

Functionalism

And the family

The background of the slide is a solid light beige color. On the right side, there are several thick, wavy, light grey lines that flow from the top right towards the bottom left, creating a sense of movement and depth.

3 main questions

- What are the functions of the family for society?
- What are the functional relationships between the family and the wider social system?
- What are the functions of the family for individuals?

Murdock's Answers

- Murdock (1949)
 - 4 basic functions of the family
 - 1) Sexual
 - Provides sexual satisfaction for adults
 - 2) Reproductive
 - Produces and raises the next generation of adults
 - 3) Economic
 - Families support each other financially
 - 4) Educational
 - Socialises children into wider society

Criticisms of Murdock

- He does not consider whether other institutions could perform these functions
 - Eg. Prostitutes could be said to fulfil the sexual function, IVF or sperm donors the reproductive function
- The nuclear family is presented as totally harmonious – Morgan (1975)
 - This ignores things like divorce and domestic violence

Parson's answers

- Parsons (1955, 1965)
- Identifies 2 “basic and irreducible functions” of the family
 - Primary socialisation of children
 - Stabilisation of adult personalities
 - This is sometimes known as the “warm bath” theory – the idea that the family is a relaxing and caring place away from the worries of the world

Criticisms of Parsons

- He presents an idealised view of the family
- His theory was based on white middle class America – it ignores variations in families and in cultures
- There is no exploration of alternatives to the family
 - Eg. Kibbutzs in Israel or communes
- Primary socialisation is seen as a one way process
 - But what about the ways in which children socialise and mould their parents
 - Eg “pester power”

Further reading

- Sociology for AS-Level – p.38
- Sociology Themes and Perspectives (4th ed.) – pp.321-327 (similar section in 5th edition)
- Sociology in Focus – pp.235-6