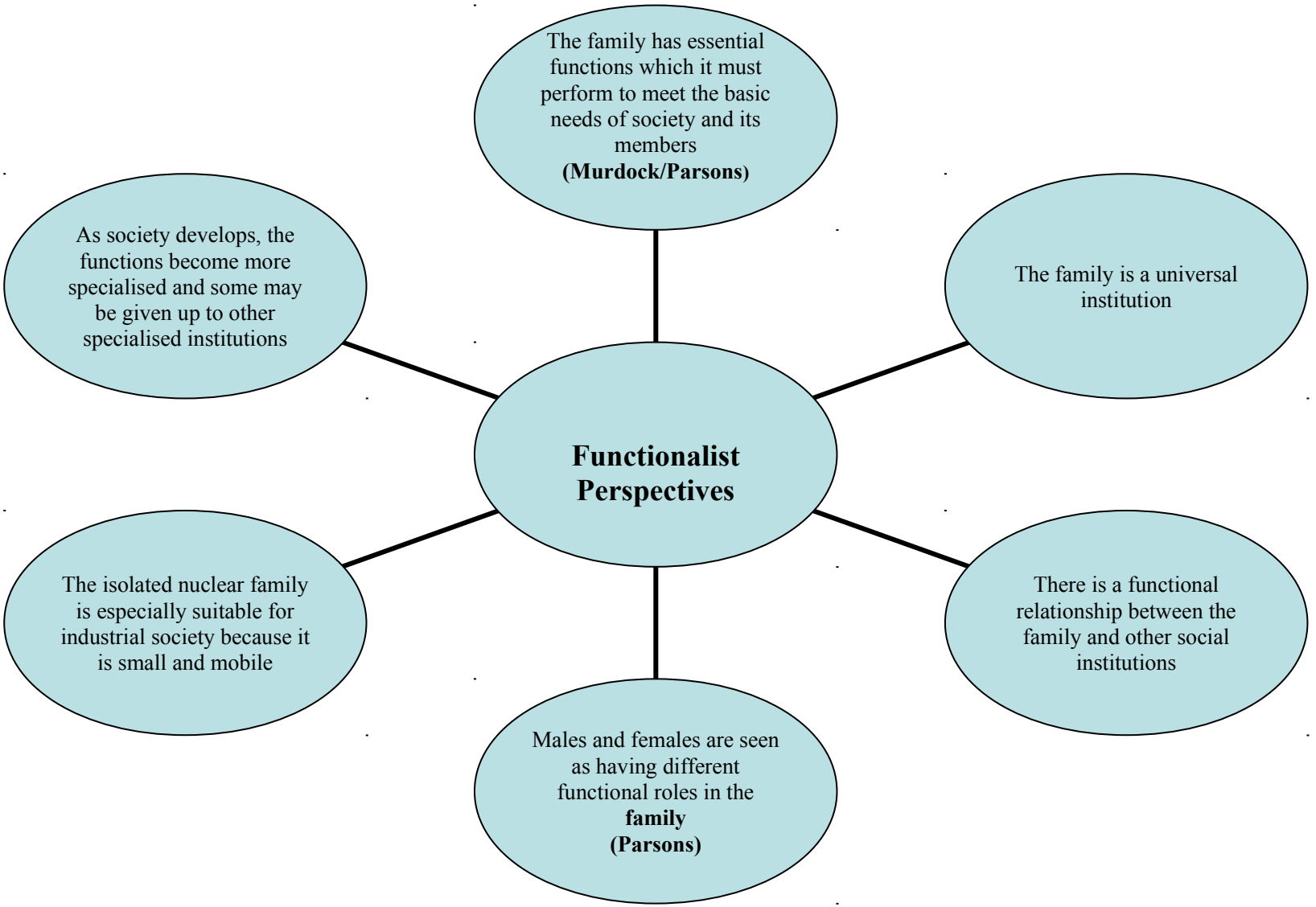
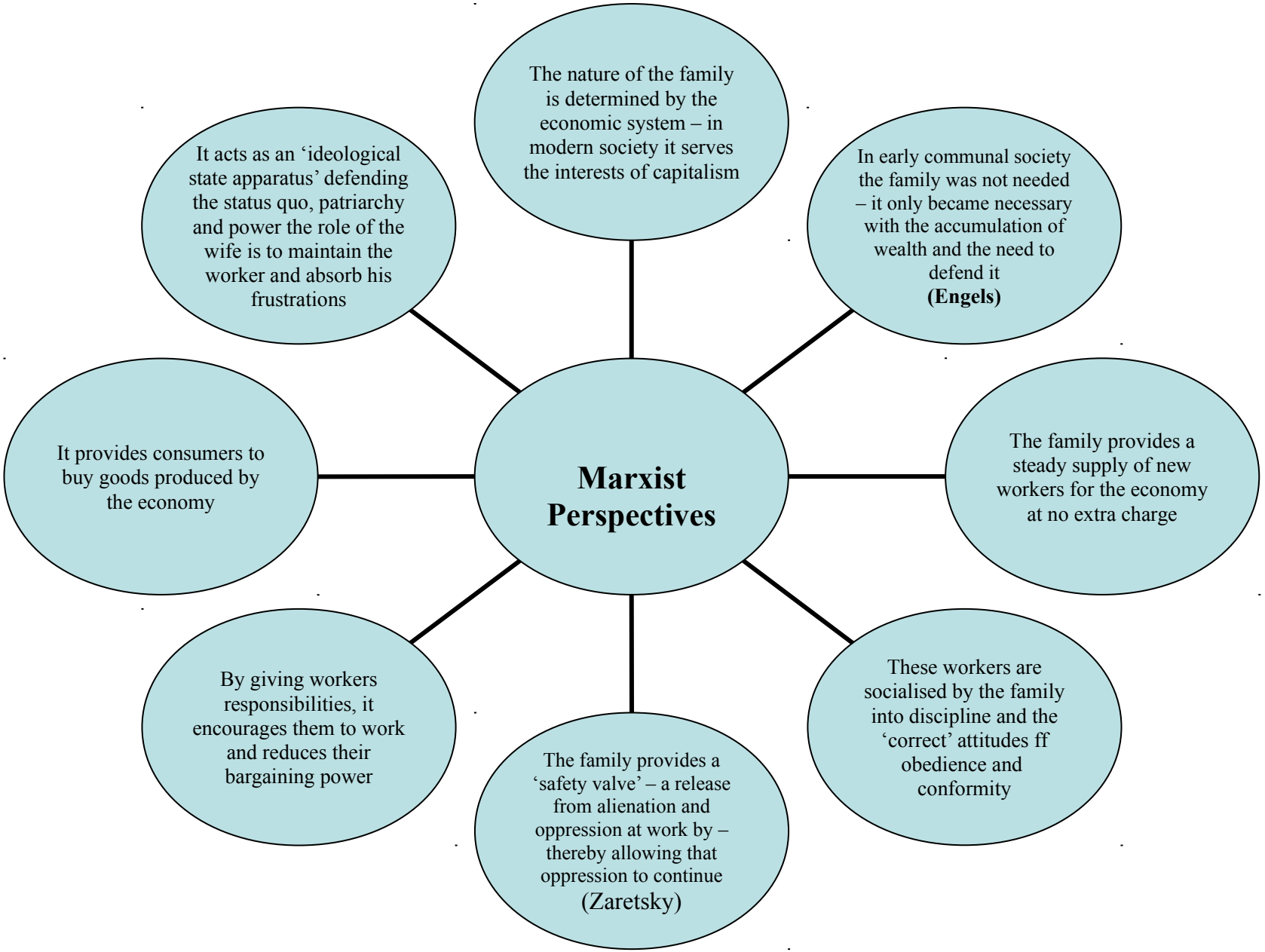
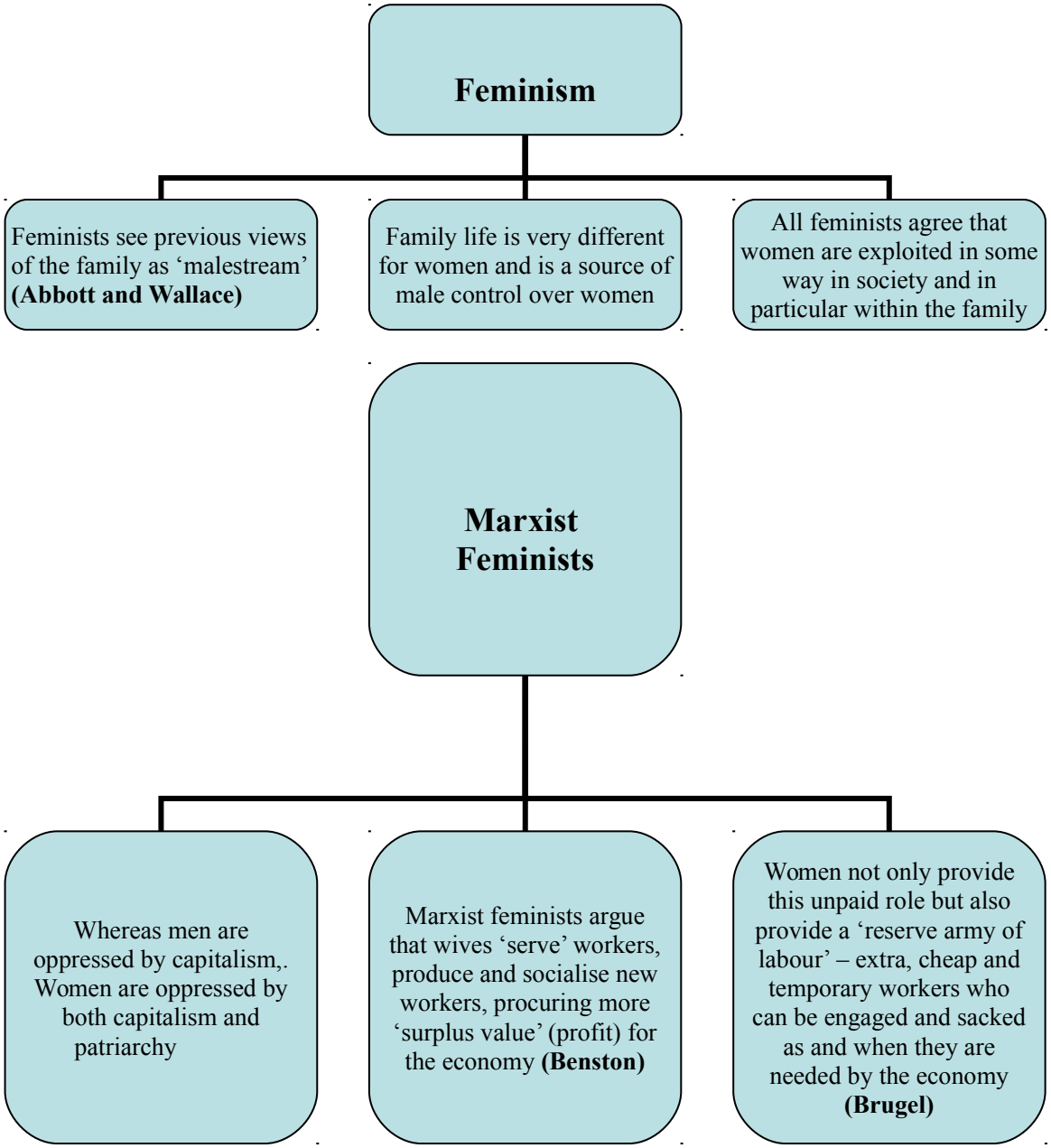
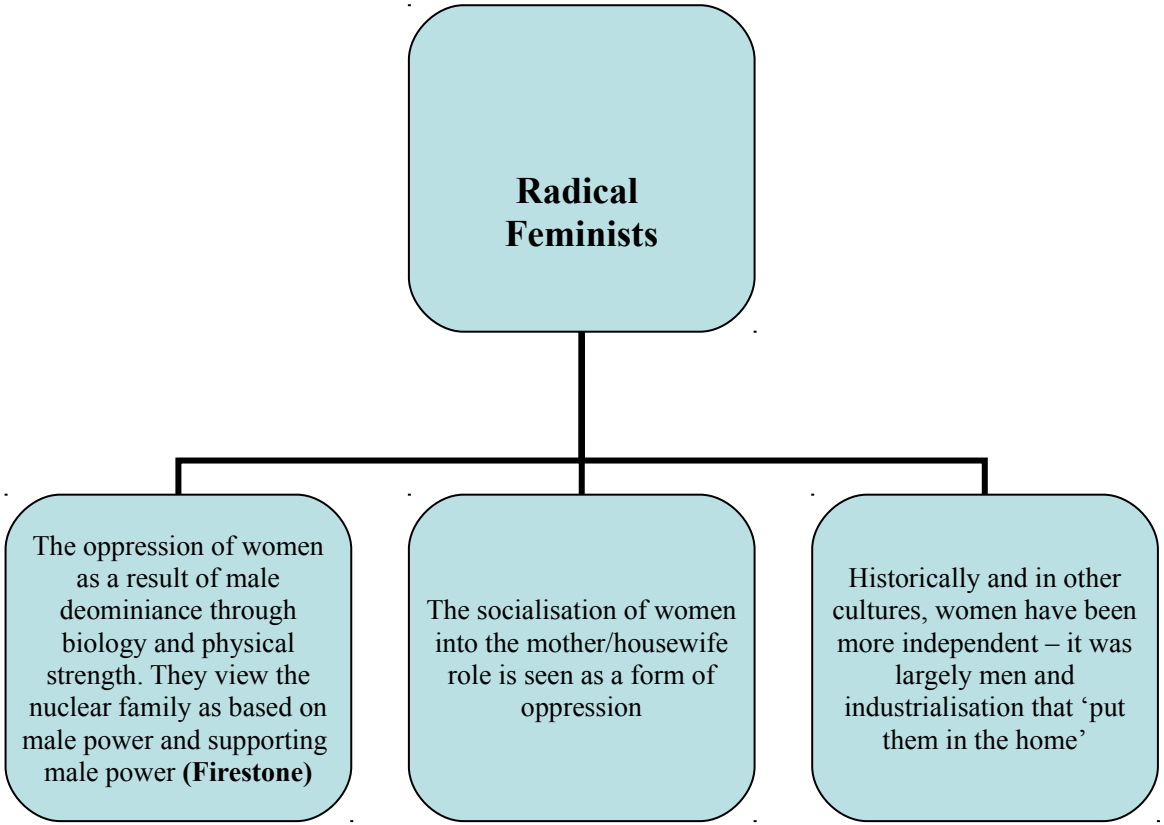

The family has essential functions which it must perform to meet the basic needs of society and its members (Murdock/Parsons)
As society develops, the functions become more specialised and some may be given up to other specialised institutions
The family is a universal institution
Functionalist Perspectives
The isolated nuclear family is especially suitable for industrial society because it is small and mobile
There is a functional relationship between the family and other social institutions
