

Cambridge AS & A Level · Sociology 9699 · Notes

Perspectives on the role of the family AS

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What you need to know

By the end of this topic you should be able to:

1. **Explain functionalist accounts of the family:** how the family benefits its **members** and **society**, how its **functions have changed over time** (from the pre-industrial to the modern family), and both sides of the **loss of functions debate**. The **New Right**, who share the functionalist belief that the nuclear family is the best basis for society, are examined with this view.
2. **Explain Marxist accounts of the family:** how the family benefits **capitalism**, through **ideological control**, the **reproduction of labour** and **consumption**.
3. **Explain feminist responses** (liberal, Marxist and radical feminist) to the functionalist and Marxist accounts: what each accepts, what each rejects, and why.

Exam questions also ask for the **strengths and limitations** of each view, and postmodernists are used as critics of all of them, so both are covered here. The causes of family diversity are in the note on diversity and social change, and conjugal roles in the note on gender equality and experiences of family life.

Understand it

Three questions every perspective answers

Every account of the family's role answers the same three questions, and keeping them in mind turns a list of names into an argument:

- **Who benefits** from the family: everyone (society and all its members), or one group at the expense of others?
- **Is the family's form natural or made:** did the nuclear family appear because it suits human needs, or because it suits a powerful group?
- **Is it good or harmful:** a warm, stabilising place, or a place of exploitation, control and sometimes violence?

Consensus theories (functionalism and the New Right) say everyone benefits and the nuclear family is natural and good. **Conflict** theories (Marxism and the feminisms) say one group gains at another's expense and the family's form serves that group. Postmodernists reject the question itself: there is no single family and no single role.

who does the family mainly benefit?

consensus views

Functionalism	→	society and all its members
New Right	→	society, but only the two-parent family

conflict views

Marxism	→	capitalism and the ruling class
Marxist feminism	→	capitalism, via women's unpaid work
Radical feminism	→	men, through patriarchy

rejects a single role

Postmodernism	→	no single role: chosen, diverse families
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Functionalism: the family benefits members and society

Functionalists see society as a system of connected institutions, like the organs of a body (the **organic analogy**). Each institution performs **functions** that keep the whole healthy and stable, and the family is the basic building block. Because people are socialised into the same norms and values, society rests on **value consensus**.

Murdock studied 250 societies and concluded that the nuclear family (or a family containing it) was **universal**, because it performs four functions no society can do without:

- **Sexual:** it gives adults a stable, approved sexual relationship, which limits conflict over partners.
- **Reproductive:** it produces the next generation, so society survives and has future workers.
- **Economic:** it provides food, shelter and money for its members, and the adults share the work.
- **Educational:** it teaches children society's norms, values and skills (socialisation).

Parsons argued that in modern industrial society the family keeps two **basic and irreducible functions**, ones no other institution can do as well:

- **Primary socialisation:** in the early years children learn the shared norms and values of their society, so they **internalise** them and become functioning members of society. Parsons said families are "factories" that produce human personalities.
- **Stabilisation of adult personalities:** the family gives adults, especially the working breadwinner, emotional support and a place to relax and release tension. This is often called the **warm bath theory**: the family soothes away the stress of work, so the worker returns fit and productive.

Parsons also linked gender roles to these functions: the husband takes the **instrumental role** (breadwinner, link to the outside world) and the wife the **expressive role** (care, emotional warmth). He saw this division as natural, based on biology.

Later functionalists add more benefits. **Horwitz** and other neo-functionalists describe the family as a **bridge** between the small private world of the child and the wider society: it prepares the young to take on adult roles. The family also acts as an agent of **social control**, rewarding acceptable behaviour and punishing deviance.

Functional fit: how the family changed over time

Parsons' **functional fit theory** says the family's form changes to fit the needs of the economy.

- **Pre-industrial society**: most people worked the land. The **extended family** was a unit of **production**: kin worked together, passed down skills, cared for the sick and old, and people inherited their status (**ascribed status**).
- **Industrial society**: factories need a workforce that is **geographically mobile** (moves to where the jobs are) and **socially mobile** (people rise by merit, **achieved status**). A small, **isolated nuclear family**, not tied to wider kin, fits these needs best, so it became the typical form.

Critics of the fit thesis: **Laslett** found from parish records that most pre-industrial households in England were already nuclear, partly because people married late and died young. **Anderson** found that in the early industrial town of Preston extended kin households **grew**, because relatives relied on each other for jobs, housing and support. So the change was not as simple as Parsons claimed.

