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Assessment 1

The concept of Family has dramatically changed in the 21st century; critically reflect upon this statement. (Consider ONE change in detail).

This essay aims to critically analyse and review various interpretations and representations of 'family' in the 21st century (Settles and Steinmetz, 1999). To examine how the dynamics of modern society, the idea of 'family', and the individual are intertwined (Sharma, 2019). Additionally, it will consider the causes of the conflicts between how people, families, and society are portrayed in the postmodern era (Noble, 1995). The idea of a family has changed significantly in the twenty-first century, and the traditional nuclear unit is no longer the only way that families are conceptualised (Parson, 1956).

Over the years, diverse family structures have emerged, reflecting the dynamic nature of society. Among these, LGBTQ+ families have come to the forefront, challenging traditional narratives and reshaping the understanding of familiar relationships (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). By embracing and celebrating LGBTQ+ families as a potent example, this essay delves into the redefined meaning of family, explores the several types of families, and examines the theoretical framework of structural functionalism to shed light on the fundamental functions and dynamics of these contemporary family structures (Patterson, 2000). Through this lens, a deeper understanding of the family's complex and multifaceted nature in the 21st century unfolds, recognising the importance of inclusivity, acceptance, and diversity in our society (Goldberg *et al.*, 2017).

Numerous sources will be utilised to analyse the subject matter covered in this essay thoroughly. Academic journals, databases, books, websites, educational institutions, and pertinent resources will all be included in this list of sources used, along with theory, policy, and

practice. Using several sources, the goal is to investigate, fully comprehend, and evaluate the essay's title.

The concept of a family has been defined differently in each nation and state (Sherma, 2019). The challenge of characterising a family typically stems from variations in how families are viewed throughout cultures and society. In several social science disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, economics, social work etc., the family is a basic unit of analysis (Sharma, 2019).

Moreover, as Barnard (2017) states, the legal definition of family is a collection of individuals connected through marriage, blood, or adoption. They cohabit in a single household and interact based on their respective social roles, such as parents, siblings, spouses, and children. It is essential to distinguish a family group from a household, as a household could include roommates or landlords living together in a shared residence (Barnard, 2017).

Furthermore, a family group should be differentiated from kindred, which also pertains to bloodlines and can encompass multiple households (Barnard, 2017). The fundamental element of the family group is the bond between parents and children. Even though this relationship may be absent in certain marital unions, and while the family and marriage pair may sometimes be confused, the parent-child bond remains at the core of the family unit (Bernard, 2017).

According to functionalists (Parsons *et al*., 1956), society is like the human body. The organic comparison highlights the interdependence and interrelatedness of the significant institutions of society by including concepts of a system. As a result, it is believed that families are dynamic and adapt to the demands of society. Like the heart and brain, they are considered the body's most essential organs, and functionalists view the family as society's leading and most influential institution (Parsons *et al*., 1956). Parsons and Murdock are the family's principal Functionalist theorists (Gopal, 2022). According to Murdock's research, the nuclear family was a universal social structure that served four fundamental purposes for society: sexual, reproductive, economic, and educational (Gopal, 2022). Functionalists believed that families were essential to preserving social order (Wilson, 2002); however, as Giddens and Griffiths (2006, p.208) argue, 'many sociologists believe that we cannot speak about 'the family' as if there is one model of family life that is universal.'

Family functioning (Procentese *et al.*, 2019) is therefore defined from the perspective of family systems theory as the interactions and processes in which system members engage to meet their needs, make decisions, define goals, and establish foundation rules for both the system and them. Openness and interactional health limit a family's ability to function well and are associated with beneficial consequences for both the family and the individual (Procentese *et al.,* 2019). However, the definition of family has evolved in the 21st century due to factors such as migration, fertility, and death rates, as well as the increasing importance of transitional families Karraker and Grochowski (2012) stated, and understanding the growing diversity of racial and cultural backgrounds, as well as nuanced definitions of sex, gender, and sexual orientation (including transgender orientation) is essential for families. Families have evolved with contemporary, urban, and industrial growth (Karraker and Grochowski, 2012).

Additionally, a traditional nuclear family is a household that consists of a mother, father and their children, biological or adopted, living together. In 'The Social System,' Parsons (1956) argued that this arrangement had encouraged the stability and division of labour, with the wife taking care of the children and running the home by cleaning and cooking, whereas the husband is an essential member of the household's income source. Four family functions—educational, economic, reproductive, and sexual—are typical in a nuclear family, according to functionalist and sociologist Murdock (1949). However, according to Parsons (1956), the nuclear family has lost its purpose in contemporary Western countries, much as the economic and educational roles that institutions like schools once performed, and is now inefficient for the larger community (Parsons, 1956).

