2.1 Functionalist and Marxist Perspectives on the Family

Total Marks

AQA 7192 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For full-credit answers in short questions write in full sentences where asked. Spend about 55 minutes on this pack.

1 State one criticism of Parsons's theory that the nuclear family best fits industrial society.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Identify and explain two key differences between Murdock's functionalist account of the family's functions and Engels' Marxist account linking the family to private property.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 Define Althusser's concept of the family as an Ideological State Apparatus in the context of how ideology is transmitted.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

4 Describe one limitation of Murdock's view of the family as performing universal functions, with reference to modern empirical evidence or critiques.

(Total for Question 4 is 3 marks)

5 Discuss how far sociologists would agree that the family serves the interests of capitalism, using relevant Marxist and non-Marxist perspectives.

(Total for Question 5 is 12 marks)

6 Define what Parsons meant by 'primary socialisation' in the context of the family and industrial society.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

7 Identify and explain two functions Murdock claimed the family performs for society, referring to Murdock's theoretical context.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 Describe one aspect of Parsons's 'warm bath' theory about the family and adult personalities in the context of postindustrial stress.

(Total for Question 8 is 3 marks)

9 Define Engels' argument about the family and the emergence of private property in the context of historical materialism.

(Total for Question 9 is 2 marks)

10 Identify and explain two Marxist views about the functions of the family in capitalist societies, naming the Marxist theorists where appropriate.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

11 Describe Parsons's 'functional fit' theory linking family structure to the needs of modern industrial society, with reference to family type.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · 2.1 Functionalist and Marxist Perspectives on the Family

Question 1

identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. it is deterministic and ignores family diversity	**B1**
brief development, e.g. critics argue many family types coexist and the nuclear family is not universally dominant	**B1**

Answer: A criticism is that Parsons' view is deterministic and ignores diversity, since many different family types coexist and the nuclear family is not universally dominant even in industrial societies.

Question 2

identifies a first difference, e.g. Murdock sees universal positive functions while Engels sees the family as reproducing class inequality	**B1**
explains the difference, e.g. Murdock presents functions as beneficial to all societies, Engels sees the family as historically specific and serving ruling class interests	**B1**
identifies a second difference, e.g. Murdock focuses on social order and stability, Engels focuses on inheritance and ownership	**B1**
explains the difference, e.g. Murdock's approach is functionalist and consensual, Engels is conflict-oriented and emphasises economic causes	**B1**

Answer: Murdock presents the family as performing universal, generally beneficial functions supporting social order, while Engels argues the family historically developed to protect private property and reproduce class inequalities; Murdock is consensual and functionalist, Engels is conflict-based and economic in focus.

Question 3

identifies ISA idea: institutions like the family transmit ideology that supports the state and ruling class	**B1**
development, e.g. the family socialises children into acceptance of existing class structures and capitalist relations	**B1**

Answer: Althusser argued the family is an Ideological State Apparatus because it helps transmit ruling-class ideology, socialising children to accept existing class structures and capitalist relations.

Question 4

identifies one limitation: the functions Murdock assigns to the family may also be carried out by other institutions	**B1**
development: this challenges the claim that the family is universally necessary to perform those functions, since they need not depend on the family alone	**B1**
further development or example, e.g. some functions may be performed by other institutions like schools or the state	**B1**

Answer: One limitation is that the functions Murdock assigns to the family may also be carried out by other institutions. For example, schools provide formal education and the state can provide economic support through welfare. This challenges the claim that the family is universally necessary to perform these functions, since they need not depend on the family alone. Diversity of family form does not itself show that a function is absent: whether a family performs a function must be considered separately from its structure.

Question 5

Level 1 Basic statements about the family and capitalism with limited use of sociological ideas. Little or no development or evaluation. Conclusions, if present, are unsupported.	**1-3**
Level 2 Some relevant sociological knowledge and description of Marxist claims that the family benefits capitalism. Limited engagement with alternative perspectives and limited evaluation. Conclusion may be simplistic.	**4-6**
Level 3 Clear explanation of Marxist views that the family serves capitalist interests, with some developed counter-arguments from functionalist and feminist perspectives. Good use of sociological evidence and concepts, and an attempt at evaluation leading to a reasoned conclusion.	**7-9**
Level 4 Detailed and balanced answer: well-developed Marxist analysis (Engels, Zaretsky, Althusser) explaining how the family reproduces labour power, ideology and private property, combined with substantial, developed counter-arguments from functionalism, feminism and interactionism. Evaluation addresses strengths and limitations of Marxist accounts and reaches a supported, qualified judgement.	**10-12**