The loss of functions debate

As society industrialised, it developed specialised institutions (**structural differentiation**). Parsons argued that these took over many of the family's old functions, leaving it with only its two irreducible ones:

pre-industrial family <i>functions it performed</i>		industrial society <i>institution that took over</i>
production of goods	————→	factories and workplaces
education and training	————→	schools and colleges
health care	————→	hospitals and doctors
welfare and care of the old	————→	the welfare state
religious teaching	————→	churches and faith groups

the modern nuclear family keeps (Parsons):
primary socialisation · stabilisation of adult personalities

For a loss of functions:

- **Production** moved to factories and offices; the family became a unit of **consumption**, not production.
- **Education** moved to compulsory schooling, which now takes much of secondary socialisation.
- **Health care** moved to hospitals and doctors; **welfare** moved to the welfare state (pensions, benefits, care homes).
- **Religious** teaching moved to churches, and many societies have become more secular.

- Today childminders, nurseries, the media and peer groups share even primary socialisation.

Against a loss of functions:

- **Fletcher** argued the family has **not** lost its functions: it performs them in **more detail** and to a higher standard. Parents now take more responsibility for children's health, schooling and wellbeing, and the state **supports** the family rather than replacing it.
- The family still carries out the **irreducible** functions, and no institution has replaced emotional support.
- Marxists add that the family keeps economic functions vital to capitalism: it reproduces labour and is the main unit of consumption.
- In many societies (much of the Global South) the extended family still provides welfare, care of the old and childcare, so the debate is **ethnocentric** if it is based only on Western industrial societies.

A loss of functions is not the same as a loss of **importance**: functionalists argue that by specialising, the family does its remaining jobs better.

The New Right: only the nuclear family works

The **New Right** share functionalism's view that the married, two-parent nuclear family with traditional gender roles is natural and best for society. They are worried about its **decline** (divorce, cohabitation, lone parents).

- **Murray** argued that generous welfare benefits allow lone mothers to raise children without a working father, creating **welfare dependency** and an **underclass** that does not share society's norms.
- Boys raised without a father lack a male **role model** and a disciplinarian, so they are more likely to turn to crime and deviance.
- Children of lone parents may receive weaker **primary socialisation** and no example of both **gender roles** (instrumental and expressive).
- **Marsland** argued that an over-generous welfare state creates a **dependency culture**, so the cost of supporting broken families falls on taxpayers.

Their solution is policies that support marriage and cut benefits that reward lone parenthood.

Strengths and limitations of functionalism and the New Right

Strengths of functionalism:

- It shows the **positive** role the family plays for its members and society, which conflict views tend to ignore.
- It explains how the family links to other institutions (education, the economy) and how the micro world of the family connects to the macro world of society.
- It explains why the nuclear family became the typical form in industrial societies (fit thesis).
- It shows why **dysfunctional** families matter: poor socialisation can lead to deviance.

Limitations of functionalism:

- It takes a **rosy view**: it ignores the **dark side** of the family (domestic violence, child abuse, neglect) because it looks only at functions that benefit people.
- It sees gender roles as natural, so it ignores the **exploitation of women**; feminists show the roles are socially constructed.
- It is **deterministic**: it treats socialisation as one-way and children as passive.
- It assumes the family benefits **all** of society, while Marxists say it benefits only the ruling class.
- It is **ethnocentric** and **outdated**: based on white, middle-class American families of the 1950s, it ignores family **diversity**.

Strengths of the New Right: it draws attention to the role of the state (divorce law, benefits) in weakening marriage; it explains some causes of the decline of the nuclear family; it highlights possible effects of poor socialisation; and it has influenced governments to adopt pro-marriage policies.

Limitations of the New Right: it ignores the dark side of the nuclear family; it is deterministic in assuming lone mothers raise delinquent children (many children of lone parents do well, often with help from wider kin); it exaggerates the decline of the nuclear family and the number of lone mothers living on benefits; it blames family change for social problems caused by poverty, capitalism or patriarchy; and it sees divorce only as a problem, not as an escape from violent marriages.

Marxism: the family benefits capitalism

Marxists see society as divided into two classes: the **bourgeoisie** (the ruling class who own the means of production) and the **proletariat** (the workers who sell their labour). Every institution, including the family, helps the ruling class keep its wealth and power.

Origin of the family. Engels argued that the monogamous nuclear family appeared with **private property**. Men needed to be sure who their children were so that property passed to **legitimate heirs**, so women's sexuality was controlled through marriage. The family therefore keeps wealth in the hands of the rich across generations.

1. Ideological control. The family passes on **ruling-class ideology**: ideas that make inequality seem natural and fair.

