

TOPIC 3



Family spending performs an important function for the economy.

GETTING STARTED

Different sociologists have different views of the role of the family. These views often focus on whether or not they see the family as beneficial for its members and for wider society.

In pairs, using what you learned from **Topics 1 and 2** as well as your own ideas, make a list of:

- 1 All the positive points you can think of about families.
For each point, suggest how it benefits (a) society and (b) the individual members of the family.
- 2 All the negative points you can think of about families.
For each point, suggest what negative effects the family may have on (a) the individual members of the family and (b) society.

Learning objectives

When you have studied this Topic, you should:

- Understand the functionalist, Marxist, feminist and personal life perspectives on the family.
- Be able to analyse the similarities and differences between these perspectives.
- Be able to evaluate the usefulness of these perspectives on the family.

THEORIES OF THE FAMILY

So far in this chapter, we have looked at some of the key members of the family – husbands and wives, parents and children – and at how far their roles and relationships may have changed. We now turn our attention to how the family fits into wider society.

This Topic deals with theories about the role or purpose of the family – what it does for its members and for society. We look at the answers sociologists have given to the question, 'What are the functions of the family?'

Sociologists have studied the family from a number of different perspectives or viewpoints and reached different conclusions as to its role or functions. In this Topic, we shall examine the following sociological theories of the family:

- **Functionalism** – a consensus perspective
- **Marxism** – a class conflict perspective
- **Feminism** – a gender conflict perspective
- **The personal life perspective.**

The functionalist perspective on the family

Functionalists believe that society is based on a value consensus – a set of shared norms and values – into which society socialises its members. This enables them to cooperate harmoniously to meet society's needs and achieve shared goals.

Functionalists regard society as a system made up of different parts or sub-systems that depend on each other, such as the family, the education system and the economy. Functionalists often compare society to a biological organism like the human body.

For example, just as organs such as the heart or lungs perform functions vital to the well being of the body as a whole, so the family meets some of society's essential needs, such as the need to socialise children.

Functionalists see the family as a particularly important sub-system – a basic building block of society. For example, George Peter Murdock (1949) argues that the family performs four essential functions to meet the needs of society and its members:

- **Stable satisfaction of the sex drive** with the same partner, preventing the social disruption caused by a sexual 'free-for-all'.
- **Reproduction of the next generation**, without which society could not continue.
- **Socialisation of the young** into society's shared norms and values.
- **Meeting its members' economic needs**, such as food and shelter.

Application

What similarities and differences can you see between society and a biological organism such as the human body?

Criticisms of Murdock

Murdock accepts that other institutions could perform these functions. However, he argues that the sheer practicality of the nuclear family as a way of meeting these four needs explains why it is universal – found in all human societies without exception.

However, while few sociologists would doubt that most of these are important functions, some argue that they could be performed equally well by other institutions, or by non-nuclear family structures.

Others have criticised Murdock's approach. Marxists and feminists reject his 'rose-tinted' harmonious consensus view that the family meets the needs of both wider society and all the different members of the family. They argue that functionalism neglects conflict and exploitation:

- **Feminists** see the family as serving the needs of men and oppressing women.
- **Marxists** argue that it meets the needs of capitalism, not those of family members or society as a whole.

Activity Webquest

Alternatives to the nuclear family

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Parsons' 'functional fit' theory

Apart from the functions identified by Murdock, the family may meet other needs too. For example, it may perform welfare, military, political or religious functions. In the view of Talcott Parsons (1955), the functions that the family performs will depend on the kind of society in which it is found.

CHAPTER 4

Furthermore, the functions that the family has to perform will affect its 'shape' or structure. Parsons distinguishes between two kinds of family structure:

- **The nuclear family** of just parents and their dependent children.
- **The extended family** of three generations living under one roof.

Parsons argues that the particular structure and functions of a given type of family will 'fit' the needs of the society in which it is found.

According to Parsons, there are two basic types of society – modern industrial society and traditional pre-industrial society. He argues that the nuclear family fits the needs of industrial society and is the dominant family type in that society, while the extended family fits the needs of pre-industrial society.

In Parsons' view, when Britain began to industrialise, from the late 18th century onwards, the extended family began to give way to the nuclear. This was because the emerging industrial society had different needs from pre-industrial society, and the family had to adapt to meet these needs. Parsons sees industrial society as having two essential needs:

1 A geographically mobile workforce

In traditional pre-industrial society, people often spent their whole lives living in the same village, working on the same farm. By contrast, in modern society, industries constantly spring up and decline in different parts of the country, even

different parts of the world, and this requires people to move to where the jobs are.