Indicative content:

- Marxist agreement: Engels argued the family developed to protect private property and ensure inheritance, serving the bourgeoisie.
- Marxist agreement: Zaretsky argued the family reproduces labour power, provides emotional support that stabilises workers and acts as a unit of consumption, sustaining capitalism.
- Marxist agreement: Althusser saw the family as an Ideological State Apparatus, socialising children into acceptance of capitalist relations and legitimising inequality.
- Support for Marxism: empirical examples where families transmit wealth and class advantage, consumer culture targeted at families, roles that reproduce gendered labour power.
- Functionalist counter-argument: Parsons and Murdock claim the family performs necessary universal functions for social order and is not simply an instrument of capitalist class interests.
- Feminist critique: some feminists accept Marxist points about class but argue patriarchy within the family benefits men as well as capitalists, so class is not the only power structure reproduced.
- Interactionist critique: focus on family as site of action and meaning, suggesting families can resist or reinterpret capitalist ideology rather than simply reproduce it.
- Empirical and methodological limitations of Marxism: tends to be deterministic and economically reductionist, may overstate the unity of family interests and underplay diversity of family experience.
- Evaluation could conclude that Marxist theories offer powerful insights into links between family and capitalism, especially over inheritance and ideology, but that they need to be combined with other perspectives to account for gender, agency and family diversity. On balance a qualified agreement is plausible, with reservations.

Question 6

identifies that primary socialisation is the process where young children learn basic norms and values **B1**

development, e.g. this learning is carried out mainly within the family during early childhood and prepares children for adult roles in industrial society **B1**

Answer: Primary socialisation is the process by which young children learn basic norms and values; Parsons saw this happening mainly within the family during early childhood, preparing children for adult roles in industrial society.

Question 7

identifies one function, e.g. reproduction **B1**

explains how it fits Murdock's idea, e.g. reproduction provides new members to sustain society **B1**

identifies a second function, e.g. economic support **B1**

explains how it fits Murdock's idea, e.g. the family provides food, shelter and financial support for members **B1**

Answer: Example: reproduction, which provides new members needed to maintain society; and economic support, where the family supplies food, shelter and care for dependent members.

Question 8

identifies the warm bath idea: the family soothes adults after work **B1**

development, e.g. the family's emotional support helps restore adults, making them effective at work **B1**

further development or example, e.g. affectionate family relationships reduce stress and help social stability **B1**

Answer: The warm bath idea is that the family soothes adults after the stresses of work; the emotional support and affection provided by family life helps restore and stabilise adult personalities so people can return to work refreshed and maintain social order.

Question 9

identifies Engels' claim that the monogamous nuclear family developed alongside private property to ensure inheritance of wealth **B1**

development, e.g. Engels argued this benefitted men and helped reproduce class inequality across generations **B1**

Answer: Engels argued that the monogamous nuclear family emerged with private property so men could pass on wealth to legitimate heirs; this change served to reproduce class inequalities and benefit the bourgeoisie.

Question 10

identifies one Marxist view, e.g. the family serves capitalism by guaranteeing inheritance of private property (Engels) **B1**

explains the link, e.g. monogamy and the nuclear family help ensure clear lines of descent and property transmission **B1**

identifies a second Marxist view, e.g. the family acts as a unit of consumption and ideological support (Zaretsky, Althusser) **B1**

explains the link, e.g. families buy goods the capitalist system produces and socialise children into accepting capitalist values, cushioning the system from challenge **B1**

Answer: Marxist views include Engels' claim that the family developed to protect inheritance of private property, reproducing class inequality, and Zaretsky/Althusser's view that the family functions as a unit of consumption and ideological apparatus, socialising members into accepting capitalist norms.

Question 11

identifies the core idea that family structure fits the needs of the wider society, e.g. nuclear family fits industrial society **B1**

development, e.g. extended families suited pre-industrial societies with stable local economies **B1**

further development, e.g. industrial societies need geographically mobile, socially flexible nuclear families **B1**

example or consequence, e.g. the nuclear family supports a mobile labour force and clear role divisions **B1**

Answer: Parsons' functional fit theory claims family structure changes to fit society's needs: extended families fit pre-industrial, locally rooted economies, while industrial society demands geographically mobile nuclear families with clear role divisions, which better support a mobile labour force.