

**Item B**

March of progress sociologists argue the family is becoming more equal. Increasingly today, both partners are likely to have jobs outside the home and they both carry out household chores and provide childcare. However, feminist sociologists reject this claim. They argue that the family is still patriarchal and that women today carry a dual burden.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the division of labour in couples is now equal.

**Paragraph 1**

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Evidence/studies:

Strengths:

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## Paragraph 2

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According to some sociologists, children in today's supposedly child-centred society lead lives that are segregated and controlled, but childhood was not always like this. Aries describes a medieval world where there was little distinction between children and adults in either work or leisure. According to this view, industrial society brought major changes. Children's lives became increasingly confined and regulated by adults. Not all sociologists share this view. Some argue that the distinction between childhood and adulthood is again becoming blurred.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the view sociological explanations of changes in the status of childhood.

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Despite their disagreements, functionalists, Marxist and feminist approaches to the family share certain similarities. They are all structural approaches: they see the family as a structure that performs certain functions - although they disagree about what these functions are and who benefits from them. Similarly, they all assume that by 'the family' we mean the conventional nuclear family.

Other sociologists reject this structural approach. For example, the personal life perspective takes a bottom-up view that focuses on people's meanings and how they themselves define what counts as 'family'.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of structural approaches to our understanding of families and households.

### Paragraph 1

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In modern society, people's lives were made up of fixed age-stages, with the final stage defined by compulsory retirement and, for many poverty. The old also faced prejudice and discrimination.

By contrast, some sociologists argue that the position of the old in today's postmodern society is changing for the better. In postmodern society, individuals can choose a lifestyle and identity that does not depend on their age. This had freed the old from their previous disadvantaged status in society.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the position of the old in today's society is changing for the better.

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There has been a significant increase in the number of divorces since 1970. One important factor behind the increase has been the changes in the law relating to divorce. However, legal changes alone may not be enough to explain the trend and sociologists have suggested a number of possible causes of a higher divorce rate. One of these is a decline in the influence of traditional norms about marriage that used to stigmatise divorce.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate sociological contributions to our understanding of the trends in divorce in the United Kingdom since 1970.

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Recent decades have seen a move to a more diverse range of family arrangements. While some sociologists see this as harmful for society, others welcome it because they see it as bringing greater individual choice about relationships.

However, some sociologists argue that the extent of change should not be exaggerated: most people live in something resembling a conventional nuclear family, and many individuals still find their choices limited. For example, while being gay or lesbian is less stigmatised than in the past, it is not always easy for people to 'come out'.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate sociological explanations to our understanding of family diversity.

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According to feminist sociologists, the main function of laws and policies on families and households is to support the conventional heterosexual nuclear family and reproduce patriarchy. For example, policies concerning the care of children or the old often make the assumption that these are women's responsibility. Even policies seemingly designed to benefit women, such as paying child benefit to the mother, may have the effect of reinforcing their gender role.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the main function of laws and policies on families and households is to reproduce patriarchy.

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In the view of Marxist sociologists, all of society's institutions contribute to maintaining the capitalist system. These institutions include the family, which Marxists see as performing important functions for capitalism. For example, its role in socialising the young helps to ensure that capitalism is provided with the next generation of docile workers.

However, critics argue that the Marxist view of the family ignores issues such as family diversity as well as inequalities within the family.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of the work of Marxist sociologists for the study of families and households today.

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Feminist sociologists see society as patriarchal and they see the family as a key social institution that plays a central role in reproducing patriarchy. For example, it subordinates women to men's power and maintains an unequal gender division of labour both in the home and in wider society. However, there are disagreements among feminists both about the underlying cause of women's oppression and exploitation, and about how this can be ended.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the contributions of feminist sociologists to our understanding of families and households.

