



GSOC.FA1 Functions of the Family

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

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

- 1** Which sociologist identified four functions that he argued were performed by families in every society he studied?

- ☐ A) Talcott Parsons
☐ B) George Murdock
☐ C) Friedrich Engels
☐ D) Ann Oakley

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Define what sociologists mean by the 'function' of an institution such as the family.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 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)

4 The functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons argued that in modern society the family retains only two 'irreducible' functions.

(a) Explain what Parsons meant by the 'primary socialisation of children'. (2)

(b) Explain what Parsons meant by the 'stabilisation of adult personalities' (sometimes called the 'warm bath theory'). (2)

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 The Marxist thinker Friedrich Engels (1884) linked the origin of the modern family to the development of private property.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 The Marxist sociologist Eli Zaretsky (1976) argued that the family serves an ideological role under capitalism.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

7 Feminist sociologists have criticised functionalist explanations of the family, such as those of Murdock and Parsons.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** State one criticism that can be made of Murdock's claim that the family performs four essential functions in every society.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** State one criticism that can be made of Parsons' view of the family's functions.

(Total for Question 9 is 2 marks)

- 10** Explain one way the family's economic function has changed over time.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

- 11** Explain one way the family still performs an important function for society today.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

- 12** Functionalist sociologists such as Murdock and Parsons argue the family's functions benefit society as a whole. Other sociologists, including Marxists and feminists, argue the family's functions mainly benefit particular groups.

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 12 is 12 marks)

- 13** For each description below, state which of Murdock's four functions is being performed.

- (a) A married couple save money to pay the household's rent and buy food each week. (1)
- (b) New parents begin teaching their toddler basic table manners and how to greet visitors politely. (1)
- (c) A married couple keep their romantic and sexual relationship exclusive to each other. (1)

(Total for Question 13 is 3 marks)

- 14** State one criticism that can be made of the Marxist view of the family's functions.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

- 15** Give an example of an institution, other than the family, that today shares in the socialisation of children, and explain how.

(Total for Question 15 is 2 marks)

- 16** State one strength of the functionalist view of the family's functions.

(Total for Question 16 is 2 marks)

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

(Total for Question 17 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.FA1 Functions of the Family

Question 1

- **B1** B (George Murdock)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** a function is the useful purpose/contribution an institution makes to meeting the needs of individuals or society (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. functionalists see institutions like the family as existing because they perform jobs that help society run smoothly
- **Answer: A function is the useful purpose an institution serves in meeting the needs of individuals or society, e.g. functionalists see the family as performing jobs that help society run smoothly.**

Question 3

- (a) **B1** sexual function: regulating sexual relationships between adults, e.g. through rules about marriage or monogamy
- (a) **B1** reproductive function: producing the next generation of society's members
- (a) **Answer: Sexual function: regulating adult sexual relationships, e.g. through marriage norms. Reproductive function: producing society's next generation.**
- (b) **B1** economic function: providing for the material needs of family members, e.g. food and shelter
- (b) **B1** educational function: socialising children into the shared norms and values of society
- (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

- (a) **B1** identifies that the family is where young children first learn the basic norms and values of their culture (oe)
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. this happens before children go to school or meet wider society, so the family shapes their earliest sense of right and wrong
- (a) **Answer: Primary socialisation: the family is where young children first learn the basic norms and values of their culture, before they go to school or meet wider society.**
- (b) **B1** identifies that the family provides adults with emotional support that helps them cope with the stresses of working life (oe)
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. Parsons compared this to a warm bath, washing away the day's tensions so the adult can return to work refreshed
- (b) **Answer: Stabilisation of adult personalities ('warm bath theory'): the family gives adults emotional support that relieves the stresses of work, like a warm bath washing away the day's tensions.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies that Engels argued monogamous marriage developed alongside private property
- **B1** explains that a man who owned property/wealth needed to be certain which children were his own, so he could pass his property to legitimate heirs
- **B1** identifies that this required control over women's sexuality/fidelity within marriage
- **B1** development, e.g. Engels argued this gave men power over women within the family, serving the interests of property owners rather than society as a whole
- **Answer: Engels argued monogamous marriage developed alongside private property: a man needed certainty over his children's paternity to pass on his wealth to legitimate heirs, which required controlling women's sexuality/fidelity, giving men power over women within the family, in the interests of property owners.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies that Zaretsky argued the family is presented as a private 'haven' separate from the harsh, competitive world of paid work
- **B1** development, e.g. this makes family life feel like a personal refuge from capitalism, even though the family itself developed as part of capitalist society
- **B1** identifies that unpaid domestic labour within the family (e.g. cooking, cleaning, childcare) reproduces workers' labour power, ready to return to paid work
- **B1** development, e.g. Zaretsky argued this hidden economic role means the family actually helps capitalism function, rather than being fully separate from it
- **Answer: Zaretsky argued the family is presented as a private 'haven' from the world of paid work, but unpaid domestic labour within it reproduces workers' labour power (e.g. through cooking, cleaning, childcare), so the family's 'private' role actually helps capitalism function.**