'The functions of the family in a highly differentiated society are not to be interpreted as functions directly on behalf of the society but on behalf of personality' (Family: Socialisation and Interaction Process, 2014).

Nuclear families can often change over time; a two-parent household could become a single-parent household. This could be due to divorce or the spouse's death (Hantrais, 2004). Classifying family variety is crucial for analytical reasons, even though it is a conceptually changing field of research due to the emergence of new family forms resulting from global structural and demographic changes (Piotrkowski *et al*., 1987). have identified five types of family diversity to show how it takes shape in real life. Organisational diversity (this creates different realities for the families), Cultural diversity (cultural differences and arrangements

around the world), Social class diversity (different access that is being given to poor and wealthy families), Life cycle diversity (a family that is at its early stages of development) and Cohort diversity (experiencing significant social changes and being impacted by those changes).

As a result of the overrepresentation of nuclear families, single parents are being underrepresented. When they appear in online articles or books, they are portrayed as a 'problem' family. This then becomes the source of the social problem, as has been the case of British reporters, which then, as a result, makes single parents appear less and less in the media (Atkinson *et al.,* 1998). It also fails to reflect the diversity of families in society, especially women. It has maintained and legitimised a worry long held by feminists who have been working to end gender-based inequalities. It has been shown that the nuclear family and being a mother are both significant and culturally specific social institutions (Edholm, 1982). According to Stacey (1987), the feminism wave's criticism of marriage and motherhood was anti-family; however, that was not the cause of the family's irreversible downward trend. The reason feminism gained momentum in the 1960s was the nuclear family problem that the West was experiencing. Women's roles within the nuclear families are gender-based, which is why feminists see nuclear families and their traditions with caution (Carter, 2006).

Furthermore, according to Collier (1995), fatherhood lies at the heart of the crisis of masculinity, which changes how men and women interact and help the parent-child interactions (Collier, 1995). However, Marxist feminists such as Benston (1969) believe that capitalists pay women a minimal wage for their jobs and currently, the wage that women earn is taken away by the hidden tax. The male wage buys and pays the employment of two people. As a result, women typically hold low-paying, unstable employment in the primary labour markets, where they are hired or fired without much worry from the employee. Men are still treated as bosses in the home; even if women work, they still need to serve as their husbands' safety valves. Thus, tension is created by competing role pressures, which in turn causes the work-family role conflict. However, a woman continues to serve as a 'safety valve,' according to Ansley (1972).
Additionally, in the 1990s, when it came to same-sex partners, they were not legally recognised or had any laws helping them become a family. Families that were formed by gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people were looked at with harsh criticism (Stacey, 1997). At the beginning of September 2000, when same-sex marriage was made into law, it first started in the Netherlands (Chamie and Mirkin, 2011). Right after Netherlands followed other European

countries like Norway, France, the United Kingdom and many more (Chamie and Mirkin, 2011). Developing decade-long legal rights and recognition for LGBTQ+ families and couples, granting the right to domestic partnership and civil unions, and allowing adoption by same-sex couples (Chamie and Mirkin, 2011). With the difficulty the LGBTQ+ individuals had to go through, it has been shown that because of these circumstances, LGBTQ+ individuals embrace and adopt kids that are more difficult to place at a higher rate than heterosexual people (Brooks and Goldberg, 2001).

Moreover, homophobia and discrimination played a significant factor in adoption for same-sex couples as some countries and states in the United States, like California, stop and ban same-sex marriages and exclude and stop gay men and lesbians from being able to adopt a child (Chamie and Mirkin, 2011). When looking into same-sex couples, for example, lesbian parent couples, there seems to be a higher number and levels of equal decision-making, family work and employment (Dunne, 2000), (Fulcher *et al*., 2008). Lesbian couples also seem to have higher satisfaction levels in the relationship, which plays a significant factor in parenting a child (Bos *et al*., 2007). Mothers have a stronger desire to tend to a child and parenthood and surpass heterosexual couples in the amount of time spent with the child and the affection given to the child (MacCallum and Golombok, 2004). A significant advancement concerned the gender role of children in lesbian parent households, as evidenced by Chrisp's (2001) title, "That Four Letter Word—Sons." It also shows that single mothers and lesbian partners seem to prefer to raise and adopt a daughter rather than a boy, and the numbers are larger than those of heterosexual families according to (Biblarz, T.J. and Savci, 2010).