Parsons argues that it is easier for the compact two-generation nuclear family to move, than for the three-generation extended family. The nuclear family is better fitted to the need that modern industry has for a geographically mobile workforce.

2 A socially mobile workforce

Modern industrial society is based on constantly evolving science and technology and so it requires a skilled, technically competent workforce. It is therefore essential that talented people are able to win promotion and take on the most important jobs, even if they come from very humble backgrounds.

In modern society, an individual's status is achieved by their own efforts and ability, not ascribed (fixed at birth) by their social and family background, and this makes social mobility possible. For example, the son of a labourer can become a doctor or lawyer through ability and hard work.

For this reason, Parsons argues, the nuclear family is better equipped to meet the needs of industrial society. In the extended family, adult sons live at home in their father's house – where the father has a higher ascribed status as head of the household.

However, at work, the son may have a higher achieved status (a more important job) than his father. This would

Box 30 The evidence against Parsons

Other sociologists and historians have produced evidence that contradicts Parsons' claims of a 'functional fit' between the extended family and pre-industrial society, and between the nuclear family and industrial society. We can summarise these criticisms in terms of the following three questions:

1 Was the extended family dominant in pre-industrial society?

According to Young and Willmott (1973), the pre-industrial family was nuclear, not extended as Parsons claims, with parents and children working together, for example in cottage industries such as weaving. Similarly, Peter Laslett's (1972) study of English households from 1564 to 1821 found that they were almost always nuclear. A combination of late childbearing and short life expectancy meant that grandparents were unlikely to be alive for very long after the birth of their first grandchild.

2 Did the family become nuclear in early industrial society?

According to Parsons, industrialisation brought the nuclear family. However, Young and Willmott argue that the hardship of the early industrial period gave rise to the 'mum-centred' working-class extended family, based on ties between mothers and their married daughters, who relied on each other for financial, practical and emotional support.

The idea that individuals break off or maintain family ties because of the costs or benefits involved is called exchange theory.

Michael Anderson's (1980) study of mid-19th century Preston uses exchange theory to explain the popularity of the working-class extended family. He shows how the harsh conditions of the time – poverty, sickness, early death and the absence of a welfare state – meant that the benefits of maintaining extended family ties greatly outweighed the costs. These benefits included using older kin for childcare while parents worked, and taking in orphaned relatives to produce extra income and help towards the rent.

3 Is the extended family no longer important in modern society?

There is partial support for Parsons' claim that the nuclear family has become the dominant family type today. Young and Willmott argue that, from about 1900, the nuclear family emerged as a result of social changes that made the extended family less important as a source of support. These changes included higher living standards, married women working, the welfare state and better housing.

However, the extended family has not disappeared. Studies show that it continues to exist because it performs important functions, for example providing financial help, childcare and emotional support (see Topic 5).

inevitably give rise to tensions and conflict if they both lived under the same roof.

The solution therefore is for adult sons to leave home when they marry and form their own nuclear family. The nuclear family therefore encourages social mobility as well as geographical mobility.

The result is the mobile nuclear family, which is 'structurally isolated' from its extended kin (relatives). Though it may keep in touch with them, it has no binding obligations towards them – unlike the pre-industrial extended family, where relatives had an overriding duty to help one another, for example at harvest or in times of hardship or crisis.

Loss of functions

The pre-industrial family was a multi-functional unit. For example, it was both a unit of production in which family members worked together, for example on the family farm, and a unit of consumption, feeding and clothing its members. It was a more self-sufficient unit than the modern nuclear family, providing for its members' health and welfare and meeting most individual and social needs.

However, according to Parsons, when society industrialises, the family not only changes its structure from extended to nuclear, it also loses many of its functions.

For example, the family ceases to be a unit of production: work moves into the factories and the family becomes a unit of consumption only. It also loses most of its other functions to other institutions, such as schools and the health service.

In Parsons' view, as a result of this loss of functions, the modern nuclear family comes to specialise in performing just two essential or 'irreducible' functions:



▲ Helping out at harvest time on the family farm

- **The primary socialisation of children** to equip them with basic skills and society's values, to enable them to cooperate with others and begin to integrate them into society.
- **The stabilisation of adult personalities:** the family is a place where adults can relax and release tensions, enabling them to return to the workplace refreshed and ready to meet its demands. This is functional for the efficiency of the economy.

