2.3 The Personal Life Perspective and Late Modern Family Diversity

AQA 7192 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For at least five questions you must write full sentences. Spend about 55 minutes on this pack.

1 Explain two limitations or criticisms made of the personal life perspective when applied to family research and policy.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 State one way in which Janet Finch's idea of 'displaying families' might help people in minority family forms gain social recognition.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 Compare briefly how the personal life perspective and the New Right differ in their explanations of declining traditional family forms in late modern society.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 Using Item A and your own knowledge, explain one way policy makers might need to change services to respond to families constituted by chosen relationships, not only biological kin.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 In your answer you should evaluate competing perspectives, use sociological evidence and reach a supported conclusion.

(Total for Question 5 is 12 marks)

6 Define what sociologists mean by the term 'family practices' in the context of David Morgan's work on families.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

7 Define the term 'families of choice' as used by Jeffrey Weeks in studies of same-sex relationships.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 Identify and explain two features of Janet Finch's idea of 'displaying families' as a way people make relationships visible to others in society.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

9 Describe one way the personal life perspective differs from a traditional functionalist view of family roles in late modern societies.

(Total for Question 9 is 3 marks)

10 Describe two ways in which the personal life perspective helps explain family diversity in late modern Britain.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

11 Explain one strength of using the personal life perspective to study modern family life in the UK.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

Mark scheme · 2.3 The Personal Life Perspective and Late Modern Family Diversity

Question 1

identifies one limitation, e.g. it may underplay structural influences like economic class or patriarchy	**B1**
develops this, e.g. critics say focusing on meanings can obscure how power and inequality shape choices	**B1**
identifies second limitation, e.g. it can be hard to generalise from detailed qualitative studies to wider populations	**B1**
develops this, e.g. this limits the perspective's usefulness for forming broad public policy	**B1**

Answer: Limitations include underplaying structural factors such as class or patriarchy, since focusing on meanings can obscure how power shapes choices, and difficulty generalising from detailed qualitative work, which limits usefulness for broad policy-making.

Question 2

identifies a way, e.g. deliberate public displays like inviting friends to events or showing family photos to claim family status	**B1**
brief development, e.g. this can reduce stigma and make their relationships visible and understood by others	**B1**

Answer: By deliberately presenting relationships through public displays, such as inviting friends to family events or showing photographs, people in minority family forms can claim family status and reduce stigma by making their relationships visible and understood.

Question 3

identifies personal life perspective view, e.g. sees change as diverse redefinitions of family based on meanings and practices	**B1**
explains this, e.g. change is not decline, it is people forming new family types through social practices	**B1**
identifies New Right view, e.g. sees changes as harmful decline from the ideal nuclear family and linked to social problems	**B1**
explains contrast, e.g. New Right blames moral failure and policy, whereas personal life highlights agency and diversity	**B1**

Answer: The personal life perspective treats changing family forms as diverse redefinitions based on meanings and everyday practices, not decline, while the New Right sees such changes as a harmful decline from the nuclear family caused by moral failure and poor policy. This contrasts agency and diversity with a moral panic about family breakdown.

Question 4

identifies a policy implication, e.g. recognising non-biological carers in benefit, health and social care rules	**B1**
explains link to Item A, e.g. Priya acting as emergency contact and providing care shows non-kin perform caring roles	**B1**
develops with effect, e.g. policy could broaden definitions of family to include chosen kin so services and rights reach those who provide care	**B1**
further development, e.g. this could improve welfare support and recognition for informal carers outside biological families	**B1**

Answer: Policy makers might broaden legal and service definitions of family to recognise non-biological carers, since Item A shows people like Priya provide kin-like care and emergency support; this would allow benefits, health and social care provisions to reach informal carers among chosen kin and improve support.

