Functionalists and Marxists perspective on the family.

Functionalists believe that society is based on a value consensus, which is a shared set of norms and values into which society socialises its members. This creates a stable society with shared goals in life. They see that each individual needs to find their place in society and become a function. They view the family as a key institution in creating these functions.

One functionalist Murdock says the family has 4 key aspects at creating this. This is the stable satisfaction of the sex drive with the same partner, this is a monogamist view and it to restrict a ‘free-for-all’. The second is Reproduction of the next generation so that society can continue Socialisation of the young; this is where the children are taught society’s norms and values. Lastly is meeting the member’s economic needs such as food and shelter. He saw that these 4 functions create a stable society and meets society’s needs; he sees the nuclear family as meeting these needs. Strengths of these views is it explains why the nuclear family is universal as it fits the key functions, and also why the nuclear family is viewed as positive. However many argue that other family types can fit these functions and also other institutions. Other perspectives reject the view that it is harmonious and that everyone wants to ‘function in society’. For example feminists argue that it is for the function of men only and does not fit the needs for women and Marxists view it for only working for capitalism to further the gap with inequality.

Parsons agreed with Murdocks theory, he also said that the functions depend on the society itself, this will affect it shape and structure. For example he sees that there are different family types for pre-industrial society and modern-industrial society. He saw that the extended family fit the preindustrial society and the nuclear family suits modern needs. He states this is because of 2 factors, geographic mobile workforce and a social mobile work force. Geographic mobile workforce is where people were able to move for their jobs due to modern technology, he argues that before this was harder so families stayed in one village to work in one place, he also states that the nuclear family is easier to move with them. A social mobile workforce is where society is the way is changing and many jobs are available and skilled are requires, this has enabled individuals to develop the social ladder and move away, rather than staying and ‘inheriting’ their families types of work. By doing this creates a nuclear family as the man is head of the household by his status and the boy in view to when his grown up as there would be conflict, thus creating another nuclear family. Parsons argued that Murdock theory was not modernised and many of the functions has been lost to other key institutions. Parsons sees that today the family only have 2 key functions which are the primary socialisation of children and creating stable units for an efficient economy. Marxists agree with the functionalists that the nuclear family is the main family type to fit modern needs. However they argue that the reason for this is not the functionalists theory’s, they believe it is not to benefit society but to benefit capitalism. They see that there is inequality of two classes, the working class who are exploited by their labour to the capitalists, and the capitalists class who own the means of production. They have identified many functions within the family which benefit capitalism. One of these factors is the Inheritance of property, Marxists argue that before there was a classless society where no private property and sexual relationships were not monogamist, however as society become more wealthy a group of men were able to secure control of the means of production. This is what brought the patriarchal monogamous nuclear family. Engel states this is because the men had to ensure his property is inherited down to his children which created the stereotype of a women only being there to produce children. Marxists feminists believe that with an overview of capitalism will achieve women’s liberation, as there will be no need for a nuclear family. Another function is ideological functions, this is where the children’s primary socialisation is to reinforce that capitalist’s views are fair and acceptable and that there is no inequality. An example of this in the family is the hierarchy made from the father and that his in charge. Lastly is for a unit of consumption, this is where family’s generate profits from labourers, for example families buying the latest products, children being pursued by the media to beg their parents for toys and children being mocked by their peers if they don’t have the latest fashion. They see that all these functions help maintain a capitalist society. Criticisms of the Marxists perspective are that it ignores other family types and assumes that the nuclear family is dominant, this is also a criticism of the functionalist view. Feminists criticize that the Marxists ignore gender inequality and that it is male dominated. Functionalists say that the Marxists view is pessimistic and ignores the benefits of the family such as support.