3.1 Functions of the Family: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Show your understanding by using sociological vocabulary and, where asked, your own examples.

1 Evaluate the view that the main purpose of the family is to benefit society as a whole. In your answer you should refer to sociologists' views and consider more than one perspective.

(Total for Question 1 is 12 marks)

2 Explain one similarity and one difference between the Marxist and feminist views of the family covered in this pack.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 George Murdock's (1949) study of family life across many different societies identified four functions performed by the family.

(a) Explain the sexual and reproductive functions Murdock identified. **(2)**

(b) Explain the economic and educational functions Murdock identified. **(2)**

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

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4 Feminist sociologists have criticised functionalist explanations of the family, such as those of Murdock and Parsons. Explain two feminist criticisms of functionalist explanations of the family.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

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Mark scheme · 3.1 Functions of the Family: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

Level 4 A detailed, well-balanced evaluation that accurately explains BOTH the functionalist case that family functions benefit society as a whole AND the Marxist/feminist case that they mainly benefit particular groups, supported by accurate reference to named sociologists. Strengths and weaknesses of each view are analysed, and a reasoned, supported judgement is reached. Sociological terminology is used accurately and consistently throughout. **10-12**

Level 3 A clear evaluation that explains both sides of the debate, with some accurate reference to sociologists. Some analysis of strengths/weaknesses. An attempt at a conclusion, which may be only partly supported. **7-9**

Level 2 Some relevant explanation of one or both sides of the debate, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation or comparison between views. **4-6**

Level 1 One or two isolated, undeveloped points about family functions, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail. **1-3**

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Indicative content:

- Functionalist case: Murdock's (1949) four universal functions (sexual, reproductive, economic, educational) suggest the family meets basic needs every society requires.
- Parsons argued the family's two 'irreducible' functions (primary socialisation and stabilisation of adult personalities, or 'warm bath theory') show it benefits society by producing well-socialised, emotionally stable members.
- Marxist case: Engels (1884) argued the family developed to protect private property and inheritance, serving the interests of property-owning men rather than society equally; Zaretsky (1976) argued the family's 'haven' role disguises its economic function of reproducing labour power for capitalism.
- Feminist case: feminists argue functionalist accounts disguise unequal domestic labour, so functions such as 'stabilisation of adult personalities' can describe support mainly benefiting men, provided by women's unpaid work.
- Evaluation of the functionalist case: critics argue it presents too positive/consensus a view, ignoring conflict, and treats one style of family as universal.
- Evaluation of the Marxist/feminist case: critics argue it may understate the genuine emotional support and practical benefits many people do experience in family life, and struggles to explain why some kind of family persists across many different economic systems.
- A balanced conclusion should weigh the functionalist emphasis on essential, society-wide benefits against the Marxist/feminist argument that these benefits are unevenly shared, without treating either side as simply correct.

Question 2

identifies a similarity, e.g. both view the family as serving the interests of a more powerful group rather than benefiting everyone equally **B1**

development of the similarity, e.g. both reject the functionalist idea that family functions benefit all members equally **B1**

identifies a difference, e.g. Marxists such as Engels and Zaretsky focus mainly on how the family serves capitalism and property owners, while feminists focus mainly on how the family serves men rather than women **B1**

development of the difference, e.g. this means feminists highlight gender inequality within the family, while Marxists highlight class inequality linked to the wider economic system **B1**

Answer: Similarity: both Marxist and feminist views reject the idea that family functions benefit everyone equally, seeing them as serving a more powerful group. Difference: Marxists (Engels, Zaretsky) focus on the family serving capitalism/property owners, while feminists focus on the family serving men, so feminists highlight gender inequality and Marxists highlight class inequality.

Question 3

(a) sexual function: regulating sexual relationships between adults, e.g. through rules about marriage or monogamy **B1**

(a) reproductive function: producing the next generation of society's members **B1**

(a) Answer: Sexual function: regulating adult sexual relationships, e.g. through marriage norms. Reproductive function: producing society's next generation.

(b) economic function: providing for the material needs of family members, e.g. food and shelter **B1**

(b) educational function: socialising children into the shared norms and values of society **B1**

(b) Answer: Economic function: providing for members' material needs, e.g. food and shelter. Educational function: socialising children into society's shared norms and values.

Question 4

identifies that feminists argue functionalism presents too positive/harmonious a picture of family life **B1**

development, e.g. functionalist accounts largely ignore inequality between men and women within the family, such as an unequal division of domestic labour **B1**

identifies that feminists argue functions such as Parsons' 'stabilisation of adult personalities' can describe support given mainly to men, provided mainly by women's unpaid emotional and domestic work **B1**

development, e.g. feminists argue this hidden imbalance is disguised, not explained, by treating the family's functions as equally beneficial to everyone **B1**

Answer: Feminists argue functionalism presents too positive a picture of family life, ignoring inequality such as the unequal division of domestic labour; functions like Parsons' 'stabilisation of adult personalities' can mean support mainly given to men by women's unpaid work, which functionalism disguises rather than explains.

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