

“A” Level Sociology

Teaching Notes for Students

Module: Family Life

Unit 1b: Family Structure

Introduction

- We can begin to explore sociological concepts of the structure of family life further by developing some of the themes introduced in the first set of Teaching Notes (in particular, the wide variety and **divergence** of family forms in human societies). In this respect, we can concentrate more upon the various practices involved in the creation of family groups rather than the question of whether or not there is a huge diversity in basic family structures.
- We can begin by noting two basic facts, one **biological**, the other **social**:
 1. Firstly, as I have suggested, it is a biological fact that human infants are born relatively helpless, insofar as if they are not nurtured by other members of society they will die.

In this respect, the need for **nurture** is a **biological** problem.

2. Secondly, it is a fact that human infants have to be taught social behaviour; that is, the ability to take a normal part in society is something into which people have to be socialised.

In this respect, the need to ensure that the **culture** of a society is transmitted to its future adults is a social problem.

- If we put these two ideas together, it is not too surprising that we should come to the conclusion that the easiest, simplest, solution to these twin "problems" is for the parent or parents of a child to take responsibility for its upbringing. In this respect, we do not have to appeal to vague (and empirically unproved) notions such as "human biogrammers", nor do we have to appeal to equally vague concepts like "nature" or "instinct". At its most basic, this relationship between parent(s) and child is usually the most individually and collectively convenient (and it is important that the word "usually" is emphasised here).
- When we start to think in these terms, a few of things are evident:
 1. The idea that human behaviour is "instinctive" tends to be used to obscure sloppy forms of reasoning. Rather than look at possible alternative explanations for particular patterns of human behaviour, a "pseudo-scientific" approach is adopted whereby "explanation" is couched in terms of vague, unprovable, assertions.
 2. Given the basic need to nurture human infants, it shouldn't be surprising that human beings devise a wide variety of different ways of achieving this basic aim, since the only "guide-lines" they have to work on are not those of instinct but simply those of experience and cultural tradition.
 3. The only real imperative involved is the need to nurture and socialise - broad objectives that can be realised in a variety of different ways.
- Thus, except in what we might term exceptional social circumstances (when there is perhaps some over-riding collective need to the contrary) it seems apparent that those people responsible for the biological production of a child should also have some interest in their child's social production (either because they want this, are encouraged to want this or, indeed, are forced to want this).
- Before we examine the second of the questions posed in the previous Teaching Notes on family structure (that of whether or not the nuclear family is a universal form of family structure in modern industrialised societies), let's quickly look at a number of the ways human societies have translated the idea of "social convenience" conceptualised above into "family practice".
- To begin with, we can note that **empirical studies** of family life within and between societies (historically within the same society and culturally between different societies) throw-up a huge variety of social attitudes, behaviours and organisational practices in relation to family groups. We can note some of this under the following headings:

a. Marriage norms.

- In general, the legal union of two (or more in some cases) adults is considered the norm in most modern industrialised societies. In the Study Pack on "Marriage" we will explore in some detail the reasons for this, but it's sufficient to note here that even in a society such as our own, "cohabitation" (the idea that two people may live together and raise their children without being legally married) is an increasingly popular choice.
- Marriage in our society tends to be of the serial monogamy type (that is, you can only be legally married to one partner (of the opposite sex) at any one time), but other societies practice strict monogamy (you are married to your partner until death intervenes to break the marriage - divorce is prohibited (Southern Ireland being a good example here). In yet other societies, various forms of polygamy are practised (where a man can be married to more than one woman or, in rather more extreme cases, a woman can be legally married to more than one man).
- In some societies, choice of marriage partner is a matter of individual choice - people meet, fall in love and marry. In others (most notably societies where the Hindu religion is well-established - India for example) arranged marriages are the norm (a situation in which parents either decide or have a great say in the individual's choice of marriage partner. In our own recent past, arranged marriages amongst the upper classes tended to be the norm, mainly because wealthy parents wanted to ensure that their family wealth was not diluted by the son or daughter's "inappropriate" marriage (that is, marriage to someone whose family were not wealthy).