The Marxist perspective on the family

While functionalists see society as based on value consensus (agreement), Marxist sociologists see capitalist society as based on an unequal conflict between two social classes:

- **the capitalist class**, who own the means of production
- **the working class**, whose labour the capitalists exploit for profit.

Marxists see all society's institutions, such as the education system, the media, religion and the state, along with the family, as helping to maintain class inequality and capitalism.

Thus, for Marxists, the functions of the family are performed purely for the benefit of the capitalist system. This view

contrasts sharply with the functionalist view that the family benefits both society as a whole and all the individual members of the family.

Marxists have identified several functions that they see the family as fulfilling for capitalism:

1 Inheritance of property

Marxists argue that the key factor determining the shape of all social institutions, including the family, is the mode of production – that is, who owns and controls society's productive forces (such as tools, machinery, raw materials,

land and labour). In modern society, it is the capitalist class that owns and controls these means of production. As the mode of production evolves, so too does the family.

Marx called the earliest, classless society, 'primitive communism'. In this society, there was no private property. Instead, all members of society owned the means of production communally.

At this stage of social development, there was no family as such. Instead, there existed what Friedrich Engels called the 'promiscuous horde' or tribe, in which there were no restrictions on sexual relationships.

private property

However, as the forces of production developed, society's wealth began to increase. Along with increased wealth came the development of private property, as a class of men emerged who were able to secure control of the means of production. This change eventually brought about the patriarchal monogamous nuclear family.

In Engels' view, monogamy became essential because of the inheritance of private property – men had to be certain of the paternity of their children in order to ensure that their legitimate heirs inherited from them.

In Engels' view, the rise of the monogamous nuclear family represented a "world historical defeat of the female sex". This was because it brought the woman's sexuality under male control and turned her into "a mere instrument for the production of children".

Marxists argue that only with the overthrow of capitalism and private ownership of the means of production will women achieve liberation from patriarchal control. A classless society will be established in which the means of production are owned collectively, not privately. There will no longer be a need for the patriarchal family, since there will be no need to have a means of transmitting private property down the generations.

2 Ideological functions

Marxists argue that the family today also performs key ideological functions for capitalism. By 'ideology', Marxists mean a set of ideas or beliefs that justify inequality and maintain the capitalist system by persuading people to accept it as fair, natural or unchangeable.

One way in which the family does this is by socialising children into the idea that hierarchy and inequality are inevitable. Parental (especially paternal) power over children accustoms them to the idea that there always has to be someone in charge (usually a man) and this prepares them

for a working life in which they will accept orders from their capitalist employers.

According to Eli Zaretsky (1976), the family also performs an ideological function by offering an apparent 'haven' from the harsh and exploitative world of capitalism outside, in which workers can 'be themselves' and have a private life. However, Zaretsky argues that this is largely an illusion – the family cannot meet its members' needs. For example, it is based on the domestic servitude of women.

Application

What other social institutions in addition to the family socialise children into the idea that hierarchy and inequality are inevitable?

3 A unit of consumption

Capitalism exploits the labour of the workers, making a profit by selling the products of their labour for more than it pays them to produce these commodities. The family therefore plays a major role in generating profits for capitalists, since it is an important market for the sale of consumer goods:

- Advertisers urge families to 'keep up with the Joneses' by consuming all the latest products.
- The media target children, who use 'pester power' to persuade parents to spend more.
- Children who lack the latest clothes or 'must have' gadgets are mocked and stigmatised by their peers.

Thus, Marxists see the family as performing several functions that maintain capitalist society: the inheritance of private property, socialisation into acceptance of inequality, and a source of profits. In the Marxist view, while these may benefit capitalism, they do not benefit the members of the family.

Criticisms of the Marxist perspective

- Marxists tend to assume that the nuclear family is dominant in capitalist society. This ignores the wide variety of family structures found in society today.
- Feminists argue that the Marxist emphasis on class and capitalism underestimates the importance of gender inequalities within the family. In the feminist view, these are more fundamental than class inequalities and the family primarily serves the interests of men, not capitalism.
- Functionalists argue that Marxists ignore the very real benefits that the family provides for its members.

Activity Quiz

Which of the following statements about the family are likely to be put forward by (a) a functionalist (b) a Marxist (c) both?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 It fulfils the needs of its individual members. 2 It is important in socialising children. 3 Its structure is determined by economic factors. 4 It provides consumers to buy goods. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5 It provides a 'safety valve' away from work. 6 It fulfils its functions for society. 7 It is universal and necessary everywhere. 8 It has an important reproductive role. 9 It keeps women under patriarchal control. 10 It performs its functions for capitalism. |
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Feminist perspectives on the family

Like Marxists, feminists take a critical view of the family. They argue that it oppresses women – as we saw in **Topic 1**, they have focused on issues such as the unequal division of domestic labour and domestic violence against women. They do not regard gender inequality as natural or inevitable, but as something created by society.