- **Althusser** called the family an **ideological state apparatus** (ISA): an institution that spreads ruling-class ideas without force.
- Children learn to **obey authority**, accept that someone is always in charge and accept **hierarchy**, through rewards and sanctions. This prepares them to be obedient workers.
- **Cooper** called the family an **ideological conditioning device**: it teaches children to conform and to accept their place.
- The result is **false class consciousness**: workers do not see that they are exploited, so they do not challenge capitalism.
- **Family responsibilities** (a mortgage, children to feed) make workers less likely to strike or quit, and focusing on private family life distracts them from wider injustice.

2. Reproduction of labour. Capitalism needs a supply of workers, fed and fit for work.

- The family produces and raises the **next generation of workers** at no cost to the employers.
- It **maintains the current workforce**: the worker is fed, clothed and rested at home, through unpaid domestic labour.
- **Zaretsky** argued the family is a **safety valve**: home seems a private refuge from **alienating** work, so the worker can let off steam there instead of rebelling against the employer. Zaretsky saw this refuge as largely an illusion, since the family cannot meet all its members' needs.

3. Consumption. The family is a **unit of consumption**.

- Families buy the goods and services that capitalism produces, which creates profit for the bourgeoisie.
- **Marcuse** argued advertising creates **false needs**: families buy things they do not need. Families compete through **conspicuous consumption**, displaying wealth through what they own.
- Advertisers target children, who then put pressure on parents to buy (**pester power**).

Strengths of Marxism: it shows how powerful economic interests shape family life; it shows the family is **not natural or universal** but developed historically with capitalism; it recognises **exploitation** and inequalities of power that functionalism ignores; it explains the ideological role of the family; and it shows the economic importance of the family as consumer and supplier of labour.

Limitations of Marxism: it is **economically deterministic**, reducing every family to its role for capitalism and ignoring other influences (patriarchy, culture, religion); traditional Marxism ignores the **oppression of women** inside the family; it ignores the benefits families give their members (love, emotional support); it treats family members as passive **empty vessels**, ignoring families that reject consumerism and capitalist values; it ignores family diversity; and families in non-capitalist societies also exist, so capitalism cannot explain them all.

Feminist responses

All feminists see the family as **unequal for women**, and so reject the functionalist picture of a warm bath that benefits everyone. They differ on **why** women are unequal and **what** should change.

Liberal feminists (such as **Oakley** and **Somerville**):

- Reject Parsons' claim that the expressive role is **natural**: gender roles are learned through **gender role socialisation** (girls given dolls and housework, boys given tools and freedom).
- Oakley showed the **housewife role** is a modern social construction, not a biological fact, and that housework is real, unpaid, often unrewarding work.
- Believe change can come gradually through **laws and policies** (equal pay, anti-discrimination laws, maternity and paternity leave) and changing attitudes, and that families are becoming more equal.
- **Strength:** shows progress towards equality and that roles can change. **Limitation:** radical and Marxist feminists say it ignores the deep structures (patriarchy, capitalism) that keep women unequal, and that laws alone do not change who does the housework.

Marxist feminists (such as **Benston**, **Ansley** and **Beechey**) accept much of the Marxist account but add that **women** are the key to how the family serves capitalism:

- Women's **unpaid domestic labour** reproduces and maintains the workforce free of charge. **Benston** argued this keeps wages low, because employers pay for one worker but get the labour of two.
- **Ansley** argued wives absorb the anger and frustration their husbands feel at work, so it is aimed at them rather than at the employers: a **safety valve** that can end in violence against women.
- **Beechey** argued women are a **reserve army of labour**: they can be drawn into paid work when the economy needs them and sent back home when it does not.
- Women working outside and inside the home carry a **dual burden** (or a **triple shift**, adding emotional work).
- **Strengths**: shows women are **doubly exploited**, by capitalism and by men; challenges the warm bath theory (there is no warm bath for women); explains why women's position will not change while capitalism remains. **Limitations**: **economically deterministic**; outdated, ignoring the progress women have made; assumes all women's experiences are the same; treats women as passive victims, ignoring women who choose a domestic role and find it satisfying (**Hakim's preference theory**); radical feminists say patriarchy existed before capitalism, so ending capitalism would not end women's oppression.

Radical feminists (such as **Delphy and Leonard**, **Greer**, **Firestone** and **Millett**) say the family's main beneficiary is **men**:

- Society is a **patriarchy** (male dominance), and the family is its key institution. **Delphy and Leonard** argued the family is an economic system in which women's work (housework, childcare, sexual and emotional services) is taken by men.
- **Domestic violence** and abuse show the **dark side** of the family: **Dobash and Dobash** found that violence against wives often followed men's challenges to their authority.
- **Firestone** traced women's subordination to their **biology** (pregnancy and childcare make them dependent on men) and saw technology as a way to free them.
- **Greer** argued women should reject marriage and the conventional family; some radical feminists support **separatism** (women living apart from men).
- **Strengths**: places patriarchy at the centre; brings the dark side of the family into view; shows that laws alone are not enough to free women. **Limitations**: exaggerates women's oppression and powerlessness (many women start divorces, and many relationships rest on love and equality); deterministic; outdated, ignoring change in men's roles; ignores differences between women by class and ethnicity (**black feminists** argue that for some ethnic minority women the family is a **haven against racism**); its solutions, such as separatism, are unrealistic for most women.

