



The Marxist Perspective on The Family

The basics

Engels - The nuclear family and private property

pre-industrial, traidtional, 'primitive' society (Before capitalism)

- No real wealth
- Primitive communism
- Collective ownership
- = Promiscuous hoard

Emergence of Capitalism

- Wealth generation
- Private Property
- Individual ownership
- = Patriarchal nuclear family

Allows for transference of wealth from generation to generation

The economic system determines the predominant type of family in society

Economic relations determine Social relations

Structural and historical approach

Focus on how the nuclear family Maintains capitalism and inequality

Marxist Feminism

Fran Ansley - women as the takers of shit

Reserve army of labour

Capitalism benefitting from unpaid labour of women

Overall evaluations

Economically deterministic

Nuclear families exist in non capitalist societies

Non nuclear families exist in capitalist societies

Other family types might be more functional for Capitalism (e.g. Step families)

Engels theory fails to explain why the family has to be Patriarchal

Ideological functions of the family

'Privatised' nuclear family is apolitical

Unequal relations between parents encourages Acceptance of hierarchy

In reality the family offers a 'safe haven' away from the harsh exploitation under capitalism - helps people put up with exploitation

A criticism of the 'warm bath theory'

Family is a 'unit of consumption'

Privatised family is typically about leisure and consumption

'Keeping up with the Joneses'

Advertising and pester power