Question:

If you look at marriage patterns in our society, choice of partner is conditioned not by "love" but by more prosaic factors such as class and status (most people marry someone of a very similar class and status).

What reasons can you give to explain why people of a similar class tend to marry in our society?

b. Divorce norms.

- As I've noted above, some societies allow couples to marry and divorce while other societies do not. The ease of divorce also differs widely from society to society; in some societies an individual has to prove "fault" with their partner (adultery, cruelty, and the like) while in others it is simply a matter of requesting a divorce. In some Asian and Arabic countries, a husband can divorce his wife simply by making it generally known that this is his wish, while a wife may not divorce without her husband's consent. Similarly, some societies recognise "widowhood", while some insist that widows remarry on the death of their husband.

Amongst Orthodox Jews, a husband has to grant his wife a divorce (even if his behaviour is the cause of marital breakdown) and without this permission a woman cannot remarry.

c. Child care.

- The relationship between parents and children varies widely in many societies. In Britain, for example, it is the norm for a child's biological parents to be responsible for that child's upbringing until at least the age of sixteen (and you might like to note that the point at which a child is legally considered to be an adult varies widely too). In this type of "child-centred" society, the status of adults may be measured by the way in which they treat their children. In addition, some societies place a high value on the number of children a man is able to father (the male's social status is increased by fathering as many children as possible).

- In most Western societies, child-rearing tends to be seen as the responsibility of the child's natural mother (although the father may be expected to contribute in some ways). However, amongst the upper and middle classes, primary child care is frequently handed-over to nurses and nannies in the early years and boarding schools in the later years of childhood. Indeed, one might argue that the "natural mother as child-rearer" norm has only really been applied to working and lower middle class mothers; upper class women can both afford to pay others to look after their children and ignore any social stigma attached to the "failure" to raise her children personally.
- In some societies - especially traditional "hunter-gather" and nomadic ones - child-rearing is performed communally; child-rearing is frequently performed by unmarried relatives, such as sisters or brothers, or by a mother of the child's parents.
- These examples are just a few of the many different attitudes, behaviours and organisational practices relating to family life that exist - or have existed at various times - in the huge number of different human societies. There are more, but I'm sure you get the basic idea and it would be more useful, at this point, to discuss the second question raised earlier.

Is the nuclear family a universal form of family structure in modern industrialised societies?

- As we have seen earlier, there are a number of different basic family structures that we can identify (nuclear, extended, single-parent and reconstituted) as well as a number of "family structures" that might be considered to deviate from the kind of nuclear norm characterised by writers such as Murdock (the Nayar, communes and the like). The fairly well documented response from writers such as Murdock, Goode and Parsons (who all subscribe, to greater or lesser extents, to basic Functionalist principles concerning social (and family) organisation is that the nuclear family unit is either the "core" unit in all types of family (including extended families) or the basic unit from which other forms of family structure deviate (the single-parent family type, for example, is frequently characterised as a "broken nuclear" family - one that tends to arise out of necessity rather than choice, perhaps).
- Once again, however, the answer to this question probably has more to do with the way in which family groups are defined than anything else, so it is probably a more sociologically fruitful avenue to explore the way in which various sociologists grouped under different sociological perspectives have analysed the reasons for the importance of the "nuclear family group or core" in modern industrial societies.