However, feminism is a broad term covering several types. Each type approaches the family in a different way and offers different solutions to the problem of gender inequality. We shall examine four main types of feminism.

1 Liberal feminism

Liberal feminists are concerned with campaigning against sex discrimination and for equal rights and opportunities for women (e.g. equal pay and an end to discrimination in employment).

- They argue that women's oppression is being gradually overcome through changing people's attitudes and through changes in the law such as the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), which outlaws discrimination in employment.
- They believe we are moving towards greater equality, but that full equality will depend on further reforms and changes in the attitudes and socialisation patterns of both sexes.

In terms of the family, they hold a view similar to that of 'march of progress' theorists such as Young and Willmott (see **Topic 1**). Although liberal feminists do not believe full gender equality has yet been achieved in the family, they argue that there has been gradual progress.

For example, some studies suggest that men are doing more domestic labour, while the way parents now socialise their sons and daughters is more equal than in the past and they now have similar aspirations for them.

However, other feminists criticise liberal feminists for failing to challenge the underlying causes of women's oppression and for believing that changes in the law or in people's attitudes will be enough to bring equality. Marxist and

radical feminists believe instead that far-reaching changes to deep-rooted social structures are needed.

2 Marxist feminism

Marxist feminists argue that the main cause of women's oppression in the family is not men, but capitalism. Women's oppression performs several functions for capitalism:



▲ Marxist feminists see women as a reserve army of labour.

- **Women reproduce the labour force** through their unpaid domestic labour, by socialising the next generation of workers and maintaining and servicing the current one.
- **Women absorb anger** that would otherwise be directed at capitalism. Fran Ansley (1972) describes wives as 'takers of shit' who soak up the frustration their husbands feel because of the alienation and exploitation they suffer at work. For Marxists, this explains male domestic violence against women.
- **Women are a reserve army of cheap labour** that can be taken on when extra workers are needed. When no longer needed, employers can 'let them go' to return to their primary role as unpaid domestic labour.

Marxist feminists see the oppression of women in the family as linked to the exploitation of the working class. They argue that the family must be abolished at the same time as a socialist revolution replaces capitalism with a classless society.

3 Radical feminism

Radical feminists argue that all societies have been founded on patriarchy – rule by men. For radical feminists, the key division in society is between men and women:

- **Men are the enemy:** they are the source of women's oppression and exploitation.
- **The family and marriage are the key institutions** in patriarchal society. Men benefit from women's unpaid domestic labour and from their sexual services, and they dominate women through domestic and sexual violence or the threat of it.

For radical feminists, the patriarchal system needs to be overturned. In particular, the family, which they see as the root of women's oppression, must be abolished. They argue that the only way to achieve this is through *separatism* – women must organise themselves to live independently of men.

Many radical feminists argue for 'political lesbianism' – the idea that heterosexual relationships are inevitably oppressive because they involve 'sleeping with the enemy'. Similarly, Germaine Greer (2000) argues for the creation of all-

female or 'matrilocal' households as an alternative to the heterosexual family.

However, for liberal feminists such as Jenny Somerville (2000), radical feminists fail to recognise that women's position has improved considerably – with better access to divorce, better job opportunities, control over their own fertility, and the ability to choose whether to marry or cohabit.

Somerville also argues that heterosexual attraction makes it unlikely that separatism would work.

However, Somerville does recognise that women have yet to achieve full equality. She argues that there is a need for 'family friendly' policies, such as more flexible working, to promote greater equality between partners.

4 Difference feminism

The feminist approaches we have considered so far all tend to assume that most women live in conventional nuclear families and that they share a similar experience of family life.

However, difference feminists argue that we cannot generalise about women's experiences. They argue that lesbian and heterosexual women, white and black women, middle-class and working-class women, have very different experiences of the family from one another.

For example, by regarding the family purely negatively, white feminists neglect black women's experience of racial oppression. Instead, black feminists view the black family positively as a source of support and resistance against racism.

However, other feminists argue that difference feminism neglects the fact that all women share many of the same experiences. For example, they all face a risk of domestic violence and sexual assault, low pay and so on.

Analysis and Evaluation

Which of the four feminist perspectives do you find most convincing? Give reasons for your answer.

