

## **Is the family a mechanism of social oppression?**

Oppression is first introduced to humans through their primary socialisation within the family. The family is an institution in which it transmits the stereotypical gender roles, for example women performing the expressive role (being nurturing) and men performing the instrumental role (being the breadwinner). These gender roles are then taught to children through types of toys children are given when they are younger. For example, boys are typically given toy cars and train sets, which require building which could spark their interest in manual labour or engineering, two heavily male dominated job sectors, whereas girls are typically given dolls and teddy bears that they care for and look after. As a result, children being socialised in this environment, with the woman typically being the dependent housewife/mother figure and the father being the breadwinner; the children are being conditioned into roles that will keep women oppressed.

This oppression is reinforced to children in their secondary socialisation, through institutions such as schools and the media. For example, in schools there are subjects that are stereotypically exclusive to one gender, STEM subjects are most common among boys, whereas English and Languages are most common among girls. English and Languages are typically expressive subjects; therefore, these subject choices could be preparing girls for their expressive role within the family, therefore reinforcing the oppression by preparing girls to be dependent housewives and mothers.

The media reinforces female oppression, through advertising the “cereal packet” family, which consists of mum, dad and their dependent children. The media normalises the nuclear family as the sole family of, for example, the UK and the USA, with rarely any portrayal of families such as extended families or reconstructed families. Therefore, by advertising the “cereal packet” family, children are growing up to believe that the nuclear family, the Father (instrumental), the Mother (expressive) and their dependent children is the “correct” family, again reinforcing not only the oppression of women but also diversity in families.

However, the family doesn't have to be an institution that promotes oppression, so long as parents socialise their children in an environment that respects diversity (whether that's family types or people; sexual orientation, religion, race and ethnicity and so on) and teaches their children about the misrepresented groups, families and communities in our society, then their children can challenge the stereotypes that secondary socialisation attempts to reinforce, until enough people are educated on respecting and accepting diversity, that oppressive policies and ideologies will be revolutionised.

**Written by Erin (Year 10)**