The Significance of the Family Group in Society

- Whether or not the family is a universal social institution, it is clear that the family group (whatever its particular form) appears to be such a singularly important social institution that its relationship to the social structure of any society is one that requires further analysis. In this respect, one way of looking at this relationship might be in terms of what the family does for both "society" and the individual members of the group (this latter idea will be developed in more detail in following Teaching Notes that focus upon the nature of relationships within the family group).
- When we, as sociologists, observe any "pattern of shared, relatively stable, relationships that persist over time" (which we term a "social institution"), we necessarily (and reasonably) assume that this behaviour has a purpose. The question we have to try and answer, therefore, is that of how do we interpret the significance of this observation?
- As you will have come to expect, there are a variety of ways in which we can interpret this behaviour (from both a sociological and non-sociological point-of-view) and these interpretations will be influenced by the general way in which the sociologist views (and constructs theories to explain) the nature of the social world.
- Thus, from a:
 - Functionalist** perspective, interpretation will be conditioned by the belief that the family institution serves a useful purpose for society as a whole
 - Marxist** perspective interpretation will be conditioned by the belief that the family institution serves a useful purpose for a particular social class.
 - Feminist** perspective interpretation will be conditioned by the belief that the family institution serves a useful purpose for a particular gender (men).
- The point of the above is two-fold:
 - a. To encourage you to keep the relationship between theoretical perspective and sociological interpretation firmly in mind.
 - b. To help you to understand the idea that while sociologists may be in broad agreement over the idea that the family institution is clearly related to other social institutions (thereby, through the various relationships developed between institutions, forming a "social structure"), both individuals and groups of sociologists differ in the way they interpret this relationship.
- It would, given the above, be useful to look at a number of these interpretations and in order to do this, it might be theoretically-useful to divide this analysis into three main camps:
 1. Those writers who emphasise the generally functional nature of this relationship for any society considered as a whole (Structural Functionalists).
 2. Those writers who, while agreeing that the family performs certain functions, emphasise the way in which these functions are closely related to the economic structure of any society (Marxist Conflict theorists)
 3. Those writers who interpret the relationship between family and wider society in terms of the power relationships between men and women (Feminist Conflict theorists).

- As you will no-doubt have noticed, the second group listed above (Conflict theory) refers to the "functions of the family". In order to avoid confusion you should note that:
 - a. Marxists tend to see institutions like the family in terms of what they do to support the overall structure of capitalist society ("their function within the confines of a particular form of economic production").
 - b. Unlike Functionalist sociology, Conflict sociology tends to view these functions from more than one angle (for example, the family as an institution may serve useful purposes for upper class men, but not for working class women).
- As ever, the significance or otherwise of dividing writers into sociological perspectives probably owes more to theoretical convenience than anything else. However, to think in terms of the way in which various writers can be broadly grouped (while recognising that they are never in total agreement) is a useful way of organising your thoughts in relation to social phenomena.
- Having, I trust, made these ideas clear we can now look at the way in which various writers within each "theoretical perspective" have tried to relate the family as an institution to the structure of social systems.

A. Functionalist Perspectives:

- Although, as we will see in a moment, there are disagreements amongst Functionalist sociologists about the precise nature and scope of various "family functions", there does tend to be a broad consensus over two basic ideas in terms of the relationship between the family unit and wider society.

a. Socialisation: The family is an integrating mechanism in society:

- As you might expect, Functionalist sociology has tended to look towards the family as the cornerstone of social integration in any given society (by which is meant the idea that ways have to be found to make people feel that they belong to the society into which they were born - to feel and believe that they have something in common with the people around them)
- This "integrating function" derives mainly from the fact that the family group represents the primary institution, in any society, for the initial socialisation of children (which is where the idea of the family being a "universal social institution" comes into play). In this respect, any institution charged with this responsibility is going to play a significant part in the reproduction of cultural norms and values.

b. Social Order: The family as a unit of stability:

- Of equal importance to this socialisation function, the family also represents an institution that acts as a stabilising force in society. Great stress is placed upon such things as emotional and sexual stability, economic co-dependence and so forth. In this respect, the family is seen to be an institution that is charged with ensuring the maintenance of social equilibrium.
- In the above we can see the basic theoretical relationship of the family institution to the general social structure in society that is proposed by Functionalists:

The family is a vital social institution charged with the basic functions of socialisation and system maintenance.

- Although the precise functions of the family appear to be many and varied (and, as we shall see, about which there is some disagreement amongst Functionalist writers), Ronald Fletcher ("The Family and Marriage in Britain", 1973) has argued that such functions fall into two main categories:

a. Those that satisfy human needs and purposes.

In short, the socialisation aspect noted above.

b Those that provide "functional interconnections" with the wider social network of society as a whole.

Necessary because, as we have seen, the family institution is one of many in society that contributes to social stability by locking other institutions into a dependent relationship (thereby making rapid, radical, changes difficult).