The personal life perspective on families

As we have seen, there are major differences between functionalist, Marxist and feminist theories of the family. However, the personal life perspective argues that they all suffer from two weaknesses:

- 1 They tend to assume that the traditional nuclear family is the dominant family type. This ignores the

increased diversity of families today. Compared with 50 years ago, many more people now live in other families, such as lone-parent families, stepfamilies and so on. We examine family diversity in **Topic 5**.

- 2 They are all structural theories. That is, they assume that families and their members are simply passive puppets



▲ Pets: part of the family?

manipulated by the structure of society to perform certain functions – for example, to provide the economy with a mobile labour force, or to serve the needs of capitalism or of men.

Sociologists influenced by interactionist and postmodernist perspectives reject the structural view. They argue that structural theories ignore the fact that we have some *choice* in creating our family relationships.

They argue that to understand the family today, we must focus on the meanings its members give to their relationships and situations, rather than on the family's supposed 'functions'.

The sociology of personal life

The sociology of personal life is a new perspective on families. It is strongly influenced by interactionist ideas and argues that to understand families, we must start from the point of view of the individuals concerned and the meanings they give to their relationships. This contrasts with the other perspectives we have looked at in this Topic:

- Functionalism, Marxism and feminism all take a 'top down', structural approach.
- By contrast, the personal life perspective shares the 'bottom up' approach of interactionism. It emphasises the meanings that individual family members hold and how these shape their actions and relationships.

Beyond ties of blood and marriage

As well as taking a bottom up approach to relationships, the personal life perspective also takes a wider view of relationships than just traditional 'family' relationships based on blood or marriage ties.

For example, a woman who may not feel close to her own sister and may be unwilling to help her in a crisis, may at the same time be willing to care for someone to whom she is not related, such as the elderly woman who cohabited with her late father. Without knowing what meaning each of these relationships has for her, we would not be able to understand how she might act.

By focusing on people's meanings, the personal life perspective draws our attention to a range of other personal or intimate relationships that are important to people even though they may not be conventionally defined as 'family'. These include all kinds of relationships that individuals see as significant and that give them a sense of identity, belonging or relatedness, such as:

- **Relationships with friends** who may be 'like a sister or brother' to you.
- **Fictive kin:** close friends who are treated as relatives, for example your mum's best friend who you call 'auntie'.
- **Gay and lesbian 'chosen families'** made up of a supportive network of close friends, ex-partners and others, who are not related by blood or marriage.
- **Relationships with dead relatives** who live on in people's memories and continue to shape their identities and affect their actions.
- **Even relationships with pets** For example, Becky Tipper (2011) found in her study of children's views of family relationships, that children frequently saw their pets as 'part of the family'.

These and similar relationships raise questions about what counts as family from the point of view of the individuals involved. For example, Petra Nordqvist and Carol Smart's (2014) research on donor-conceived children explores "what counts as family when your child shares a genetic link with a 'relative stranger' but not with your partner?"

Analysis and Evaluation

How legitimate is it to count pets, friends and dead relatives as part of your family? Give reasons for your answer.

Donor-conceived children

In their research, Nordqvist and Smart found that the issue of blood and genes raised a range of feelings. Some parents emphasised the importance of social relationships over genetic ones in forming family bonds.

For example, Erin, the mother of an egg donor-conceived child, defined being a mum in terms of the time and effort she put into raising her daughter: "that's what makes a mother and not the cell that starts it off".

However, difficult feelings could flare up for a non-genetic parent if somebody remarked that the child looked like them. Differences in appearance also led parents to wonder about the donor's identity, about possible 'donor siblings' and whether these counted as family for their child.

Where couples knew their donor, they had to resolve other questions about who counted as family. Do the donor's parents count as grandparents of a donor-conceived child? Is the donor-conceived child a (half) sibling to the donor's other children?

For lesbian couples, there were additional problems. These included concerns about equality between the genetic and non-genetic mothers and that the donor might be treated as the 'real' second parent.

Activity Media

Donor-conceived children

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Evaluation of the personal life perspective

Nordqvist and Smart's study illustrates the value of the personal life perspective as compared with top down, structural approaches. It helps us to understand how people themselves construct and define their relationships as 'family', rather than imposing traditional sociological definitions of the family (based on blood or genes, for example) from the outside.

However, the personal life perspective can be accused of taking too broad a view. Critics argue that, by including a wide range of different kinds of personal relationships, we ignore what is special about relationships that are based on blood or marriage.

