Outline and explain two ways changes in gender roles have impacted on the functions of the family. [10]

One way that changes in gender roles have impacted on the functions of the family is through women's involvement in paid work. As society has progressed towards greater gender equality in the workplace through policies such as the Equal Pay Act and the Equality Act, more women have taken on paid employment. This provides them with financial independence from their husbands and also provides their family with greater economic security, at least in theory. The economic function was highlighted by Murdock as being one of the four functions of the family that provided benefits for both the members of the family and for wider society. However, Murdock (and subsequently Parsons) saw this as being achieved by the male in the family and so the change to having a dual income family changes the burden of the economic function from being on a male breadwinner to both partners. However, feminists would argue that women are still expected to take on the majority of the unpaid labour in the home as well, so there is little change in that regard.

A second way in which changing gender roles have impacted on the functions of the family is through gender socialisation. Whilst the traditional nuclear family was based upon children being socialised into their gender roles by their same sex parent, these roles were based upon a biological division of labour, with males taking on the instrumental role or being the breadwinner, and females the expressive role, of caring for and nurturing the family. As women have become more involved in paid labour, this has changed the way in which young girls are socialised. In contemporary society, girls are socialised into having career ambitions of their own, through observation of their mothers being in paid labour. This alters the functions of the family, as it no longer reproduces an instrumental and expressive role, but rather combined conjugal roles that are undertaken by both males and females, which impacts on the expectations of their children to take on both roles in the future.

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Item A

Some sociologists have argued that gender roles within the family are becoming more equal in society. With more flexible working, changing perceptions of masculinity and women's changing priorities, both male and female responsibilities in the home have changed over the past 50 years.

2. Applying material from item A, analyse two reasons for changes to gender roles within relationships. [10]

One reason for changes in gender roles within relationships is 'women's changing priorities' (Item A). Over the past 50 years, the rise of feminism in society has provided women with greater opportunities in education and employment and this has led to women having higher aspirations than in previous generations. Sharpe outlined this change when examining the attitudes of schoolgirls to their future in the 1970s and the early 1990s. In the 1970s, girls prioritised love, marriage and children, but when a similar cohort of student were asked almost 20 years later, their priorities had changed to education and careers. This has impacted on gender roles as women are less likely to choose to marry earlier in life and as a consequence are usually more financially independent and have different attitudes to relationships than previously, preferring a partnership of equals and having higher expectations of their partners contributing towards domestic labour and childcare.

A second reason for the changes in gender roles within relationships has been the 'changing perceptions of masculinity' (Item A). In contemporary society, males are more likely to define themselves by their role as a father than by their occupation. Beck argues that this is a result of the greater insecurity in late modern society around employment, whereas fatherhood is a lifelong commitment. As a result, males invest more time in their children and play a more active role in child-rearing than in previous generations. This, combined with higher expectations of men to contribute to domestic labour have created more equality between males and females in their relationships. However, feminists would argue that males are less likely to deal with the emotional burdens of children and women are still most likely to be seen as the primary caregiver in relationships, despite increased male involvement.