- You can think about this, by analogy, with your own social relationships - the greater their number and intensity, the harder it becomes for you to break free from their grip.
- If we start to explore the above ideas in a bit more detail, we can note that **Fletcher** identifies the main functions of the family as being:

a. Procreation and Child-Rearing:

The family structure provides a legitimate arena for the bearing and raising of children. Given the relative helplessness of children at birth, parental nurture and care is seen as vital - and the family provides a solid basis for such care and support in the early years of a child's social development.

b. Regulation of Sexual Behaviour:

In this respect, the family structure serves to limit and contain "petty" sexual jealousies and by defining the limits of sexual freedom, the family structure limits the chances of potentially damaging sexual relationships developing.

Additionally, the family is a primary institution for the provision of love, care and emotional support for both children and adults. In short, it provides a sense of belonging and serves to clearly-define role relationships between men and women.

c. Provision of a Home:

This idea expresses the assumption that people find comfort and security within primary social and sexual relationships. The "home" not only provides physical shelter, it also serves as the focal point of family existence - clearly demarcating the division between various wider-social roles, for example.

Question:

Fletcher calls the above the "essential functions" of the family - explain the meaning and significance of this idea.

- According to Fletcher, these "essential functions" provide:

A set of social relationships that define the limits and nature of human sexual attraction.

An arena within which children can be effectively and affectively (that is, "lovingly and trustingly") socialised.

A source of demarcation between the personal (strong emotional ties) and the impersonal (weak emotional ties) worlds.

Note: These "essential functions" relate more-or-less closely to the first category noted above (the satisfaction of human needs).

- In relation to the second basic category (that of functional interconnections between the family and wider society) Fletcher argues that the family performs a number of "non-essential" functions, many of which provide linkages with the wider social world. These include:
 - Government of its own (internal) affairs
 - Economic consumption of goods
 - Education
 - Health care (both physical and mental)
 - Religious (first exposure to religious ideas / socialisation)
 - Recreation
- As I have suggested, not all (Functionalist) writers agree with the above ideas, although there is a tendency to argue over specific elements rather than fundamentally disagreeing over the matter.
- **Talcott Parsons**, for example, has argued that the family in modern industrialised societies has transcended these latter functions in order to develop a new set of primary functions. For Parsons, the family has become increasingly specialised, to the extent that he argues it basically performs only two "essential" functions:
 1. The primary socialisation of children
 - Families, according to Parsons are like "factories whose product is the development of human personalities".
 2. The stabilisation of adult personalities.
 - This involves a number of specific ideas, including such things as:
 - a. The "emotional security" that adult partners provide for each other (a mutually-dependent relationship based upon affective norms - love, trust and the like).
 - b. The definition and demarcation of family roles (mother, father, daughter and so forth).
 - c. The way in which a division of labour is established between family members.
- As we can see, **Parsons' "core functions"** mirror the two basic categories noted by **Fletcher**.
- While we could continue to look at examples of the various functions of the family as seen from this perspective, you should by now have a reasonable grasp of the basic ideas involved (and as I've already noted, most arguments amongst Functionalist writers tend to revolve around specific points rather than fundamental ideas). What it would be useful to do, however, is to develop two ideas:
 - a. Firstly, the theoretical relationship between the family institution and its general position within the social structure.
 - b. Secondly, criticisms of the basic Functionalist position.

Family and Social Structure: General Comments.

- As I have suggested, we can conceptualise the "structure" of anything (be it a house, a family group or a society) in terms of the nature of the relationship between its constituent parts. Thus:

A "house" differs from a "bungalow" on the basis that the various elements involved in its construction (bricks, windows, doors and the like) are arranged differently. Thus, while these elements may be exactly the same, the fact that they have a different relationship to one another is the most significant point.

A "nuclear family" differs from an "extended family" on the basis that the various elements involved in its construction (people) relate to each other in different ways. Within the nuclear family, for example, grandparents live their lives separately from their children and grandchildren, while within the extended family this is not the case. Again, while the constituent elements may be the same, the different relationship between them produces different family structures.

