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| **Learning Table 1: The Functions of the Family: FUNCTIONALISM & THE NEW RIGHT** |
| **Analysis** | **Evaluation** | **Application** |
| **Functionalism** – functionalism is a structural consensus theory that see the family as a beneficial institution, contributing the social stability and the creation of a harmonious society. **Murdock (1949)** four main functions of the family (all research based on the nuclear family):1. Sexual – expressing sexuality in a socially approved context.
2. Reproduction – the family providing some stability for the reproduction and rearing of children.
3. Socialisation – the family is an important unit of primary socialisation, whereby children learn socially acceptable behaviour and the culture of their society. This helps to build shared ideas and beliefs (value consensus) which functionalists regard as important to maintaining a stable society.
4. Economic – the family provides food and shelter for its members.

**Parsons (1951)** Many suggest that in contemporary society the functions once performed by the family in pre-industrial society have been removed. These functions have been transferred to more specialised institutions such as the NHS and Education system. Parsons calls this structural differentiation. He claimed that the more modern family has two basic functions: 1. Primary Socialisation of Children – involves the learning and internalising of society’s culture. This includes language, history and values. Primary socialisation is so powerful that it becomes part of the individual’s personality.
2. The Stabilisation of Human Personalities – In industrial societies, the need for work and money, the lack of power and independence, boredom of work, pressure to achieve success and support a family all threaten to destabilise personalities. Parsons suggests the family helps to stabilise personality by the sexual division of labour. (Women have an expressive role whilst men take on the instrumental role – see LT5 for more details.)

**Young and Willmott (1973)** have suggested that the classic extended family has largely disappeared from modern society. It has been replaced by a structurally isolated, privatised nuclear family. This is a self-contained, self-reliant and home-centred unit with free time spent doing jobs around the house, leisure time spent with the family. In this isolated privatised family, family members will often know more, and care more about the lives of media soap stars than people who live on their street.  | * *Downplaying Conflict*

These theories ignore the dark side of the nuclear family, such as violence against women and child abuse. * *Outdated View*

Parson’s view of instrumental and expressive roles is very old-fashioned. * *Ignoring the Exploitation of Women*

Feminists would argue that Parson’s view of expressive role ignores the fact that this undermines women’s position in paid employment. For example, having the added pressures of housework and childcare can cause mental and physical strain on the women in nuclear families. * *Ethnocentric*

Parson’s view of the family is particularly ethnocentric. Tribal communities can result in matrifocal families. (Such as the Nayar Tribe).* *Has the family really lost its functions?*

Fletcher says that the family plays an important role in the economy as a unit of consumption. The modern family is particularly concerned with raising its living standards and keeping up with the neighbours through buying a whole host of goods targeted at family consumers, such as large-screen TVs, home media and broadband packages and holidays abroad.* *Functions of the Traditional Nuclear Family have Changed*

For example, the family used to provide most of the help and care for the young, the old, the sick and the poor during period of crises. However, the burden has become shared with the welfare state, NHS and social serviced. Homes for the elderly, hospitals, state pensions and jobseekers allowance reduces the pressure on the family and thus, they no longer carry out this function. Furthermore, the family used to be solely responsible for the primary socialisation and social control of children. However, there has been an increase in the number of children’s centres, child-minders, pre-schools and playgroups. With free nursery or pre-school education or children for 15 hours for 3-4 years olds meant that this is no longer restricted to the family.  |  |
| **The New Right –** The New Right supported traditional values and institutions and its views of the role, importance and function in society of the traditional nuclear family. They are very similar to the Functionalist Approach. Like Functionalists, they see the traditional heterosexual nuclear family with two natural parents and a traditional division of gender roles in the family as the best means of bringing up children to become conformist, responsible adults. **The nuclear family under threat:**However, they argue that the nuclear family life is under threat from social changes such as* rising divorce rates
* step families
* lone parents
* cohabitation
* births outside marriages
* gay marriages

They are opposed to all state policies that support relationships outside the nuclear family. **Blame:**They blame these social policies for the rise in lack of respect and anti-social behaviour amongst the youth. As well as lack of discipline in school and educational underachievement, alcohol and drug abuse, crime and dependency on the welfare state (dependency culture) and a work shy underclass. The New Right argues that this is all due to a decline in the nuclear family. **The Welfare State:** Murray (1990) and Marsland (1989) argue that the welfare state has undermined personal responsibility and self-help. For example welfare support for lone parents encourages single women to have children they could not otherwise afford, knowing they will get help from the state. **Moving Forward:**The New Right argue that in order to return to traditional family values, government policies should encourage the nuclear family. This includes measures to reduce divorce rates and births outside marriage. | * *Downplaying Conflict*

Criticisms of the New Right approach to the family are similar to those of the functionalist perspective (above). These theories ignore the dark side of the nuclear family, such as violence against women and child abuse.  |  |