Other critics of the family's "warm bath": **Leach** argued the isolated nuclear family turns inwards, cut off from wider community, and puts too much emotional pressure on its members. **Laing** argued that intense family relationships can cause psychological damage. Both are used against functionalism alongside the feminists.

Postmodernists: no single role

Postmodernists (such as **Stacey** and **Cheal**) argue that society is now so **diverse** and fragmented that no single theory (a **grand narrative**, or **meta-narrative**) can explain "the family".

- People **choose** their relationships and family forms; the family serves whatever needs its members have.
- **Strengths:** matches today's diverse families; does not judge some family types as right or wrong; recognises the choices people make. **Limitations:** exaggerates choice, since class, poverty and gender still limit options; exaggerates diversity, as most people still live in a nuclear family at some stage of life; offers no overall explanation, so it struggles to say why patterns exist.

Key facts and formulas

There is no formula list in Sociology. "Learn it" means you must remember it.

Key term	Status
Functionalism: organic analogy, value consensus, family as building block of society	Learn it
Murdock (250 societies): nuclear family universal; four functions: sexual, reproductive, economic, educational	Learn it
Parsons: two irreducible functions, primary socialisation and stabilisation of adult personalities (warm bath theory); instrumental and expressive roles	Learn it
Functional fit theory: extended family fits pre-industrial society, isolated nuclear family fits industrial society (mobility, achieved status); critics Laslett and Anderson	Learn it
Loss of functions (structural differentiation): production, education, health, welfare and religion move to specialised institutions; against it Fletcher (functions done in more detail), Marxist economic functions	Learn it
New Right (Murray, Marsland): nuclear family best; lone parents linked to welfare dependency, the underclass, deviance in boys without a father	Learn it
Marxism: Engels (private property and legitimate heirs), ideological control (Althusser's ideological state apparatus, Cooper's ideological conditioning device, false class consciousness)	Learn it
Marxism: reproduction of labour, safety valve (Zaretsky), unit of consumption, false needs (Marcuse), conspicuous consumption, pester power	Learn it
Liberal feminism (Oakley, Somerville): gender roles socially constructed; change through laws and attitudes	Learn it
Marxist feminism (Benston, Ansley, Beechey): unpaid domestic labour, wives absorb men's anger, reserve army of labour (Beechey), dual burden, women doubly exploited	Learn it
Radical feminism (Delphy and Leonard, Greer, Firestone, Millett, Dobash and Dobash): patriarchy, dark side, domestic violence, separatism	Learn it
Common limitations: deterministic, outdated, ethnocentric, ignores diversity, ignores the dark side or women's choice	Learn it
Question 2(a) points: 4 marks each, $2 \times 4 = 8$; Question 2(b) points: 3 marks each, $2 \times 3 = 6$; Question 3: $10 + 6 = 16$; essays AO1 8, AO2 8, AO3 10	Learn it

How to do it

We have tagged 58 questions for this topic (2021–2026, Papers 21–23, plus one old-syllabus Paper 14 essay in 2021), 50 different (the same questions were often set on two papers in a session). 19 of them mix two types, so the counts add up to 77.

Question type	Questions
Explain strengths or limitations of a perspective on the family	27
Evaluate a view on the role of the family (26-mark essay)	16
Explain two ways the family supports capitalism or the ruling class	9
Explain a view on the family's role, then one argument against it	8
Describe two functions or ways the family benefits	7
Explain two ways the family harms society or some of its members	6
Explain two ways the family benefits members or society, for functionalists	4

Question 1 (4 marks) wants two points, each worth 2: identify it (1), describe it (1).

Question 2(a) (8 marks) wants two points, each worth up to 4:

1. **Make the point** (1): name the way or function in a few words.
2. **Explain it** (1): say how it works.
3. **Select sociological material** (1): a sociologist, theory or concept.
4. **Show how the material supports the point** (1): a sentence linking the material back to the question.

Question 2(b) (6 marks) wants two strengths or limitations (or one of each), each worth up to 3: **identify** it (1), explain **why the perspective has it**, meaning what the theory focuses on or assumes (1), and explain **why that makes it a strength or limitation**, meaning what it lets us see or what it misses (1).