- In terms of a society (or "social system"), Functionalists tend to concentrate upon the broadest, most fundamental, elements; namely, social institutions - mainly because institutions represent general patterns of human behaviour that are highly organised and which have persisted over time. The various ways in which institutions relate to each other (on the basis of "organisational purpose" and "institutional needs") gives us the social structure of any society.
- Functionalists argue that social institutions develop out of the need to satisfy, fulfil and organise various human social needs. In small-scale societies these social needs are relatively few (they may only involve the need to raise / socialise children, organise the provision of food, shelter and so forth), while as societies become larger and more complex these social needs become greater (involving such things as forms of industrial production, the organisation of an education system, the development of political systems of government, law and the like). As social needs increase, so too does the number and variety of institutions organised to fulfil these social needs.

Talcott Parsons, for example, calls this a process of "institutional differentiation and specialisation", which, in simple terms, means that as societies grow ever more complex in terms of the relationships involved, social institutions have to adapt to changing needs and, by so doing, become more specialised in their functions. We have already seen an example of this idea in relation to the "functions of the family" advanced by Parsons - in modern industrial societies there are only two basic functions (other functions have been taken over by other institutions - "differentiation"), but these are performed by the family because this is the institution best-equipped to perform these functions ("specialisation").

- In structural terms, as I have noted, institutions are related to one another on the basis of purpose and need (for example, the purpose of work is the production of wealth, goods and so forth which is "recirculated" from this institution to an institution such as the family, thereby increasing people's general standard of living. Work "needs" from the family people who have been basically socialised into the norms and values of society, just as it "needs" from an education system people who have been more-specifically socialised into various academic and vocational specialisms). However, we can also group institutions into what are called "social sub-systems". These consist of the:
 1. **Economic sub-system** (the way in which work is generally organised in society).
 2. **Political sub-system** (the way in which government and political activity is organised).
 3. **Kinship sub-system** (the way in which families are socially organised and values passed from generation to generation).
 4. **Cultural sub-system** (the way in which education, religion and the like is organised).

- In this respect, each social institution is part of a larger grouping (a "sub-system") and these sub-systems in turn make-up a larger group - the social system. Within each sub-system, an institution has both a specific role to play and a specific relationship to the social system as a whole (as I have already noted above).
- One final question remains to be answered in this context, namely,

"Why is the family group considered to be the functionally most important institution in any society?".

- As you will recall in relation to the debate concerning whether or not the family group is a universal social phenomenon, Functionalists have tended to argue that the family is universal because it performs functions that are central to the maintenance of both institutional sub-systems and society as a whole.
- In the main, there is general agreement that the family group's most important function is the socialisation of children (whereby cultural norms and values are passed-on from one generation to the next). However, while this explains how the family group is socially important, it doesn't explain why it is necessary that children are raised within a "kinship-based" group (such as a family) rather than a non-kinship-based group (such as a commune). We can address this question - and others - in the following section...

Criticisms...

1. However much writers such as Parsons and Bales ("Family, Socialisation and Interaction Process ", 1980), Goode ("The Family", 1964) or Fletcher ("The Family and Marriage in Britain", 1973) may dress-up the answer to the question of why children have to be raised within a kinship-based group by referring to ideas such as "differentiated sub-systems" (Parsons, Goode) or the family as the "fundamental instrumental foundation of the larger social structure" (Goode), it remains evident that the basic reason for seeing the family group as functional is based upon the notion of "emotional closeness" between parent and child.

While this may or may not be significant (and we would need to ask questions about how this "emotional closeness" is created), it is fundamentally a judgement based upon values - the values of the sociologist who interprets this as evidence for the primacy of the kinship-based family group over all other possible types of family group.

2. The implication in both the above and Functionalist writing generally is that we can equate "natural" with "good" (in the sense that the family group is "naturally" the best functionally-adapted institution for child-care in our society). As we will see when we look at other perspectives, most - but not all - writers grouped within this perspective tend to play-down the less harmonious aspects of family life (child abuse, the subordination of women by men, the unequal division of domestic labour, male violence against females and so forth). Bell and Vogel tend to be exceptional here when they talk about some of the "dysfunctional" aspects of family life (see Haralambos "Themes and Perspectives" p.463).

