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QUESTIONS: 1. WHAT IS FAMILY?

2. DISCUSS THE FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY

3. DISCUSS THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY

4. DISCUSS YOUR NUCLEAR FAMILY

5. DRAW YOUR FAMILY TREE

**What is a Family**

The dictionary defines family in several ways. One definition is "a fundamental social group in society typically consisting of one or two parents and their children." While this definition is a good starting point, there are several modern family structures that are excluded by this definition, such as childless couples or other variations on the family unit. Another definition is "Two or more people who share goals and values, have long-term commitments to one another and reside usually in the same dwelling." This definition encompasses the vast majority of modern family units.

The traditional family consists of a father, mother and children. This is the family shown on television as the standard family. However, the 21st century showcases a variety of family units, some very different from the standard of the 1950s. Today, children are also often raised in single parent homes, by grandparents or by homosexual parents. Some families opt to have no children, or cannot have children due to some medical or emotional barrier. The idea that parents and children make a family is a basic definition; however, in order to accurately acknowledge other family structures, a broader definition is necessary. In addition to a more universal family definition, there are also plenty of people who consider a group of friends to be family, and adults who consider pets from goldfish to horses as defining members of the family unit.

Many people consider friends to be as close or even closer than extended (or immediate) family. People who have lost close family members may create a family unit of friends with similar interests and goals to become replacements or enhancements to a lacking family structure. This type of family unit, while untraditional, can be just as close, if not closer, than a traditional family structure. Friends are chosen by an individual; at times, these people may be more special or important than the family a person was born with. In addition, some people who have supportive families also have an extensive network of friends who they consider to be a second family or as additions to their blood or legal relatives.

Pets can also become members of a family unit. Pets add an element of responsibility to a family, particularly for children. For couples who cannot, or choose not to, have children, pets can be a replacement and be loved as dearly as children. Pets, such as dogs and cats, are cared for as additional family members by many people and are mourned as such as well when they pass away.

Rather than simply defining family by a dictionary definition, each individual should look to define a family by his own standards, enriching the dictionary's definition. You can have several families in your lifetime, even several families at once if you choose. Regardless of how you choose to define your family unit, whether it is traditional or unique, your definition is of the family unit that works for you. As the saying goes, "Family is what you make it." Whether made of blood relatives, friends, or pets, or a combination of these, your family can offer you the support you need to thrive.

**Discuss the Functions of a Family**

As a social institution the family has certain functions to perform for the society and the individual. It plays important role for survival, protection and support, socialisation and societal identification of the individual. The Family serves the society as an instrument of sexual control and cultural transmission.

The functions of the family are divided into two categories: Essential and Nonessential functions.

**The essential functions of the family are as follows:**

**1. Satisfaction of Sex Needs:**

This is the essential function which the family performs. The sex instinct is the natural and biological urge of human beings. The satisfaction of sex desire requires that male and female should live together as husband and wife.

Hence, family is the only place where husband and wife can satisfy their sex instinct. Family satisfies sexual desires of male and female through the institution of marriage. Without family the satisfaction of sex needs is impossible.

**2. Reproduction:**

The family is an institution par excellence of the reproduction and the rearing of children. The task of race perpetuation has always been an important function of the family. An ongoing society must replace its members. It primarily relies on the biological reproduction of its members.

**3. Sustenance Function:**

The family provides the daily care and personal protection to its dependant members namely aged, children etc. The family is an insurance for the individual in times of crisis. Family provides protection and shelter to orphans, widow and her children.

**4. Provision of a Home:**

Establishment of household life or provision of a home is another essential function of the family. The desire for a home is a powerful instinct for men as well as women. Family provides an opportunity for husband and wife to live together happily.

**5. Socialisation:**

Man is a social animal. But he is not born human or social. He is made social through the process of socialisation. Socialisation refers to the process through which the growing individual learns the habits, attitudes, values and beliefs of the social group into which he has been born and becomes a person.

The family presents itself to the child as an educative group of most fundamental kind. It presents itself as a concrete manifestation of the cultural process. It is the first social environment which trains and educates the newborn child.