1. Explain strengths or limitations of a perspective on the family (27 questions)

Always Question 2(b), 6 marks. Asked of Marxism 5 times, the New Right 5, functionalism 4, Marxist feminism 4, radical feminism 4, postmodernism 4 (once as "views on family diversity") and liberal feminism once.

1. Pick a strength or limitation that belongs to **this** perspective (use the lists under each perspective in Understand it).
2. Write: "A strength of X is that... X has this strength because they... This is a strength because...".
3. The middle sentence explains what the theory **focuses on or assumes** (for example "because Marxists analyse the family's relationship with the economy").
4. The last sentence says **what it lets us see** (strength) or **what it misses** (limitation).

Ready-made limitations that fit most perspectives: **deterministic**, **outdated**, **ignores diversity**, **ignores the dark side** (consensus views), **ignores women's choice and agency** (feminist and Marxist views), **ethnocentric**. Ready-made strengths: **highlights exploitation or inequality** (conflict views), **explains social stability** (consensus views), **links the family to the economy or wider institutions**, **fits today's diverse families** (postmodernism).

Don't give a positive or negative point about a **family type** ("lone-parent families can't socialise children") when the question asks about a **perspective** ("a strength of the New Right is..."); examiners report this mistake often.

2. Evaluate a view on the role of the family (26-mark essay) (16 questions)

Asked as (counting tagged questions): the main role is to serve capitalism, the ruling class or capitalist ideology (3), evaluate functionalist explanations or the functionalist perspective (3), evaluate Marxist explanations or whether they offer the best understanding (2), the family has lost its functions or the nuclear family has lost its social importance (2), feminist perspectives on equality in the family (2), and once each: reproduce inequality, promote social stability, harmful for some members. One old-syllabus 25-mark essay (2021) asked about functionalism and value consensus (1).

Marked **AO1** knowledge and understanding 8, **AO2** interpretation and application 8, **AO3** analysis and evaluation 10, so $8 + 8 + 10 = 26$.

1. **Introduction**: say which perspective holds the view and define its key terms.
2. **For the view** (4–5 developed paragraphs): each a point, explained, backed by a sociologist or concept, and tied to the question's words.
3. **Against the view** (4–5 paragraphs): rival perspectives, used **as criticisms of the view**, not described on their own.
4. **Conclude** with a judgement: how far, for which families, in which societies.

The family serves capitalism / ruling-class interests / capitalist ideology:

- **For**: ISA and false class consciousness (Althusser); obedience and hierarchy through sanctions (Cooper); safety valve (Zaretsky, Ansley); unit of consumption, false needs and conspicuous consumption (Marcuse); reproduction of labour at no cost; family responsibilities stop workers striking; inheritance to legitimate heirs (Engels); women's unpaid domestic labour (Benston); women as a reserve army of labour (Beechey).
- **Against**: too **deterministic**, since families can reject capitalist values (anti-consumerist lifestyles, working-class values); functionalists say the family benefits all of society (Murdock's four functions, Parsons' two irreducible functions, social cohesion); radical feminists say it serves **men** (patriarchy came before capitalism); postmodernists say families are too diverse for one role; dysfunctional families are a cost to the economy, not a help.

Evaluate functionalist explanations / the family promotes social stability:

- **For:** the family as building block interacting with other institutions (organic analogy); essential functions for individual and society; primary socialisation into value consensus prevents deviance and anomie; warm bath keeps workers productive; functional fit; support from the New Right.
- **Against:** ignores the family's role for capitalism and patriarchy (Marxists, feminists); deterministic; the dark side (Leach, Laing, Dobash and Dobash); ignores diversity; ethnocentric; Fletcher disputes the loss of functions; others now share socialisation; no warm bath for women.

The family has lost its functions:

- **For:** structural differentiation (Parsons); production, education, health, welfare and religion taken by specialised institutions; nurseries, media and peers share socialisation.
- **Against:** Fletcher (functions done in more detail, state supports the family); the irreducible functions remain; Marxists show the economic functions remain (consumption, reproduction of labour); in many societies the extended family still provides welfare.

Evaluation moves examiners reward: say **why** a counter-point weakens the view, not just that another view exists; use the question's key word (if it says "best", compare which theory explains **more**); point out where rival views agree (Marxists and functionalists both see socialisation into shared values, but disagree on whose values); use time and place (the view fits industrial capitalist societies better than others).

3. Explain two ways the family supports capitalism or the ruling class (9 questions)

Worded as supports capitalism or the economy, promotes ruling-class ideology, prepares children for the workplace, or (4 times, Marxist feminist) the role of **women** in maintaining capitalism.