3. In more general terms, writers from different perspectives (as we will discuss in a moment) have questioned the basis of the "functional relationship" between social institutions in various social systems. In particular, critical interpretation has focused upon questions of power and exploitation centred around class (Marxist Conflict theories) and gender (Feminist theories).

B. Marxist Conflict Perspectives:

- Like Functionalists, Marxist Conflict theorists such as:

Cooper ("The Death of the Family", 1972),
Engels ("The Origin of the Family") and
Zaretsky ("Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life", 1976)

recognise that the family group - as a social institution - serves some kind of purpose in any society. Where Marxists tend to disagree with writers working in other perspectives, however, is in relation to the nature of that purpose and, for writers such as the above, the relationship between the family and the social structure of any society is one of unequal dependence.

- In this respect, the family institution is seen in terms of the way in which it links into the wider structure of social relationships in, for example, Capitalist society. Thus, while Marxists might be perfectly happy to accept the idea that the family has a primary socialisation function, they interpret and develop this idea to argue that socialisation has an ideological dimension.
- In this respect, people are not simply being socialised into "society" in the abstract. On the contrary, the socialisation process is directed towards the integration of people into a specific form of social relationship - one that reflects the fundamental, structural, inequalities of Capitalism. In basic terms, therefore, the argument here is that the family as an institution helps to maintain and reproduce basic social inequalities by presenting them as "normal" and "natural" within the socialisation process.

Question:

Identify some of the ways in which parents attempt to socialise their children into Capitalist society? For example:

Socialising children into the need to gain educational qualifications in order to achieve "high status", well-paid, occupations.

- For Marxist Conflict theorists, the purpose and nature of family forms in Capitalist societies can be summarised in the following way. The family group:

1. Acts to control sexual behaviour:

In particular, as Engels has noted, ("The Origin of the Family"), the relationship between economic wealth and gender roles is related to the way in which males, as the dominant sex in society, sought to ensure that wealth was passed-on through the male line. For Engels (and his collaborator Karl Marx), male domination over both women and private property go hand-in-hand.

In this context it is also useful to note Marxist interpretations of the significance of marriage, since one way in which men are able to exploit women (just as Capitalist owners exploit non-owners) is through the "legal servitude" of marriage. In this sense, the "legally-binding marriage contract" is an exploitative one, insofar as it tends to make one partner (usually the female) dependent upon the other.

2. Serves to reproduce labour power for Capitalism:

Not only does the family serve the necessary purpose of producing more people to work in Capitalist industry (and thereby ensure repeated profitability): it also socialises them into the ideology of capitalism.

3. Is a safety valve for people's frustrations:

The family serves two main purposes in this respect:

a. Whereas the vast majority of males are relatively powerless in Capitalist industry, the family structure serves the purpose of disguising this powerless condition. Males within the family have traditionally been powerful figures in relation to the females - not simply in physical terms but also in legal terms. Marxists contend that this "illusion of power" within the family serves as a safety valve for the build-up of tension and frustration at work.

b. Related to the above, male domination within the family serves to direct frustration away from criticism of Capitalism and projects it onto male-female relationships within the family. Hence, the family is a relative hot-bed of male violence against women and children, since males are continually "frustrated" through their lack of power within the workplace.

4. Channels and legitimates the exploitation of women:

This can be clearly related to the above idea, but a further dimension is added if we follow Engels' argument that women are "forced" to exchange sex for material goods within the family group; that is, one of the few resources controlled by women within the family is their body, whereby sex can be used as a form of economic exchange.

5. Provides a number of "free" services for Capitalists.

In particular, Capitalist owners do not have to bother about such things as the cost of raising children as future workers in the economy. The cost of reproducing future labour power is carried not by the Capitalist but by the workers themselves...

6. Is a primary consumer of Capitalist products:

It is a constantly replenished source of profits...

Criticisms...

