

What Families Do

Sociology

The functionalist account of family functions, and the critical replies.

Functionalist

- Primary socialisation of the young
- Stabilisation of adult personality
- Regulation of sexual behaviour
- Economic support and consumption
- Parsons: functions shed to other bodies

Critical replies

- Marxist: reproduces labour at no cost
- Feminist: unpaid care falls to women
- Ignores abuse and violence within it
- Assumes one form fits every household
- Interactionist: negotiated, not fixed

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Functions can be real and unequally distributed. Naming a function does not establish that the arrangement is fair.

Educational reference. Radical psychiatry's claim that the family causes serious mental illness has not held up empirically.