1. Choose two **separate** ways: ideological socialisation (ISA, false class consciousness), obedience through sanctions, safety valve, unit of consumption, reproduction of labour, family responsibilities preventing strikes, inheritance to legitimate heirs; for women: unpaid domestic labour, absorbing men's anger, reserve army of labour, dual burden.
2. Explain how each one helps the ruling class or capitalism.
3. Name the material: Althusser, Zaretsky, Cooper, Marcuse, Engels, Benston, Ansley, Beechey, or a concept.
4. Link it back: "so workers accept their position and do not challenge the bourgeoisie".

Functionalist points (warm bath) earn marks only if you turn them into how **capitalism** benefits; "safety valve" is the better concept.

4. Explain a view on the family's role, then one argument against it (8 questions)

Question 3: (a) 10 marks, (b) 6 marks, both marked by levels. Views asked (6 different questions): the main role is to support or serve capitalism (two questions), ideological control, to benefit society, the family performs functions that benefit the whole of society, and the family has experienced a loss of functions.

(a) Explain this view (10 marks):

1. Write **two** clear, developed points that **agree** with the view; no evaluation (that is for part (b)).
2. Back each with sociological material (theory, sociologist, concept) and show how it supports the view.
3. Two developed, supported points reach the top level (8–10).

(b) One argument against (6 marks):

1. Give **one** argument only; extra arguments earn nothing.
2. The usual move is a **rival perspective** saying the main role is something else: functionalism against Marxism (the family benefits everyone), Marxism or feminism against functionalism (it benefits the ruling class or men), postmodernism (too diverse for one role), New Right (dysfunctional families harm society), Laing (psychological damage), Fletcher against loss of functions.
3. Develop it with material and say clearly why it **contradicts** the view (5–6 marks).

5. Describe two functions or ways the family benefits (7 questions)

Question 1, 4 marks. Asked as two functions the family performs (3 times), two ways it benefits its members (once), society (twice) or capitalism (once).

1. Identify a function (1): primary socialisation, stabilisation of adult personalities, reproduction, economic support, sexual regulation, social control, passing on skills.
2. Describe it in one sentence (1): what it does for the person or society.
3. Write two bullet points; no introduction, no theorist needed.

6. Explain two ways the family harms society or some of its members (6 questions)

New Right (3): two ways lone-parent families harm or have a negative impact on society. Use: boys without a father lack a role model and discipline, so are drawn into crime; welfare dependency puts a cost on the state; the underclass with different norms; weak primary socialisation; no example of both gender roles. Material: Murray, Marsland, welfare dependency, underclass.

Feminist (3): ways family life is harmful for some members, girls experience family life differently from boys, the family supports the interests of men. Use: domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash); unequal domestic labour and the dual burden; gender role socialisation and tighter control of girls (Oakley); emotional work; men's control of money and decisions. Material: patriarchy, radical and liberal feminists.

Use the same 4-mark scheme as Question 2(a). Keep each point on the exact group in the question (girls, not women at work).

7. Explain two ways the family benefits members or society, for functionalists (4 questions)

1. Choose two of: primary socialisation, stabilisation of adult personalities (warm bath), the bridge to wider society (Horwitz), gender roles (instrumental and expressive), social control, reproduction, economic support.

2. Explain how it benefits the **people** or **society** in the question (members: emotional security, survival; society: value consensus, productive workers, social order).
3. Name Parsons, Murdock or Horwitz, or a concept.
4. Link back to the question's beneficiary. Examiners report answers that explain a benefit to the individual when the question asks about **society**.

Worked examples

Example 1

Describe two functions the family has lost to other institutions. [4]

- **Health care (1)**: the family used to nurse the sick at home, but in industrial societies hospitals, doctors and a health service took over most medical care (1).
- **Education (1)**: children once learned work skills from their parents, but compulsory schooling now gives them most of their knowledge and training for jobs (1).

Two functions, each identified and described: **4 marks**.

Example 2

(a) Explain two ways the family performs ideological control, according to Marxists. [8]

(b) Explain one strength and one limitation of liberal feminist views of the family. [6]

(a) Way 1. The first way is that the family teaches children to **accept authority (1)**. Parents use rewards and punishments so that children learn to obey and to accept that someone above them makes the decisions (1). Cooper called the family an **ideological conditioning device (1)**: children who learn obedience at home grow into workers who accept the authority of bosses and the hierarchy of the workplace without question (1).

Way 2. The second way is that the family passes on the idea that **inequality is fair (1)**. Parents pass on beliefs such as "people get what they deserve", so children grow up thinking the rich have earned their position (1). Althusser saw the family as an **ideological state apparatus (1)**: by spreading ruling-class ideas without force, it creates **false class consciousness**, so workers do not see their exploitation and do not challenge capitalism (1).