**The nonessential functions of a family are as follows:**

**1. Economic Functions:**

Family serves as an economic unit. The earlier agricultural family was a self-supporting ‘business enterprise’. It was producing whatever the family needed. Today the importance of family as an economic unit has been lessened as most of the goods for consumption are purchased readymade from the market.

The family still remains as an important economic unit from the point of view of ‘consumer’s outlay’. In other words, the modern family is a consuming unit and not a self-sufficient ‘producing unit’.

**2. Property Transformation:**

The family acts as an agency for holding and transmission of property. Most families accumulate much property and other forms of wealth. The family transmits these properties.

**3. Religious Function:**

Family is a centre for religious training of the children. The children learn various religious virtues from their parents. The religious and moral training of children has always been bound up with the home.

**4. Educative Function:**

The family provides the bases of all the child’s latter formal education learning. Family is the first school of children. The child learns the first letters under the guidance of parents. The child learns language, behaviour and manners from the parents. The virtues of love, cooperation, obedience, sacrifice and discipline are learnt by the child in the family.

**5. Recreational Function:**

The family provides recreation to its members. The members of the family visit their relations. They enjoy various occasions in the family jointly and derive pleasure.

The family has given up some of the functions that it performed in the past. But by and large, the family remains the most important primary group in society for accomplishing certain essential functions.

**Discuss the African Traditional Family**

Scholars of the African traditional family agree that the one widely known aspect that distinguishes the African traditional family, say from the European one, is the perversity of polygamy. Although polygamy is the act of an individual being married to more than one spouse at the same time, the more commonly practiced in Africa is polygyny “…. the legal marriage of one man to two or more women concurrently – is permitted.” As a result of its perversity, the presence and absence of polygyny was a significant determinant and indicator of the nature of virtually every African social group; whether tribe, clan, or extended family, whether matrilineality or patrilineality was practiced, bride price existed, and how children were raised.

Polygyny was widely practiced in Africa and it often formed the backbone of the traditional African family patterns. According to Mair, “….the polygynous joint family, consisting of a man, his wives, and their children, is the ideal for most Africans.” Studies conducted from the 1930s to 1950s indicate that polygyny was common virtually in all regions of Africa.

In spite of the perversity of polygyny, there was evidence that it was on the decline. The major reason cited is that with increasing modern influences, marrying more than one wife became an economic burden. Even traditionally, ordinary citizens could not achieve marrying more than one wife. Often only Kings, chiefs and men who had wealth could afford it.

Moreover, during the period earlier than 1940s, marriages remained completely matrilocal during the couple’s entire life. But however, after a few years of contact with white civilization wife go their husbands’ home if the marriage was thought stable especially after the couple has had two or more children.

**Discuss Your Nuclear Family**

My nuclear family is made up of my parents and my three sisters. My dad’s name is Daniel, mums’ is Uzoamaka. I come in third place amongst the children. My two elder sisters are Ewomazino and Elogehene while my younger sister goes by Uzezi. From our names I am sure you can tell we are from Delta state, although my mum is originally from Imo state. My dad is rarely available due to his job as a medical personnel in the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), as a result we are all closer to our mom who is business woman; not that she is constantly available but it’s easier for her to make appearances because she is her own employer. As of recently our roles in the family have changed. My eldest sibling is currently serving the country while the other is to graduate from tertiary institution in June – if the pandemic allows. I am also rarely around due to school and also because I don’t spend most of my holidays in Port-harcourt with my parents. As for my younger sister she is still completing her secondary school education and gets keen attention from my mum in order not to fall of tracks. My parents still have the same role as before: provide our basic necessities until we can stand our own and also serve as father and mother figures, lending shoulders when we need one to cry on. It’s easier however to let them off the hook when they cannot fall through because we are more understanding of them as grown adults now.

**Draw Your Family Tree**

Patriarchal Family Matriarchal Family

Favour

Omamoke

Elogehene

Ewomazino

Child 5

Child 1 (Mom)

Child 4

Child 3

Child 2

Child 4 (Dad)

Child 3

Child 1

Child 2

Grandparents 2

Grandparents 1