Question 7

- **B1** 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
- **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.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. other family forms (such as lone-parent or reconstituted families) can also perform these functions, so a single 'universal' nuclear family is not required
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that other institutions (such as schools, the state or paid childcare) now perform some of these functions instead of the family
- **Answer: Critics argue other family forms, such as lone-parent families, can also perform these functions, and other institutions such as schools or the state now take on some of them, so a single 'universal' nuclear family is not required.**

Question 9

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. Parsons' view was based mainly on the 1950s American nuclear family and may not fit today's more diverse family forms
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that it ignores conflict and inequality within families, presenting family life as always warm and supportive
- **Answer: Critics argue Parsons' view was based mainly on the 1950s American nuclear family and may not fit today's diverse family forms, and that it ignores conflict and inequality within families.**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies a genuine change, e.g. families used to produce most of their own food, clothing and other goods, but today most goods are bought ready-made
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that the welfare state now provides some financial support (such as benefits) that used to depend entirely on the family
- **Answer: Families used to produce most of their own food, clothing and goods themselves; today most goods are bought ready-made, and the welfare state also provides some financial support families once had to provide alone.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies a genuine ongoing function, e.g. the family still provides most young children's earliest care and early learning of language/behaviour, before school
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this early care and socialisation continues to shape children's basic habits and relationships throughout their lives
- **Answer: The family still provides most young children's earliest care and their first learning of language and behaviour, before school, which continues to shape their habits and relationships.**

Question 12

- **Level 4** (10-12): 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.
- **Level 3** (7-9): 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.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Some relevant explanation of one or both sides of the debate, with limited development or accuracy. Little clear evaluation or comparison between views.
- **Level 1** (1-3): One or two isolated, undeveloped points about family functions, with little or no sociological terminology or accurate detail.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **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 13

- (a) **B1** economic
- (a) **Answer: Economic**
- (b) **B1** educational (socialisation)
- (b) **Answer: Educational (socialisation)**
- (c) **B1** sexual
- (c) **Answer: Sexual**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. it focuses heavily on economic/class factors and may understate the real emotional support and personal satisfaction family life can provide
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that not all families are equally wealthy or property-owning, so the link to protecting private property may apply less to poorer families
- **Answer: Critics argue the Marxist view focuses heavily on economic/class factors and may understate the real emotional support family life can provide, and that the link to protecting property may apply less to poorer, non-property-owning families.**

Question 15

- **B1** a correct example, e.g. school
- **B1** brief explanation, e.g. schools teach children rules, routines and shared values (such as respecting others and following instructions), alongside the family
- **Answer: School: schools teach children rules, routines and shared values, such as respecting others and following instructions, alongside the family.**

Question 16

- **B1** identifies a genuine strength, e.g. it highlights real, practical needs (such as care of children and economic support) that most families do provide in some form
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this helps explain why some form of family or household is found in almost every known society
- **Answer: It highlights real, practical needs, such as care of children and economic support, that most families do provide in some form, which helps explain why some kind of family or household exists in almost every known society.**

Question 17

- **B1** 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
- **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.**