

# The Functionalist Perspective on the Family

## The basics

Top down 'structuralist' theory

Asks 'what functions does the family perform for society?'

Positive Role of the Nuclear Family

1950s!

Essential building block

## Murdock's 4 Basic Functions

Reproductive

Economic

Studied 200 societies

Evaluation - The Nayar

Sex drive/ monogamy

Social

## Parson's Functional Fit Theory

Pre-industrial society  
Extended family

Larger family  
Many functions

Industrial society  
Nuclear family

Smaller family  
Fewer functions

Criticism  
Fit isn't as neat

## Overall Evaluations

### Positive

Link to New Right

Functional Fit Theory - some of it makes sense

### Deterministic

Feminism - ignores oppression of women/ public private divide

### Negative

Out of date - 1950s, can't explain diversity

Downplays conflict - darker side of family life

## Traditional gender roles

Expressive

Instrumental

Feminist criticism:  
Patriarchal  
Oppressive  
Ideological

## Two irreducible functions of the family

Primary socialisation

Criticism - Marxist  
Feminism - women takers of shit

Stabilisation of adult personalities  
(Warm bath theory)