

# Assess the view that the nuclear family functions

[Family](#)



Assess the view that the nuclear family functions for the benefit of the individual and society. A nuclear family is universal and consists of two generations of families: a father, a mother and their children, all living in the same household. In this essay, I will be assessing the views that the nuclear family functions to benefit all its members and society as a whole, from a Functionalist, Feminist and a Marxist perspective.

In order to assess these views, it is necessary to first establish the functions that the nuclear family performs and then to assess whether these benefit the individual and the wider society. Sociologists such as George Peter Murdoch (1949) claimed that the family was a 'universal institution'. This is a functionalist view, however Marxists and feminists argue that it only met the needs of capitalists. Functionalists see society as playing a major role in achieving social goals such as providing positive norms and values for the individual and society to reproduce consensus.

They believe that institutions such as the family must have a function which benefits society and its members. They believe that without consensus society will collapse into chaos. Consensus and shared values enable the members of society to cooperate with each other providing unity. Functionalists see society as an institution from which norms and values are shared providing harmony. Functionalists regard society as a system that depends on each other such as the institution of the family, the education system and the economy.

They look at what the nuclear family does for the whole of society, not just for certain individuals. Functionalists consider the nuclear family as essential for society's smooth running. George Peter Murdoch (1949) claimed that the

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family was a universal institution. He studied 250 different societies and cultures and found that the family existed in one form or another. This suggests that families are necessary in some way whether it be for societies to survive, for individual well-being, or both. He believed that the family performed four vital functions.

Sexual: where adults can enjoy healthy sex lives with their marital partners preventing disruption to society and conflicts that could arise from sexual desires such as affairs and also allows children to be raised by their natural parents. Reproductive: the family allows the reproduction of the next generation without doing so, society will cease to exist. Economic: the family ensures the survival of its members by providing food and shelter. Education: the family allows primary socialisation without it there will be no consensus about society's norms and values.

Functionalists have been criticised for ignoring the dark side of family life. Many families are places of disruption and violence from at least one of its members suffering from domestic violence, child abuse and divorce. Murdock's views have been criticised to be conservative rather than universal. In different societies people have different methods of child rearing influenced by their religious teachings, class and different psychological approaches to the upbringing of children. Talcott Parsons believed that the family performed two functions.

Primary socialisation: children's personalities are moulded in terms of society's culture; they learn norms and values from their parents for example expressive roles from the mother and an instrumental role from the father. Stabilisation of adult personalities: marital partners provides each

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other with emotional support, idea that the man can relieve the stress of being insecure in his workplace by allowing himself to relax by indulging in his childish side. Due to this taking place, it relieves adult family members and strengthens social stability.

Parsons views can be criticised as his perceptions of society are outdated. Family diversity now exists. Marxists would criticise of the nuclear family as they see the role of primary socialisation as exploiting the working class which promotes and maintains class inequality. A Hierarchical structure exists within the Nuclear Family, as the man is considered the breadwinner, the head of the household who has the responsibility to go out and work to earn money for the family's needs.

This structure enables men to accept their perhaps low status at work which stops them from questioning the hierarchical nature of capitalism which only benefits the powerful and rich. Marxists Feminist would criticise the nuclear family as benefitting the capitalists system and therefore the ruling class. Men benefit from the Nuclear family and the capitalist system through the exploitation of women. Women are expected to have children and spend a lot of time to raise them. They would argue that primary socialisation means that males will remain dominant and women will remain inferior even in the future generations.