STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONAL THEORY

- comprehensive and recognizes the important interaction between family and its internal and external environment.
- major theoretical frame of reference in sociology
- understanding a families structural (organization) dimensions and functions are key to this theory
- general assumptions include:
  1. A family is a social system with functional requirements
  2. A family is a small group possessing certain generic features common to small groups.
  3. The family as a social system accomplishes functions that serve the individual in addition to the society.
  4. Individuals act in accordance with a set of internalized norms and values that are learned primarily in the family through socialization.
- the structural functional approach primarily analyzes the family’s structural characteristics - the arrangement of the parts that form the whole, and the function it performs both for society and its subsystems.
- structure is how a family is organized, the manner in which units are arranged, and how these units relate to one another.
- different theorists base structure on:
  - family form
  - type of power structure
  - marital patterns
  - subsystems
- 4 basic structural dimensions are:
  - role structure
  - value systems
  - communication processes
  - power structure

- function - family functions are the outcomes or consequences of the family structure - what the family does, why does it exist, what purposes does it serve?
  - 5 basic family functions
    - affective function;
    - socialization and social placement function
    - reproductive function
    - economic function
    - health care function

**FAMILY DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY**

- attempts to account for change over time in the family system, including changes in interactions and relationships among family members

- families are long-lived groups with a natural history or life cycle that must be assessed if the dynamics are to be fully and accurately interpreted.

- each family goes through each developmental stage in its own way

- all families are considered examples of and overall normative pattern and follow a universal sequence of development

- family life is divided into a series of discrete stages that are relatively stable and distinct from adjacent stages.

- families change structure depending on ages of family members

- general assumptions:
  - families develop and change over time in similar and predictable ways
• as people mature and interact with others, they initiate actions as well as reactions to environmental demands.

• families and their members perform certain time-specific tasks that are set by themselves and by the cultural and societal context

• there is a tendency for families to have a discernible beginning and end

• Developmental tasks of Duvall (see handout)

• Developmental task of Erickson (see handout)

SYSTEMS THEORY

• the most inclusive and powerful of family theories

• used in education, game theory, computer science, systems engineering, cybernetics and information and communication areas.

• works with the family system as client rather than the individual as client.

• has stimulated most of the attempts to achieve a systematic understanding of the normal and troubled family

• general assumption: matter in all its forms, living and nonliving, can be regarded as forming systems that have discrete properties capable of being studied.
  • focus is on the interaction among the various parts of the system rather than on the function of the parts themselves

  • systems do not exist in a vacuum

  • interrelationships among the parts is the prime focus

  • the whole is greater than the sum of its parts

  • whatever affects the system as a whole affects each of its parts

  • causes and effects are interchangeable

• viewed as an open social system with boundaries, self-regulatory mechanisms,
interacting and superordinate systems, and subcomponents

- terms:
  - system
  - social system
  - open versus closed systems
  - wholeness or nonsummativity
  - feedback
  - adaptation

- family systems definitions
  - family vs. group
  - welfare system
  - educational system
  - political system
  - communication system
  - health care system
  - religious system

- family subsystems
  - spouse subsystem
  - parent-child subsystem
  - sibling subsystem
  - others - grandparents, aunts/uncles, extended family members
Figure 7–5
Schematic illustration of the family and its external environment.
Figure 5-1
The five basic family functions.