In Vanfraussen *et al.* (2003) study, it has been researched that same-sex families rate their experience of having a daughter to be higher than the ones that have sons (Vanfraussen *et al*., 2003). Furthermore, Fulcher *et al.* (2008) have stated that children, when picking their activities of the day, were less gender-based when it came to LGBTQ+ families as parents were more often equally sharing all their daily tasks and jobs, making the children more open to their choices. The parent's sexual orientation seems to be a big part of children's view of gender, their behaviour in the outside world and how they react to certain things. It also shows that sexual minority couples are more likely to both be employed and have the same or similar preferences when it comes to housework, as these couples are less reliant on traditional gender norms (Doan and Quadlin, 2018). On July 17, 2017, the United Kingdom approved The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act

2013, legalising same-sex unions. The first same-sex marriage occurred on March 29th 2014 (Government, 2014). Furthermore, the purpose of the Act is to enable same-sex couples to get married in civil ceremonies and to switch genders without getting remarried. English and Irish courts have ruled in Article 12 of the Act that: 'Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family, according to the national laws governing the exercise of this right' (Government, 2014). Article 12 of the Act, which protects the freedom to marry, also addresses traditional marriage between individuals of the opposite sex (Government, 2014). Additionally, Article 12 says that it exists to protect marriage as the family's foundation.

Additionally, the Gender Recognition Act of 2004 lets transgender people have their chosen gender legally recognised (Government, 2004). Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Government, 2002) is also there to protect individuals from being discriminated against based on their chosen gender or sexuality, allowing all families to adopt a child, which ensures that LGBTQ+ families are getting the same type of treatment as heterosexual families (Government, 2002).

Furthermore, pride events have become increasingly popular throughout the 21st century, bringing visibility and promoting inclusivity for LGBTQ+ families. Contributing to a broader and more diverse portrayal of families throughout history and allowing access to adoption and foster parenting (Ie *et al.,* 2018). Moreover, Europe has been changing with time when it comes to same-sex marriages in the past two decades, as twenty years ago, same-sex marriage was not recognised anywhere in Europe (Romeijn, 2013). Nine European nations permit same-sex marriage and the other thirteen show recognition on the topic. The number of countries legalising same-sex marriage is growing more and more each year (Romeijn, 2013).

UK and France, one of the largest and most influential nations in Europe, have adopted same-sex marriage. The same-sex law in France has also sparked some large protests for more significant participation in politics by the Catholic Church (Morabito, 2013). However, there are countries in Europe, like Poland, where same-sex marriage has been banned and is illegal (Perales and Campbell, 2018). As Poland is a very conservative country, more than 90% of the country speaks one language, is the same race ethnicity and shares one religion. The Polish Roman Catholic Church has a significant influence on the population of Poland. Poland also has a ban on abortions and has many sexist and homophobic places where being queer is not allowed or becomes dangerous in some areas for same-sex couples making it more difficult for them to

form or start a family. (Graff, 2006). Because there are no laws protecting and supporting same-sex marriage, starting a family in Poland, Ukraine, etc., makes it much more complex (Gallo *et al*., 2014).

In conclusion, the family structures and dynamics have changed significantly due to social, cultural and economic factors. For many years, traditional nuclear families, which are made up of a woman, a man and their baby or babies, it has always been the standard of a nuclear family. However, scholars like Parsons (1956) and Murdock (1949) have challenged the meaning of a nuclear family and how it should be. Explaining that not every family is the same and has the same life style.

Furthermore, family diversity is increasingly widely accepted, with people realising that families come in different forms, function differently, and have different goals (Chamie and Mirkin, 2011). Diversity, culture, social class and unique experiences make different families have different family structures (Doan and Quadlin, 2018).

Moreover, the portrayal of the nuclear family has resulted in the underrepresentation of families like single-parent households. This underepresentation brings social problems and puts neglect in different types of families, and reinforces gender inequalities as feminists have criticised how the gender-based roles and expectations they have in a nuclear family, asking for a re-evaluation of how traditional families are structured (Collins, 1994).

Additionally, with the legalisation of same-sex unions in several nations and the establishment of legal rights and safeguards for LGBTQ+ people and families, acceptance of LGBTQ+ families has changed dramatically over time (Scherpe, 2013). LGBTQ+ families now have legal recognition and protection thanks to laws that promote inclusivity and equality, such as the Same-sex Couples Act in the United Kingdom and the Adoption and Children Act, to protect and acknowledge the people and to accept and comprehend diverse family structures on a larger scale. LGBTQ+ rights are still discriminated against in several nations (Government, 2002). Conservative societies—like Poland, for example—highlight the continuous difficulties marginalised populations face in their quest for acceptance and acknowledgement (Smith, 2017).

In summary, there is growing doubt about the premise that the nuclear family is the best type of family structure. The rights and experiences of non-traditional families, such as single-parent and LGBTQ+ families, are more recognised and safeguarded as family diversity

gains traction. Diverse family arrangements are becoming increasingly accepted in society, encouraging inclusivity and upending conventional gender norms and expectations (Government, 2002).

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