

Amber Petersen

Sociology 1010

Instructor: Daniel Poole

Applying Your Sociological Imagination

Family is the central and most important unit, which in some way or another we all belong to one. We crave it, whether we are related by blood or by friendship we all have an actually need to be a part of a family. The group that I'm a part of and is most important to me is my family, so i'm going to discuss the history, characteristics, challenges or conflicts, and the importance of the roles they play. President Ronald Reagan notably stated, "The family has always been the cornerstone of American society. Our families nurture, preserve, and pass on to each succeeding generation the values we share and cherish, values that are the foundation of our freedoms" (Lee 2009) (314).

My family has always been my cornerstone in everything I've done and have been my support throughout my life. Family is, indeed, a subjective concept, but it is a fairly objective fact that family (whatever one's concept of it may be) is very important to people in the United States. In a 2010 survey by Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, 76 percent of adults surveyed stated that family is "the most important" element of their life—just one percent said it was "not important" (Pew Research Center 2010) (314). It's amazing to me that our families



history is so embedded into all cultures and families. People pay money to use genealogy websites, research books and websites, and visiting famous places to find any trace of their family tree. My own family comes from German and Dutch descent on my father's side and English on my Mother's side, which includes even a couple Mormon pioneers that came across the plains. Their experiences were something I always loved to hear from Grandpa as a child, I was always amazed and appreciated their examples. History to our ancestors is what links us to the present and passes on the traditions and values to the future.

The dictionary defines family as a group consisting of parents and children living together in a household or all the descendants of a common ancestor. This doesn't mean there aren't different kinds of families, when I was divorced I still felt my son and I were our own little



family but the definition is what mine consisted of as a child. It consisted of my Mom, Dad, 3 brothers, 1 sister and me as the oldest child. We all are caucasian in ethnicity with me as the oldest daughter, 29 years old, married, with 1 son and 1 on the way. My next sibling is a brother, 27 years old, married, and two little boys. Next is

my only sister, she's 25 years old, married, and a newborn girl. Then my two youngest brothers are 21 and 18, both still living at home. I also feel that friends can be come part of a family as well in some circumstances. For instance I have a best friend that has been through everything with me since the 5th grade and now I consider part of my family, she and I invite each other to our family events. The sociological understanding of what constitutes a family can be explained by symbolic interactionism as well as functionalism. In other words, families are groups in

which people come together to form a strong primary group connection and maintain emotional ties to one another over a long period of time (313).

We have many challenges or conflicts but as a whole we generally all get along well and get together as friends too. Some of the challenges we face are typical family problems with miscommunications, tempers, and recently on how we discipline our children. We usually can discuss our way through those conflicts and are still friends when its done with. We all experienced challenges recently; I went through a divorce 5 years ago and family was a support and therapist throughout it, just this year my brother's newborn son needed surgery for an intestinal problem, and my sister struggled through post partum depression after the recent birth of their child. I feel these are the typical problems that most families deal with even though they can get to be more serious problems but we've been pretty lucky so far. In general we don't have any conflict theory between us because there is no power struggles within the family (even though my sister likes to be in charge sometimes). We all seem to be content with our natural roles.



The biggest theoretical perspective that explains my family is functionalism. The family plays a vital role in training them for adult life. As the primary agent of socialization and

enculturation, the family teaches young children the ways of thinking and behaving that follow social and cultural norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes(321). My parents always showed us by their example that serving others and working hard was an essential part of life and our beliefs. My father worked outside the home as the breadwinner and my mother stayed home to take of us, each one of us has in some way taken that into our roles and has become very important to us. According to functionalists, the differentiation of the roles on the basis of sex ensures that families are well balanced and coordinated. When family members move outside of these roles, the family is thrown out of balance and must recalibrate in order to function properly (321). Children always seem to find a role in their family, for instance I've always taken on the mothering, please everyone, eldest child role. My brother has always taken on the peacemaker role. My sister is a very typical middle child role, honest, always thinking she got the short end of the stick but always thoughtful in helping us older siblings. The next brother was a spitfire, always extremely honest, but always a hard worker. My youngest brother has a very helpless youngest child syndrome but has a humor that keeps us going. When considering the role of family in society, functionalists uphold the notion that families are an important social institution and that they play a key role in stabilizing society. They also note that family members take on status roles in a marriage or family. The family—and its members—perform certain functions that facilitate the prosperity(321). Functionalism illuminates the many purposes of families and their roles in the maintenance of a balanced society (Parsons and Bales 1956)(313).

This group of people all play important roles in my life and really do maintain my life. I feel that we complete our lives, I love the traditions, laughs, and the fun memories that we're creating. Families provide for one another's physical, emotional, and social well-being. Parents care for and socialize children. Later in life, adult children often care for elderly parents (314).

The cycle is continuing and I hope that one day I can take care of my parents one day the way they did when I was a child. These good values and strong connections is what I feel our society needs even more then ever, I hope to continue these values on with my own children. This is why our histories are so important and necessary to our lives, we need to strengthen our country by continuing these traditions.

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