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Some sociologists and others argue that couple relationships in society today are increasingly unstable. For example, New Right commentators claim that today's high rates of cohabitation and divorce and low rate of first marriages indicate a lack of commitment on the part of many couples. From a different perspective, Giddens suggests that relationships in which individuals stay together only so long as it serves their self-interest are becoming the norm. Several sociologists point to women's increased independence as a destabilising factor.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate sociological arguments and evidence for the view that couple relationships in society are increasingly unstable.

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Conflict theories take a negative view of the family arguing that it plays an integral part in perpetuating social inequality. Feminist sociologists are highly critical of the family as they claim it reinforces patriarchy by confining women to a subservient role within the home as a housewife and mother which is learnt during primary socialisation and reinforced during marriage. Marxists conversely would argue that the family simply exists to protect private property and prevent the proletariat revolution by creating a false class consciousness. Consensus theories however would point to the advantages of the family as an agent of socialisation which helps maintain social order by teaching norms and values.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the family is a beneficial institution in society.

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Recent changes in the law have had a significant impact on family formations and family life. Sociologists have argued that the advancing of women's rights has resulted in a range of new legislation to protect the rights of women and give them rights within the family. Divorce has become more accessible and takes considerably less time than in the past. Women also have greater legal rights within the workplace and this allows them greater independence as they have their own finances and therefore a more equal say about family spending and decisions. Other legal changes that have played a part in the changing form of the family include those that have allowed for both civil partnerships and gay and lesbian families as a response to more liberal social attitudes and similarly the greater rights that have been afforded to cohabiting couples.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that changes in the law have had the most significant impact upon family life.

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Nowadays, the number of children in families is significantly lower than in the past, with the average British family only having one or two children. This is because children have become an economic liability and it is now much more costly to raise a family than in the past. Children are also unable to make financial contributions to the family themselves as they are prohibited from paid employment. Similarly, women are investing more in their careers and less in their families due to changes in their social status which has seen them become more equal to men in the world of work. Women also have more control over their fertility through the introduction of free contraception and so are more likely to delay childbirth and as a consequence have fewer children. The way in which children are raised has therefore changed as the family has become more child-centred and children have greater rights than ever before.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that changing patterns of childbearing and childrearing have had a positive impact on society.

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Sociologists have competing perspectives about the main reasons why divorce has increased in society. Many feel the increase can be attributed to a general decline in social stigma towards divorce and it is no longer seen as shameful. This goes alongside a decline in religious belief (secularisation) which means society is generally more tolerant of family diversity as there is no longer an expectation for individuals to remain in unhappy marriages because marriage is no longer seen as a holy institution. Functionalist and New Right sociologists are critical of the increased divorce rate as they believe it threatens social solidarity and weakens the economy, whereas Feminists and Marxists welcome the changes as they believe it free us from patriarchal/capitalist exploitation.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that declining stigma and changing attitudes are the main reasons for the increase in divorce.

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Postmodernist sociologists argue that individual choice is now more important to people than their responsibilities to their family. As a result, people are choosing to live in a variety of different ways and the idea of family is more difficult to define.

However, other sociologists argue that postmodernists overestimate the extent of change in family life.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that individual choice in personal relationships has made family life less important in the United Kingdom today.

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The 'march of progress' view argues that the experience of childhood in Western societies has improved in the last 50 years or so. In particular, families have become child centred.

However, other sociologists point to many negative aspects of childhood today, such as increased child obesity.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate sociological explanations of changes in the experience of childhood in the last 50 years or so.

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Functionalists believe the family has its own important role to play in helping society to function effectively. In each type of society, one particular type of family will be the norm. This family type will fit the needs both of its individual members and of society as a whole.

Other sociologists believe that functionalists fail to consider ways in which families are dysfunctional.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate functionalist explanations of the role of the family in society.

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Some sociologists argue that changes within the family and in wider society have led to more equality in modern family life. The way in which domestic tasks are allocated is more equal and both partners are likely to be in paid employment. This sharing of responsibilities has led to more equal power relationships.

Applying material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate the view that the division of labour and power relationships in couples are equal in modern family life.

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