

Sex roles in the family:

Perspectives from the field of women's studies

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Change of sex roles in the family

“Key Evidence of Convergence”

Sullivan & Coltrane (2008*):

- Men's contributions to housework increased substantially
- Between 1965-2003, fathers tripled their time for child care
- Belief in gender equality within families gains acceptance
- ➔ Researchers diagnosing a ‘stalled revolution’ at home underestimate the amount of change going on “behind the scenes”
- ➔ Conclusion: Not a call for complacency

* Sullivan, O. & S. Coltrane. 2008. "Men's Changing Contribution to Housework and Child Care: A Discussion Paper on Changing Family Roles." in: Briefing papers, Council on Contemporary Families (Ed.), University of Illinois.

Change of sex roles in the family

“Key Evidence of Convergence”

England’s response (2008):

“Understanding the Asymmetry of Gender Change”

- While women have increased their paid work to a great extent, men have increased their housework only fractionally
- For every hundred women going into a male-typical occupation, perhaps one man goes into a female-typical occupation
- For every hundred parents encouraging daughters to play soccer, perhaps one encourages a son to play with dolls
- ➔ Change of sex roles is part of social change
- ➔ Link to institutional and cultural framework

Contents

- Change of sex roles in the family – a recent debate between mainstream and feminist research
- Relevance of perspective
- Sex role concepts, 1940s – nowadays
- Implications
 - ➔ Feminist scholarship and ‚mainstream‘
 - ➔ Further research

Relevance of perspective

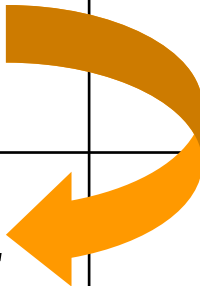
Differences between mainstream and feminist approaches

- Cognitive interest – defining the problem
 - Theory – search for mechanisms
 - Empirical approach
 - Assessment of empirical evidence
- ➔ The researchers perspective is key!

'Sex roles'

Selected approaches

Emphasis*	Structural account	Social psychological account
Concepts	<p><i>Functionalism</i> Linton, Parsons ~1940s-70s</p>	<p><i>Interactionism</i> Goffman ~1960s-70s</p>
	<p><i>Institutional analysis in the field of women's and gender studies</i> Krüger ~1990s-2000s</p>	<p><i>Interactionism ,doing gender'</i> West & Zimmerman ~1980s-90s</p>



* Distinction based on: A Dictionary of Sociology 2005, "roles"

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‘Sex roles’

Feminist critique of the functionalist approach

- Existence & functionality of two opposite sex roles
- Married couple/family as the unit of analysis (power – bargaining)
- Socialization mechanism (context dependence)
- Static concept (social change)
- *„Feminists agree that male dominance within families is part of a wider system of male power, is neither natural nor inevitable, and occurs at women's cost. [...] Feminism thus challenges family studies to rethink both the separateness and the solidarity of families.” (Ferree 1990: 866)*

→ ‘Gender’

'Sex roles'

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‘Doing gender’

West & Zimmerman (1987)

- **Sex** application of biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males
- **Sex category** established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one’s membership in a category
 - *proxy for sex*
- **Gender** activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category

‘Doing gender’

- “When we view gender as an accomplishment, an achieved property of situated conduct, our attention shifts from matters internal to the individual and focuses on interactional and, ultimately, institutional arenas.”
(West & Zimmerman 1987:126)
- “Gender makes women's reproductive physiology the basis for a separate (and stigmatized) status, not the other way around [...].”
(Lorber 1986:569)
- „Damit wurde die mit dem sex-gender-Modell vorgegebene Sichtweise auf Geschlecht praktisch "umgedreht" [...].”
(Gildemeister 1994:132)

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Institutional analysis

Krüger (2001, 2006)

- Link between societal order and gender order
- Historical & dynamic theoretical perspective
- Life course approach & institutional analysis
- Gendered link between educational system, labor market, welfare state and the family

Implications

- Reinterpreting the link between societal order and sex roles in the family
 - ➔ This link needs to be reestablished conceptually and empirically
- Sex roles are not fixed or inalterable
 - ➔ Take responsibility for the social inequality implications of established 'sex roles,' i.e. beyond supposed individual 'preferences'
- Sex roles have changed, since Parsons, Goffman, West & Zimmerman
 - ➔ Considering the implications for further research
 - ➔ Theoretical concepts
 - ➔ Empirical measures