to understand the systems | | | Helpful for therapists trying to sort out disruptive behaviours by looking at the family as a group; | |
| Psycho mom who hates daughter on Dr. Phil, daughter isn’t the only person at fault, what about the family is toxic or maintaining this situation?  Change to one member affects the rest, ex. Mom goes back to work after maternity leave, all need to shift to assist with household tasks, or baby is born and now both spouses take on new chores | | | Like symbolic interactionism it is not a great theory for explaining abuse when it starts to include blaming the victim for somehow contributing to the dysfunction – she stays therefore she contributes | |
| 10. developmental (life course)  *Alex: "You dropped your kid off a changing table?!" Gabe: "Stuff just happens, okay? Last week, my kid ate a cigarette." Craig: "I caught him playing in the dryer yesterday." Patel: "I picked up the wrong baby from daycare." Gabe: "I found my baby swimming in the toilet. No judging."*  *What to expect when you’re Expecting* | The family goes through a series of predictable stages and for each stage there are specific tasks and challenges that the family needs to respond to  Families at similar stages face similar situations  Newer version contends that family changes are impacted by other social forces like sexism or racism for example – that the family isn’t developing in a bubble | Uses the concept of individual developmental theories from biology or psychology to understand the life cycle of a family | Both micro look at the individual family development but also macro as it now includes an understanding that society can influence or impact development | | | It is good at describing family life and the ways in which families change  It is helpful for support to know what challenges are typical or tasks should be mastered  Is evolving or developing as a theory to be more inclusive of the reality that there are so many different family forms and paths and also that social forces do have an impact ex. classism | |
| A young man moves out on his own and gets a career as an electrician, he finds a partner and they move in together, they decide to co-parent, at each stage they will experience similar challenges and tasks as other couples who are at the same stage | | | Originally It focuses on the internal life of families and sort of ignores the relationship between families and society as a whole  Fails to account for how unique challenges can impact families ex. death of a child  Has been accused earlier of not being relevant to families who are out of synch – however lately they have tried to address this saying that there should be flexibility built in | |
| 11. social exchange theory  *Coworker: “What are you looking for in a guy?”*  *Meg: “looks come and go, but stupid lasts forever !”*  *Meg Carruth* | Individuals make choices by weighing the costs and benefits. They know what they have to offer and what they want or need. Benefits are rewarding cause they meet a need – like status, beauty, humour, money costs are things you have to give like time, energy, money what it costs you to stay in the relationship or family  We try to maximize benefits and minimize costs | Borrows from symbolic interactionism when it says that individuals perceive what is good for them and so on – and only the person making the decision can really determine this | micro – looks at individual choices and decision making | | | Can help us to explain mate selection, or why someone stays at home or in a relationship  Can explain division of labour in a relationship | |
| Princess Di offered the benefits of fertility, youth, public appeal, beauty, family standing, respectability and in exchange Charles offered wealth, luxury and status- but Charles actually loved Camilla a married woman who was much older and Diana did not enjoy royal life so for both Diana and Charles the costs ended up being greater than the rewards | | | It isn’t very romantic, it offends some people  Doesn’t really explain how we adapt and adjust to accommodate each other – give up some of our benefits or end up giving more than was first planned | |
| 12. Conflict theory | Conflict exists between groups in society because of inequalities in power  Groups are organized by class and access to power, these groups are competing for resources and power  The ones with less power can be exploited ☹  Re: family – the women and children have less power than the father and are therefore exploited – unpaid labour is expected but he is paid for his labours outside the home. | Marx theory of the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and is in favour of dismantling capitalism and sharing resources more equally  Engels notes that divisions in class are mimicked by divisions in family | macro, it examines the inequalities present in the whole of society and them mirrored in the families | | | Acknowledges inequities and attempts to solve this problem in the family and society  They question who does this function for? And therefore are in conflict with structural functionalists | |
|  | | | Redistributing power and wealth is very unpopular by those who have it | |
| 13. feminist theory | There is no single feminist theory, but they share the idea that patriarchy is wrong and that women have been discriminated by some in society, that sexism privileges men and discriminates against women.  Values equality between men and women politically, socially, economically.  Concerned with reproductive rights, employment rights, family responsibilities and gender stereotypes, objectification and abuse  There is a bias toward men so when women don’t act like men they are deviant or less than or irrational | First wave argued to have developed in the 1800s when women wanted public education, then in the early 1900s when they fought for the vote, and more well known the late 60s and 70s when women’s lib was a movement  Most family theories prior to the 70s looked at describing families or excusing them, not looking critically at them  Feminism is also born out of conflict theory that criticizes the oppression of the worker by the rich but looks at gender instead of class | macro, it looks at society as a whole and typically from a somewhat critical or evaluative framework | | | One of the few theories that looks critically at the inequities in our society  Desires equality for all, not women over men or men over women  Provides familial ideology – an understanding that only valuing the nuclear family can have negative consequences for others  Criticizes gender stereotypes and structural functionalist roles and raises awareness that traditional nuclear families expect a lot of free labour from women versus men who expect to be paid for their work outside the home | |