- Leaving aside the general criticisms that have been made concerning Marxist perspectives (since they have already been made at various points in Study Packs relating to other parts of the course), a couple of criticisms of the above interpretation are worth noting.

1. Firstly, many feminists have criticised Marxist perspectives on the family for their over-concentration on the "class nature" of economic exploitation. Radical feminists such as Millett and Firestone, in particular, have argued that Marxism's apparent preoccupation with Capitalist forms of economic exploitation have led to the ignoring of "patriarchal" forms of exploitation. Patriarchy (in simple terms, the exploitation of women by men), it is argued, pre-dates capitalism and should, therefore, be given more significance.

2. In relation to marriage, non-Marxist explanations for the need to secure male - female relationships in law have tended to focus around the idea that a legal framework for marriage in modern industrial societies is necessary to protect the interests of both partners, since legal norms have, in this context, greater power than simple social norms.

In general, where Functionalists tend to see only co-operation and harmony in society, Marxists tend to see conflict and exploitation - and for both of these perspectives it is evident that their interpretation of the relationship between the family group and social structure should always be critically considered in the light of this idea.

- Finally, to complete this section we can look briefly at feminist perspectives on family life. A more complete analysis of feminism in most of its major forms is carried-out in another Study Pack ("**Family Life: Feminist Perspectives**") in a later part of this section of the course.

C. Feminist Perspectives:

- While we should be extra careful in grouping the variety of different - and frequently opposed - feminist perspectives together in the way that we have done with functionalism and Marxism, it is evident that, in general terms, feminist perspectives on the family have tended to stress the following ideas:

1. Men oppress women within the family, just as they oppress women within all other institutions in Capitalist society.
2. Feminist writers have tended to dismiss notions of gender differences based upon supposed biological / genetic differences between males and females as "rationalising myths" that serve to legitimate male domination over women.
3. Women have a service role forced upon them within the family.

Women act as "unpaid servants" within the home. This idea is explicitly linked, by Marxist feminists, to the economic relationship between Capital and Labour, in the sense that Labour is exploited by Capital in the economic sphere just as women are exploited by men within the family.

Many women also play a "**dual role**", being seen as both paid workers and unpaid housewives. This idea serves to emphasise the way in which women are exploited by both Capitalists and men in general.

4. Mary Macintosh ("The State Oppression of Women") has argued that the low status of women in the workforce is related to their position as a form of "reserve army of labour". Women are called into the workforce at various times when there is a shortfall of male labour and forced back into the family when there is a surplus. Women are a marginalized workforce, forced into low pay, low status, employment on the basis of:

- a. The oppression of women within the family - their primary social role being seen as that of child-rearers.

- b. The "dual role" of women, where work is made to fit around their primary role of housewife and mother.

- c. Sexual discrimination against women, in terms of both overt discrimination (sexual harassment and so forth) and covert discrimination (failing to promote women because they are "likely to have children" and so forth). Such discrimination is a form of prejudice based upon male perceptions of the threat to their power posed by successful, resourceful, women.

Perspectives On Family Life

- For each of the following "functions" of the family, identify the perspective from which you think it is most likely to arise by writing (SF) for Structural Functionalist, (M) for Marxist Conflict or (F) for Feminist Conflict in the accompanying brackets...

Regulates sexual activity and limits petty jealousies (SF)

Reproduces labour power for work in Capitalist industry ()

Socialisation of children into norms and values of society ()

Reproduces the ideologies that prop-up patriarchy ()

Provides "free" services necessary to maintain the workforce ()

Stabilisation of adult personalities ()

Allows men to exploit women ()

Control of sexuality ()

Production of children for reproduction of society ()

Childrearing ()

Acts as safety valve for release of tensions built-up in the workplace ()

Allows for economic co-operation between males and females ()

Provides emotional support and fulfilment for children and adults ()

Reproduces the ideologies that prop-up Capitalism ()

Motivates people to consume products of Capitalism ()

Provides unpaid services for men ()

Provides an emotional haven from the tensions of the outside world ()

Institutionalises the domination of men over women ()

Channels and legitimates male domination over women ()