The Marxist Perspective on The Family

The basics

Economic relations determine Social relations

Structural and historical approach

Focus on how the nuclear family Maintains capitalism and inequality

Emergence of Capitalism

The economic system determines the predominant type of family in society

Engels - The nuclear family and private property

Pre-industrial, traditional, 'primitive' society (Before capitalism)
- No real wealth
- Primitive communism
- Collective ownership = Promiscuous hoard

Emergence of Capitalism

- Wealth generation
- Private Property
- Individual ownership = Patriarchal nuclear family

The Nuclear family and Private Property

- Family is a 'unit of consumption'
- 'Keeping up with the Joneses'

Family is a 'unit of consumption'

Privatised family is typically about leisure and consumption

Advertising and pester power

Family is a 'unit of consumption'

Nuclear families exist in non capitalist societies

Other family types might be more functional for capitalism (e.g. Step families)

Engels theory fails to explain why the family has to be Patriarchal

Non nuclear families exist in capitalist societies

Overall evaluations

Economically deterministic

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Ideological functions of the family

Unequal relations between parents encourages acceptance of hierarchy

'Privatised' nuclear family is apolitical

In reality the family offers a 'safe haven' away from the harsh exploitation under capitalism - helps people put up with exploitation

A criticism of the 'warm bath theory'

Marxist Feminism

Fran Ansley - women as the takers of shit

Reserve army of labour

Capitalism benefiting from unpaid labour of women

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