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| **Gender Roles (Couples)** | | | |
| **Analysis** | | **Application** | **Evaluation** |
| Gender Roles and Domestic Labour | **Functionalism** **(Parsons, 1955)** - segregated conjugal roles in traditional nuclear families.   * Instrumental role – men go out to work and act as the financial breadwinner. * Expressive role – women act as homemakers and carers.   **Reasons for segregated conjugal roles in nuclear families**   * Parsons claims (and supported by the New Right) this division of labour is based on biological differences. He claims women are ‘naturally’ suited to a nurturing role and men as the provider.   **Young and Willmott (1973):** Argue there has been a shift toward **The Symmetrical Family**.   * Less patriarchal and male dominated. * Both partners share household chores, childcare and decision making. * Most partners are involved in paid employment. * The domestic division of labour has shifted from segregated conjugal roles to more equally balanced (joint) integrated conjugal roles.   **Causes of a shift towards symmetrical families**:   * **Improved living standards in the home**. This has encouraged couples to be more home-centred, building the relationship and home. * The **decline of close-knit extended family** and greater geographical and social mobility. * The **improved status and rights of women**. With most women now in paid employment men are accepting women as more equals and not simply housewives. * The **commercialisation of housework**. With technology improving, there has been the invention of fridges, freezers, washing machines, dryers, vacuum cleaners, irons, microwaves, takeaway and ready meals. This means that housework is now easier and less skilled, so women are able to do less and men more. Furthermore, this allows women to go out to work to pay for the convenience items or even pay for someone else to carry them out (a cleaner). * **Weaker gender identities**. Post modernists would argue that men and women have more choice in how they see themselves and their roles. Couples are free to ‘pick and mix’ roles and identities based on personal choice and therefore less constrained by traditional masculine and feminine gender identities. This may result in a more equal split in the domestic division of labour.   **The Triple Shift**   * However, other Sociologists argue there are still inequalities within couples. * **Delphy and Leonard (1992)** argue that women take the major responsibility of emotional labour and managing the emotional side of the family. This is known as ‘**emotion work**’ and involves women adopting the ‘**expressive role**.’ * Examples of emotion work include talking to partners and children about things that interest them, smiling at their jokes, taking pleasure in their successes etc. * However, this expressive role of women in the emotional side of family life now often comes on top of their ‘instrumental’ responsibilities in paid employment and domestic labour. This means they often take responsibility for 3 jobs (emotion work, domestic labour and paid employment). This is known as the **triple shift**. |  | *Is Parson’s View really relevant to today’s Society?*   * Out-dated view – men are taking a greater share of domestic tasks and many women are financial providers. * Division of labour is not natural – it is socially created and largely benefits men.   *Are modern marriages and cohabiting relationships really more equal?*   * **Feminist** writer’s highlight the fact that there is not really much evidence that the family is now typically ‘symmetrical’. However, there does seem to be more role integration in leisure activities and some decision-making but housework and childcare remain predominantly women’s work. Furthermore, if there is a more equal split in childcare, it is usually the man who engages in the more enjoyable activities such as playing with the children or visits to the park. Whilst the woman is still responsible for bathing and feeding the children. * **Knudson and Waerness (2008)** conducted a **comparative study** of women’s and men’s housework in 34 countries and found there was no modern country in the world where men do housework more than or as much as, women. * METHODOLOGICAL EVALUATION: how might we criticise the comparative method? * Several surveys have also indicated inequality in the domestic division of labour. For example, The **Food Standards Agency** ‘Consumer Attitudes to Food Standards’ survey (2007) found that 77% of women took all or most of the responsibility for household shopping. * METHODOLOGICAL EVALUATION: how might we criticise surveys? * Feminist Ann Oakley (1974) points out the **problems with measuring the domestic division of labour**. Oakley argues that Young and Willmott’s evidence for jointness in the symmetrical family is totally unconvincing. 72% of men claim to help their partners in the home in some way. However, Oakley argues that this could mean anything from tucking children into bed to occasionally making breakfast. Until there is a stricter operationalisation of ‘domestic labour’ – we cannot be sure of the findings reported. |
| Decision Making | **Inequalities in Power and Authority in Contemporary Families**  The bulk of the evidence suggests that power and authority are not equally distributed in marriage and cohabiting relationships.   * Edgell (1980) found that some decisions in the family are taken jointly, very few are taken by women alone. In their research, women had sole responsibility for decisions only in relatively unimportant areas like home decoration and furnishing, children’s clothes, food and other domestic spending. Decisions which were viewed as very important such as moving house or taking out a loan were made by men. |  | *Supporting Evidence for Inequalities within decision making:*   * Pahl (2005, 2008) found that there is growing individualisation in couple’s finances, whereby each partner has some independent in financial matters (own bank account or credit card). However, although this may appear to lead to more equality, it actually results in the opposite. This is because overall men earn 15% more than women and so they are better off to be financially independent of women. * However, it can be argued that much of the research is not representative of contemporary society as it does not consider decision making amongst homosexual couples. |
| Domestic Violence | **The Darker Side of the Family**   * Official Statistics on domestic violence report: * 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience some form of domestic violence in their relationships. * 89% of the most violent incidents are committed by men against women. * Each year approximately 150 people are killed by current or former partners (80% of them are women). * Female victims of domestic violence will suffer an average of 35-37 assaults for a period of around 7 years before informing any agency.   **Feminist Explanations of Domestic Violence**   * **Radical Feminists** explain domestic violence as a means for men to exercise **patriarchal power**, to control and intimidate women, and to keep them in a state of submission. * **Marxists Feminists** emphasise **structural** (societal) factors as well. These include social deprivation (with factors like overcrowded homes, low incomes generating stress and disputes about money), a culture of violence – particularly in some parts of the working class and the generally lower status of women in society. * **Dobash and Dobash (1992)** carried out **unstructured interviews** with 13 victims of domestic violence. These interviews often lasted up to 12 hours in an attempt to achieve **verstehen** with their participants. From their research they found the main cause of domestic violence is **Patriarchy**. It is a product of male domination, power and control. Women slapped, pushed, beaten, raped and even killed. Often triggered by husband’s perception that his wife was challenging his authority or not carrying out her ‘duties’. Domestic violence or the threat of it is the way many men dominate women and preserve their power over women. Male domination in the police and the judiciary system also explains why domestic violence is not effectively dealt with. |  | *The Nature of Studying Domestic Violence*   * The growing **privatisation** of the family has meant that accurate evidence on the extent of violence and abuse inside the family is difficult to obtain, and fear or shame means that it is almost certain that many such incidents are covered up. * An estimated two thirds of victims of domestic violence do not seek help because they are afraid the violence will get worse or are ashamed. * Only 25% of all domestic violence incidents are reported to the police. However, only around 1 in 20 of those result in a conviction. * METHODOLOGICAL EVALUATION – how can we criticise official statistics (positively and negatively)? * **Marxist Feminists** can be criticised for being e**conomically deterministic** – too readily simplify domestic violence to the economy. * METHODOLOGICAL EVALUATION – how can we criticise unstructured interviews? (positively and negatively)? |