Two ways, each made, explained, supported and linked back: **8 marks**.

(b) Strength. Liberal feminism shows that **gender roles in the family can change (1)**. Liberal feminists see roles as learned through gender role socialisation rather than fixed by biology (1). This is a strength because it explains the real progress towards equality that has followed equal pay laws and changing attitudes, and shows how further change is possible (1).

Limitation. Liberal feminism **underestimates how deep gender inequality runs (1)**. It assumes laws and education can gradually create equality, without challenging patriarchy or capitalism **(1)**. This is a limitation because women still do most of the housework and childcare even where equality laws exist, which suggests the causes are structural, as radical and Marxist feminists argue **(1)**.

6 marks.

Example 3

"The family has become more important to its members, not less."

(a) Explain this view. **[10]**

(b) Using sociological material, give one argument against this view. **[6]**

(a) Point 1. Fletcher argued that the family has not lost its functions but now performs them **in more detail**. Parents today take far more responsibility for their children's health, diet, schooling and wellbeing than parents in the past, and the state's schools and health services **support** families rather than replace them. So the family is more involved in its members' lives than before, not less.

Point 2. Parsons argued that, as other institutions took over production and education, the family **specialised** in two irreducible functions. The **stabilisation of adult personalities** has become more important because modern work is stressful and impersonal: the family is the main place adults find emotional support (the warm bath), which no other institution can provide. Specialisation makes the family's remaining role more valuable to its members.

Two clear, developed points, each supported by a sociologist and concept and focused on the view: **Level 3 (8–10 marks)**.

(b) Radical feminists argue the family is **not** more important to all its members, because it harms many women. Dobash and Dobash showed that violence against wives is often used to enforce men's authority, and Delphy and Leonard argued that women's unpaid work in the family benefits men. For these women the family is a place of exploitation, not support, and many now choose to leave it: more divorces are started by women, and more women live alone or raise children alone. So the family's importance depends on who you are, and for many women it has fallen.

One clear, developed argument against, with focused material: **Level 3 (5–6 marks)**.

Example 4

Evaluate the view that the main role of the family is to benefit men. **[26]**

Introduction. This is a radical feminist view: the family is the central institution of **patriarchy**, a system in which men dominate women and benefit from their work.

For the view (AO1/AO2).

- **Unpaid labour:** Delphy and Leonard argue the family is an economic system in which men take women's domestic, emotional and sexual work; women still do most housework and childcare, even when in paid work (the **dual burden**).
- **Power and violence:** Dobash and Dobash showed that violence against wives often follows challenges to male authority, so violence keeps men in control.
- **Socialisation:** gender role socialisation teaches girls to care and boys to lead (Oakley), reproducing male dominance in each generation.
- **Biology turned into dependence:** Firestone argued pregnancy and childcare make women dependent on men, which men exploit.
- Even Parsons' **warm bath** works for the male breadwinner: the wife provides the comfort, not the husband.

Against the view (AO3).

- **However**, Marxists argue the main beneficiary is **capitalism**: the man's comfort at home only serves to keep him a productive worker, and Marxist feminists such as Benston show women's unpaid labour mainly cuts employers' costs. The view mistakes who gains in the end.
- **Functionalists** argue the family benefits **everyone**: children gain primary socialisation, adults gain emotional stability, society gains value consensus. Murdock found family functions in all 250 societies he studied, which suggests they meet universal human needs, not just men's.
- **Liberal feminists** argue roles are becoming more equal (equal pay laws, more involved fathers), so the view is **outdated** for many families.
- **Postmodernists** argue families are too diverse for one role: in same-sex, lone-mother or dual-earner families the claim that men gain makes little sense.
- Some women **choose** a domestic role and find it satisfying (Hakim), which the view ignores; black feminists see the family as a **haven against racism** for both sexes.

Conclusion. The view rightly shows inequalities functionalism ignores, and women do still carry most domestic work. But it is too deterministic and too general: in many families the benefits are shared, and Marxist feminists offer a stronger explanation by linking men's gains to the needs of capitalism. The view is best seen as **partly** true, more for traditional families than for diverse modern ones.

How it would be marked. A range of detailed points with sociologists and concepts (AO1 7–8), consistently applied to "benefit men" (AO2 7–8), with each counter-argument explicitly weighed and a justified conclusion (AO3 9–10). In the exam, make each bullet a full paragraph.