Males and females are seen as having different functional roles in the family (Parsons)

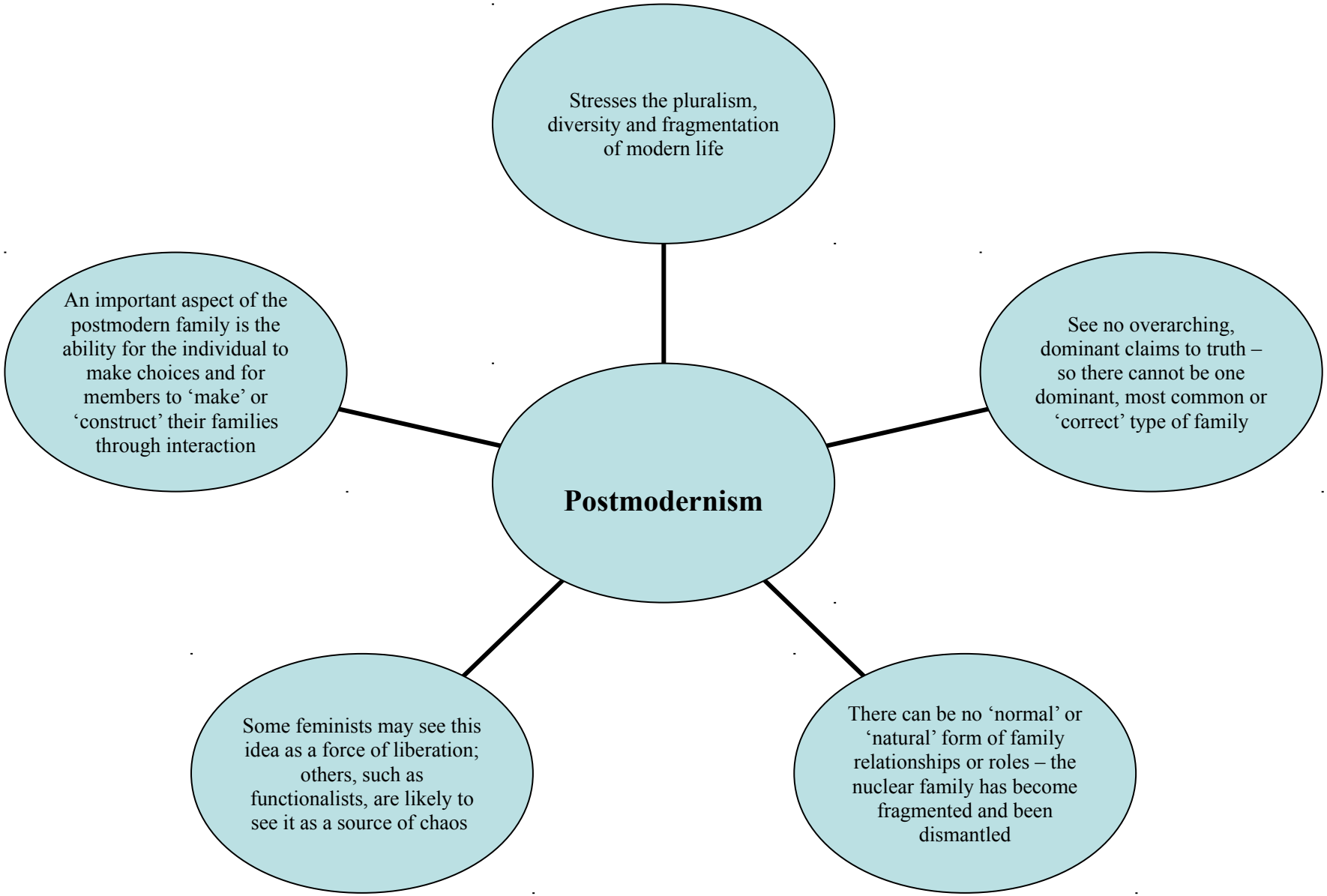

Marxist Perspectives
The nature of the family is determined by the economic system – in modern society it serves the interests of capitalism
It acts as an 'ideological state apparatus' defending the status quo, patriarchy and power the role of the wife is to maintain the worker and absorb his frustrations
In early communal society the family was not needed – it only became necessary with the accumulation of wealth and the need to defend it
(Engels)
It provides consumers to buy goods produced by the economy
The family provides a steady supply of new workers for the economy at no extra charge