Question 5

Level 1 Basic statements about the personal life perspective with little or no development or comparison. Limited use of evidence and no clear conclusion. **1-3**

Level 2 Some developed points about the personal life perspective and one other view. Some use of evidence and a partial conclusion, but evaluation is limited in depth or balance. **4-6**

Level 3 Clear evaluation that contrasts the personal life perspective with other relevant perspectives such as functionalism, Marxism or the New Right. Good use of sociological examples and evidence. A reasoned conclusion is presented. **7-9**

Level 4 Thorough and balanced evaluation. Candidates consider strengths and limitations of the personal life perspective, compare it with several alternative perspectives, use appropriate evidence and theory, and reach a well-supported judgement about how far sociologists would agree. **10-12**

Indicative content:

- AO1 points: outline the personal life perspective: focus on meanings, relationships, family practices, families of choice, displaying families; key names Smart, Morgan, Finch, Weeks.
- AO2 application: show how these ideas explain diversity, chosen kin networks, everyday practices making family, and implications for understanding non-traditional households.
- AO3 evaluation strengths: captures subjective meanings, explains diversity, highlights care and emotion, useful for qualitative research and policy recognising non-kin carers.
- AO3 evaluation limits: may underplay structure, inequality and power such as class, gender and economic constraints; problems of generalisability from qualitative work; critics argue it is descriptive and offers less explanation of causes.
- Compare with functionalism: functionalism emphasises stability and universal roles, different view of family functions; personal life rejects fixed role assumptions.
- Compare with New Right: New Right sees decline and harm from non-nuclear families, personal life sees diversity and agency.
- Compare with Marxism and feminist perspectives: Marxism stresses class and capitalist economic forces shaping family, feminism emphasises patriarchy and power within families; personal life may be complemented by these structural accounts.
- Evidence: refer to studies of chosen families, qualitative work showing everyday practices, and limitations noted in empirical critiques such as small samples or lack of attention to inequality.
- Conclusion: balanced judgement such as the personal life perspective is highly useful for understanding meanings and diversity but should be used alongside structural perspectives to explain patterns and causes.

Question 6

identifies family practices as routine, everyday activities and interactions that create family relationships (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. these practices are how people 'do' family rather than being fixed roles or structures **B1**

Answer: Family practices are the routine, everyday activities and interactions through which people create and sustain family relationships; they are how people 'do' family rather than fixed roles or structures.

Question 7

identifies families of choice as networks of close, supportive relationships people select, often beyond biological kin (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. commonly used to describe how some same-sex couples form family-like bonds with friends and non-biological kin **B1**

Answer: Families of choice are networks of close, supportive relationships that people select, often beyond biological kin, and are used to describe how some same-sex couples form family-like bonds with friends or non-biological relatives.

Question 8

identifies one feature, e.g. using rituals and routines such as family meals, photographs or celebrations to show family membership **B1**

explains why, e.g. these displays make relationships publicly recognisable and help people claim family status **B1**

identifies second feature, e.g. selective presentation, deciding which relationships to display and which to keep private **B1**

explains why, e.g. selective display manages social recognition and can protect alternative family forms from stigma **B1**

Answer: Finch argues people display family by using rituals and routines like meals, photos or celebrations to make relationships publicly recognisable, and by selectively presenting some relationships while keeping others private to manage social recognition and avoid stigma.

Question 9

identifies difference, e.g. functionalism treats family as a fixed institution with universal roles, while personal life focuses on meanings and relationships **B1**

development, e.g. functionalists emphasise functions such as socialisation and stability, personal life sees people negotiating roles in everyday life **B1**

further development or example, e.g. personal life would study how people create family through practices rather than assume a fixed nuclear role pattern **B1**

Answer: Unlike functionalism which treats the family as a fixed institution with universal roles and emphasises functions like socialisation, the personal life perspective focuses on meanings and relationships and studies how people negotiate roles through everyday practices.

Question 10

identifies one way, e.g. it recognises chosen relationships and friendships as family-like, beyond blood ties **B1**

development, e.g. this accounts for same-sex households and close non-kin networks being family for some people **B1**

identifies second way, e.g. it explores how everyday practices and displays create family identity in many diverse settings **B1**

development, e.g. this explains why people in similar household structures may have very different experiences of family **B1**

Answer: The personal life perspective recognises chosen relationships and friendships as family-like, helping explain same-sex households and non-kin networks, and it shows how everyday practices and displays create family identity, explaining why similar household forms can have different family experiences.

Question 11

identifies a strength, e.g. it captures diversity and subjective meanings often missed by structural approaches **B1**

development, e.g. this yields richer, more realistic accounts of how people experience relationships in late modern society **B1**

Answer: A strength is that the personal life perspective captures diversity and subjective meanings missed by structural approaches, producing richer, more realistic accounts of how people experience relationships today.