Common mistakes

- **Giving a perspective's ideas instead of its strengths or limitations.** Describing what Marxists believe, or what a family type is like, is not a strength or limitation. Examiners ask candidates to learn a table of strengths and limitations for each perspective.
- **Losing the middle mark in Question 2(b).** Even strong answers rarely explain **why** the perspective has that strength. Say what the theory focuses on or assumes.

- **Answering about the wrong beneficiary.** "Benefits society" answered with benefits to the individual, or "supports capitalism" answered with general functionalist benefits never linked to capitalism.
- **No sociological material in Question 2(a).** Two good points without a theorist or concept earn at most half the marks.
- **More points than asked.** Three ways in Question 2(a), or two arguments in Question 3(b), waste time; only the required number is credited.
- **Evaluating in Question 3(a).** Part (a) only explains the view; the argument against belongs in part (b).
- **Long introductions and definitions of the family** in Section A, which earn nothing and cost essay time.
- **Juxtaposition in essays.** A Marxist block followed by a functionalist block, with no weighing. Use each rival view to criticise the view in the question.
- **Losing the question's focus:** turning a social stability essay into a list of functions, a loss of functions question into a history of the family, or a nuclear family question into a discussion of marriage.
- **Confusing the feminisms:** giving liberal or Marxist feminist strengths when the question asks about radical feminism.
- **Wrong claims about Marxism,** such as "Marxists accept all family types": know what the theory actually says.

How to get the marks

- **"Describe two..." (4 marks):** two bullet points, each identified and described in one sentence.
- **"Explain two..." (8 marks):** two paragraphs starting "The first..." and "The second...", each with the four steps: point, explanation, sociological material, how it supports the point.
- **"Explain one strength and one limitation..." (6 marks):** "A strength of X is... X has this strength because... This is a strength because...", then the same for the limitation.
- **"Explain this view" (10 marks):** two developed points that agree, each supported with material; no evaluation.
- **"Give one argument against" (6 marks):** one developed argument with material, clearly contradicting the view.
- **"Evaluate..." (26 marks):** AO1 8 for a range of detailed points with concepts and theory; AO2 8 for applying them to the exact question; AO3 10 for evaluation that is clear, explicit and sustained. Juxtaposed views stay in the middle AO3 bands.
- **Sociological material** means a named sociologist (Murdock, Parsons, Fletcher, Althusser, Zaretsky, Benston, Ansley, Oakley, Delphy and Leonard, Murray), a theory or a concept (warm bath, fit thesis, ISA, safety valve, unit of consumption, false class consciousness, reserve army of labour, patriarchy).
- **Stay in the family:** answers about education, the media or the workplace earn nothing in this paper unless linked back to the family.
- **Answer the essay first** if time is tight: it carries 26 of the 60 marks.

Quick check

1. Name Murdock's four functions of the family and Parsons' two irreducible functions.
2. Which perspective says each of these? (a) The family is an ideological state apparatus. (b) Women are a reserve army of labour. (c) The family is the key institution of patriarchy. (d) The isolated nuclear family fits the needs of industrial society.
3. Give two functions that, according to Parsons, the family lost during industrialisation, and Fletcher's reply.
4. A student writes: "A limitation of the New Right is that lone-parent families cannot socialise children properly." Why would this earn no marks, and what would a real limitation look like?
5. In a 26-mark essay, how many marks are for AO3, and what kind of evaluation reaches the top band?

Answers

1. Murdock: **sexual, reproductive, economic** and **educational**. Parsons: **primary socialisation** of children and **stabilisation of adult personalities**.
2. (a) Marxism (Althusser). (b) Marxist feminism (Beechey). (c) Radical feminism. (d) Functionalism (Parsons' functional fit theory).
3. Any two of production (to factories and workplaces), education (to schools), health care (to hospitals), welfare (to the welfare state), religious teaching (to churches). Fletcher replied that the family has not lost these functions but performs them in more detail, with state institutions supporting it.
4. It is a New Right **belief** about a family type, not a weakness of the theory. A real limitation: "The New Right is deterministic **(1)**, because they assume lone mothers will raise delinquent children **(1)**. This is a limitation because many children of lone parents do well, often with support from wider kin, so the theory blames the family form for problems really caused by poverty **(1)**."
5. **10 marks**. Evaluation that is **clear, explicit and sustained**: each counter-argument is used to show why the view is weak, not just placed next to it, and the essay ends with a justified judgement.

Past questions to try

- 9699/22/M/J/22 Q2: (a) two ways the family supports the economy; (b) strengths of Marxist views.
- 9699/22/M/J/23 Q3: (a) explain the loss of functions view; (b) one argument against.
- 9699/22/F/M/23 Q5: essay on whether the main role of the family is to promote social stability.
- 9699/22/M/J/21 Q4: essay evaluating the functionalist perspective on the family.