By giving workers responsibilities, it encourages them to work and reduces their bargaining power
The family provides a 'safety valve' – a release from alienation and oppression at work by – thereby allowing that oppression to continue
(Zaretsky)
These workers are socialised by the family into discipline and the 'correct' attitudes ff obedience and conformity


Feminism
Feminists see previous views of the family as 'malestream' (Abbott and Wallace)
Family life is very different for women and is a source of male control over women
All feminists agree that women are exploited in some way in society and in particular within the family
Marxist Feminists
Whereas men are oppressed by capitalism,. Women are oppressed by both capitalism and patriarchy
Marxist feminists argue that wives 'serve' workers, produce and socialise new workers, procuring more 'surplus value' (profit) for the economy (Benston)
Women not only provide this unpaid role but also provide a 'reserve army of labour' – extra, cheap and temporary workers who can be engaged and sacked as and when they are needed by the economy (Brugel)



Liberal Feminists

Liberal feminists advocate increasing gender equality through the law and changing values. They claim that power relations and the division of labour within marriage have become more equal, largely as a consequence of changes in women's work patterns


Stresses the pluralism, diversity and fragmentation of modern life
An important aspect of the postmodern family is the ability for the individual to make choices and for members to 'make' or 'construct' their families through interaction
Postmodernism
See no overarching, dominant claims to truth – so there cannot be one dominant, most common or 'correct' type of family
Some feminists may see this idea as a force of liberation; others, such as functionalists, are likely to see it as a source of chaos
There can be no 'normal' or 'natural' form of family relationships or roles – the nuclear family has become fragmented and been dismantled