

REVISING THE FUNCTIONALIST THEORY OF THE FAMILY

GP Murdock studied **250 societies across the world** and claimed on the basis of this that **the nuclear family - biological parents in a socially acceptable (i.e. married) heterosexual relationship plus children - was**

Murdock claimed that the nuclear family performed **4 crucial functions for society and the individual**

1. **Reproduction/procreation** – ensures survival of society. Having children reinforces the bond between the married couple.
2. **Sexual** – this function ensures reinforces emotional bond between couples whereas sex within marriage ensures social stability and order.
3. **Economic** – human children are dependent upon their parents for economic upkeep for years
4. **Education** - parents socialise their children into the culture of society ensuring their commitment to values &

By 'multifunctional' Parsons mean that extended families built their own homes, made their own clothes, grew their own food, looked after and cared for their old, sick and disabled, and taught children essential skills

The most influential functionalist thinker on the family is **TALCOTT PARSONS**. He claims that

- The **isolated nuclear family** has evolved to become the **most common family type in modern industrial societies**.
- In pre-industrial societies, people mainly lived in **multi-functional extended families**.
- Multifunctional means that the family performed functions such as education, health, welfare, production
- The **cause or catalyst of family change was industrialisation** which brought about both **geographical and social mobility, as well as urbanisation**. Consequently people broke away from extended kin and formed nuclear families in towns and cities.
- Industrialisation produced **structural differentiation** – institutions such as the State developed that took over the functions of the family.
- The nuclear family now specialises in two functions; the **primary socialisation of children** and the **stabilisation of adult personalities**
- Adults in families have very distinct biologically-determined roles; the father is the **instrumental leader or breadwinner** and the mother is the **expressive leader or emotional caretaker**.