The personal life perspective rejects the top down view taken by other perspectives, such as functionalism.

Nevertheless, it does see intimate relationships as performing the important function of providing us with a sense of belonging and relatedness.

However, unlike functionalism, the personal life perspective recognises that relatedness is not always positive. For example, people may be trapped in violent, abusive relationships or simply in ones where they suffer everyday unhappiness, hurt or lack of respect.

Activity Discussion

The family and wider society

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Topic summary

Functionalists take a **consensus** view of the family. They see it as a **universal** institution that performs essential functions for society as a whole and for all its members.

Parsons sees a **functional fit** between the nuclear family and modern society's need for a **mobile labour force**.

Marxists see the family as serving the economic and ideological needs of **capitalism**, such as the transmission of private property from one generation of capitalists to the next.

Feminists see the family as perpetuating **patriarchy**.

Liberal, radical and Marxist feminists differ over the cause of women's subordination and the solution to it.

Functionalist, Marxist and feminist theories have all been criticised for neglecting family **diversity** and individuals' capacity to **choose** their family arrangements.

The **personal life perspective** argues that we must focus on the meanings people give to relationships and on how they define what counts as family.

EXAMINING THEORIES OF THE FAMILY

QuickCheck Questions

Check your answers at www.sociology.uk.net

- 1 List the four functions of the family that Murdock identifies.
- 2 How does the family perform an ideological function, according to Marxists?
- 3 Give two criticisms of the Marxist view of the family.
- 4 Explain the difference between Marxist feminism and radical feminism.
- 5 What is meant by a 'bottom up' approach to the family?
- 6 Give three examples of relationships that some people regard as 'family' but are not based on blood or marriage.

Questions to try

Whether or not you are taking the AS exams during your A level course, answering the AS questions below is a very good way of testing your knowledge and understanding and practising your skills in preparation for your A level exams.

Item A Despite their disagreements, functionalist, Marxist and feminist approaches to the family share certain similarities. They are all structural approaches: they see the family as a structure that performs certain functions — although they disagree about what these functions are and who benefits from them. Similarly, they all assume that by 'the family' we mean the conventional nuclear family. Other sociologists reject this structural approach. For example, the personal life perspective takes a bottom-up view that focuses on people's meanings and how they themselves define what counts as 'family'.

Item B Capitalist society is based on a wealthy capitalist class exploiting the labour of a propertyless working class in order to extract a profit. However, to obtain their profit, capitalists must sell what has been produced and this requires people who are willing to buy it. For capitalism to continue, the proletariat must be persuaded to accept their exploitation. Capitalists also need to retain control of their wealth in order to maintain their privileged position.

AS questions

- 1 Define the term 'patriarchy'. (2 marks)
- 2 Using **one** example, explain how liberal feminists see gender inequality in the family being overcome. (2 marks)
- 3 Outline **three** functions that functionalists see the family as performing. (6 marks)

AS and A level question

- 4 Applying material from **Item A** and your knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of structural approaches to our understanding of families and households. (20 marks)

A level question

- 5 Applying material from **Item B**, analyse **two** functions that the family may perform for capitalism. (10 marks)

The Examiner's Advice

Q4 Spend about 30 minutes on this. You could start by developing points from **Item A**, e.g. on the similarities and differences between different structural perspectives, in terms of what functions they see the family performing and who benefits. Use concepts such as economic and ideological functions, primary socialisation, stabilisation of adult personalities, reserve army of labour, reproduction of the labour force or patriarchy etc. Use evidence from studies such as Murdock, Parsons, Engels, Ansley, Greer, Tipper, Nordqvist and Smart etc. Evaluate structural approaches by considering debates between functionalists, Marxists and feminists mentioned above, but you should also deal with criticisms from the personal life perspective. Make use of evidence on how people define 'family', e.g. donor-conceived children, fictive kin, chosen families, pets as family etc.

Q5 Spend about 15 minutes on this. Divide your time fairly equally between the two functions. You don't need a separate introduction. It's essential that you take two points from the **Item** and show through a chain of reasoning (see page 248) how each relates to a function for capitalism. (It is a very good idea to quote from the **Item** when doing so.) You could use functions such as ideological indoctrination, providing a consumer market, or inheritance of wealth. For example, the family is based on parental authority. This means children are socialised into the idea that there must always be someone in charge, thus making them willing to accept their employers' orders. Use concepts such as commodities, unit of consumption, power, advertising, primitive communism, paternity, the family as haven etc, and studies such as Ansley, Engels or Zaretsky. Include some brief evaluation.