|  | | | Lots of negative feedback  Some backlash has been violent  Lots of bad press and generally misunderstood  People fear that equity will hurt those who currently enjoy more privilege – what will I or they have to give up?  Conflict is never easy | |
| 13. liberal feminism | Argues that discriminatory policies force women into an inferior social class that restricts their rights in society  Feminism is a theory of human rights  Change could happen through politics and social policy | Feminists concerned with equity and fairness particularly in the work force and in politics | macro | | | Who doesn’t want political and social and economic equality for men and women? | |
| Susie works for a law firm and she is fighting for fair wages for all staff regardless of gender. She is also lobbying the firm to hire more women as she is only one of two in this firm of 10. | | | Some men worry that if there is a move to correct this inequity, that some men will have to suffer, after all there are only so many jobs and so much money | |
| 13. socialist feminism | Based on the assumption that the status of women is a social inequality connected to or rooted in the sexual division of paid and unpaid labour | From conflict theory, if society is inequitable and the rich exploit the poor, these power dynamics are copied in families where the dad can exploit the mom and the parents can exploit the children and so on | macro | | | Considers other equities and interplay | |
| Susie works from dawn to dusk looking after the family, her husband Dan comes home from work at 6 and rests while she serves the dinner and bathes the kids  In Canada in 1992 people performed 25 billion hours of unpaid work – 95% domestic – looking after children and caring for a home – women did 2/3rds of this – they do more unpaid work as teens and as grown women | | | Also sort of extreme, sort of a negative generalization unless you qualify that some women are exploited in family situations by some men | |
| 13. women of colour /anti oppression feminism | some feminists are concerned about multiple inequities or oppressions not just gender and feel there is an interplay between them and the way the majority groups experience privilege in many societies | Feminists concerned that there are other inequities not just gender and that the others can get lost in the shuffle or are not being fought for by white privileged women perhaps | macro | | | More equitable to consider other forms of oppression and to understand that they influence or impact differently than if a person had just one difference from the majority | |
| Susie is Muslim, poor, has a learning disability and has recently lost her job at the local coffee shop because the owner was worried he would lose business because she wears a hijab or head scarf | | | Overwhelming to try to correct and kind of depressing lens to view life | |
| 13. radical feminism | The difference between men and women result in any male and female relationship as being exploitive, only by separating out and having a female culture can one be truly unexploited  Women are often unsafe in families the way they are structured in our society | Women overwhelmed by the idea that women are and have been oppressed by men and that working toward change hasn’t really seemed to work | macro | | | Well, it is true that there has been a struggle for a long time and still there are inequities and women are overwhelmingly the victims of violence | |
| Susie is discouraged by her repeated attempts to get the men in her work place or her family to respect her, keep her safe and treat her fairly, she thinks she will move to a community that is more women centric | | | How do we procreate if we separate? What about our sons?  Seems pretty extreme and sad | |
| 14. post modernism | Postmodern families are different from modern and traditional families of earlier centuries, so we need a new model or theory to understand them,  essentially a tenet of post modernism is to question the answers but even to question the questions, not to take any theorists’ of the past take on social relationships as truths and to point out that they are just interpretations of the facts as one researcher or group might see / develop / discuss.  postmodern research is  characterized by flexible methods that are often qualitative, the focus is to recognize the variety of ways families are and the ways they view society – there are no absolutes | Last part of the 20th C the world changed dramatically with the internet and tech explosion and globalization and the spread of capitalism, new cultural forms emerge and the new social, economic and political relations generated by these changes are the theories of post modernism,  Deconstructing includes decentering power relations – this makes them connected to feminism  Challenging the status quo is also connected to feminist theory of the latter part of the 20th C | macro – an overall look or lens that you can filter trying to understand families through | | | 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 | |
| modern family is an example of the post modern family | | | 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 | |
| 15. queer theory |  |  |  | | |  | |
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