# Sociological Theories of Family Problems

### Structural-Functionalist Approach

According to the Structural-Functionalist approach, the family is a social institution that performs important functions for society, including producing new members, regulating sexual activity, socializing the young, providing physical and emotional care for family members. Traditional gender roles contribute to family

Traditional gender roles contribute to family functioning. For eample, women perform the expressive role of managing the household and caring emotionally for family members. Men, on the otherhand, perform the instrumental role of earning income and making major decisions.

Functionalists also argue that high rates of divorce and single parenthood constitute a “breakdown” of the family resulting from rapid social change. Breakdown of the family is a primary social problem that leads to such secondary social problems as crime, poverty, and substance abuse. This perspective also examines how changes in other social institutions contribute to family problems (e.g.,economy).

# Conflict Perspective and Feminist Perspective 5

Conflict theory focuses on the impact of capitalism, social class, and power on marriages and families. Feminist theory focuses on how marriages and families influence gender inequalities. Feminists are critical of patriarchy —the traditional male domination of families. Conflict and feminist perspectives overlap in views on how industrialization and capitalism have contributed to gender inequality. Factory production during industrialization resulted in men leaving home to earn incomes and women staying home to do unpaid child care and domestic work what Engels called “domestic slavery of the wife.”Today most wives leave home to earn income, but still, do the bulk of unpaid domestic labor and are more likely than men to compromise occupational achievement for childcare and other household responsibilities. Economic factors influence norms regarding monogamy.

A double standard grants men more tolerance for being nonmonogamous in societies where monogamy is expected. Engels argues monogamy arose from husbands’ concentration of wealth and need to verify relationship to children. Unequal distribution of power among women and men and the historical view of women as property of men contribute to wife battering.

Today, gender relations within society at large are have become more egalitarian, but male domination persists. Powerful and wealthy segments of society largely shape social programs and policies that affect families; corporations and businesses conflict with family needs

# Symbolic Interactionist Perspective-4

Symbolic Interactionists point to the effects of interaction on one’s self-concept, especially of children. The “looking glass self” is when individuals form a self-concept based on how others interact with them. Family members are significant others who affect self-concept; can be positive or negative.

Symbolic Interactionists are also concerned with how labels affect meaning and behavior. For example, “visitation rights” (implying visitor status) minimizes the importance of the noncustodial parent’s role; “parenting plan” or “time-sharing arrangement” might mitigate this.

This perspective is also useful in understanding dynamics of domestic violence and abuse. Some abusers and victims define intimate partner violence as an expression of love. Emotional abuse using negative labels (“stupid”, “whore”, “bad”) affect the self-concept of abuse victims, convincing them they deserve the abuse.

Watch the following short video to learn more about the Looking-Glass Self.<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bU0BQUa11ek>