**Task 2** *(Short Essay – word limit 800 words)* **(AC 1.1)**

Analyse the following statement*:*

*Does who your parents are and what they do for a living matter?*

In order to respond to the above essay title you should identify and evaluate the ways that

1. social factors (e.g. social class, gender, ethnicity, norms, values, behaviour, lifestyle) can affect individuals (e.g. in terms of education, health, attainment, employment) and
2. the implications this may have for wider society.

At least **TWO (2)** theories must be used to develop an evaluation.

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It is an undeniable fact that a person’s parents and childhood experiences can influence their opportunities. This essay will compare and contrast a range of sociological perspectives in an attempt to answer to what extent a person’s family dictates their life outcome.

The Marxist perspective views contemporary capitalist society as being fundamentally shaped by an unequal and exploitative distribution of wealth and power. In this view society is dichotomised into two opposing classes; the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Marx and Engels, 2018). The bourgeoisie is characterised by their ownership of the means of production (factories and resources) and are not required to sell their labour. In contrast, the proletariat are what comprise the working classes, those who must sell their labour in order to live. Since children inherit their parents socio-economic status, Marxists argue that a parent’s occupation and background are vital in the reproduction of capitalism; a bourgeois child will inherit their parent’s wealth and privilege, while a proletariat child will inherit their parent’s limited opportunities and potential poverty (Engels, 1884).

This brings us to socialisation. Socialisation is the process by which we inherit society’s norms and values – what is deemed to be socially acceptable behaviour and beliefs. Primary socialisation is the name used to describe the process by which children first inherit the norms and values of their parents. This is done through ‘role-modelling’, where children observe their parent’s behaviour and seek to replicate it within themselves. This means that a person’s parent’s views will dictate their own initial views on gender, sexuality and more as the child can only replicate what they are exposed to.

It is through this process that Althusser (1970) argues that the family acts as an ideological state apparatus, or a tool of the bourgeoisie, in order to maintain their dominance. Since the bourgeoisie control the dominant ideology, they can utilise this dominance in order to enforce the view that contemporary capitalist society is based on meritocracy, where wealth is based on ability and talent Therefore, children born into a proletariat family will believe their position and condition to be justified and will not challenge bourgeois dominance – limiting their aspirations and career prospects.

In contrast, Functionalism believes that the different agencies of society perform different and interdependent functions (SimplySociology, 2023). Primary socialisation allows for shared values to be taught and thus allows for a harmonious society. Sociologist Talcott Parsons (Tutor2u, 2019) argues that although primary socialisation is a major factor in a person’s initial development, it is interdependent agencies of secondary socialisation influence a person’s future condition far more. School, for example, is an effective institution that, based on attainment, sorts its members into functions that would best suit them and can prepare them for success regardless of their parent’s background. It is important to note that Functionalists do not view meritocracy as a myth, like Marxists, but as the natural condition of society. It is through the harmonious relationship between the family and education that any socio-economic disadvantages that individuals may inherit from their parents may be alleviated and they can perform to their rightful potential and fit the needs of society.

It is through this reasoning that Functionalism can be used to critique the Marxist view. Since Functionalists believe that modern society is a meritocracy, Marxists are seeing not a class difference but an achievement difference. If children of working class parents studied and worked harder then they would be able to attain better paying jobs and conditions. However, this is not the reality; while working class children can attain high positions through hard work, Functionalists overestimate how equalising the school system really is. A study by The Sutton Trust (2007) indicates that significant roles in society have a majority of people who have been privately educated, including over 70% of judges and over half of all CEOs. While not exclusively all privately educated, this does show that wealth plays an important role in deciding career opportunities.

This disparity between quality of education and household income has significant consequences for ethnic minority groups in the UK. Only 16.5% of Black students attained 3 A grades or better at A level during the 2020-2021 school year (UK Government, 2022a), with Black households most likely to have a weekly income of less than £600 a week in 2021 compared to other ethnic groups(UK Government, 2022b). Although this data does show that income is tied at least to attainment, it reveals another more sinister fact – that race plays an undeniable role in both attainment and wealth. A fact that both theories fail to address.

The significance of a person’s parents in determining their future outcome has proven to be undeniable, with both economic and social factors at play. While Functionalism does prove the importance of institutions maintaining harmony and social order it is clear that by utilising conflict theories such as Marxism we can reveal and highlight social inequalities. However, with such a strict focus on economics the Marxist perspective fails to recognise how other factors, such as race, can affect the lives of not only modern, working class people but their children as well.

Word Count: 851

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