



Wales
HIGH SCHOOL
SIXTH FORM

Academic Reading List

Sociology

Sociology

Consensus Theories – Functionalism

The sociological perspective, functionalism, developed from the writings of the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917).

Emile Durkheim argued that society was like a human body (the organic analogy). Society was made up of various institutions that acted like the organs of the body: they all needed to be functioning properly for the body to function. Problems in one area of society (such as high levels of crime, for example) could be a symptom of dysfunctions somewhere else (just as a headache is not always caused by banging your head). In order for society to run smoothly there has to be the correct balance of social cohesion and social control.

By social cohesion, Durkheim meant the extent to which people in society were bound together in common purpose. By social control, he meant the extent to which people were prevented from behaving in an anti-social manner. He believed the good society had neither too little nor too much of either of these qualities. Too little social cohesion and you have a selfish society where people do not look out for each other. Too much, and people do not seek personal advancement which stifles progress. Too little social control and you have lawlessness and chaos. Too much and you have oppression and tyranny. He argued that this balance was best maintained by consensus: i.e. agreement.

Critical to functionalism is the idea of socialisation. This is the process that creates a value consensus and therefore social solidarity.

There are two stages of socialisation: Primary socialisation: learning the particularistic values of family and community through family (occurs at a young age). Secondary socialisation: learning the universalistic values of wider society through education, media and other institutions.

Functionalism is essentially a conservative idea, based on the view that social change is a gradual process that happens naturally when the consensus shifts.

Sociology

Conflict theory: Marxism

As is often the case, there are similarities between the functionalist and Marxist case: they both think that families perform important functions for the society as it is currently constituted. The difference is that Marxists disagree with the way society is currently constituted. Instead of seeing a consensual society which works to benefit all its members, they see a society based on class struggle, which works to benefit a rich minority.

Engels (1884) on Family: Engels argued that family had a clear economic function for capitalism, by ensuring that wealth remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Family relations, based on clear legal contracts, facilitate inheritance and therefore when rich people die it is their children who keep hold of their wealth. For Engels, then, family is all about blood lines and proof of parentage.

Zaretsky (1976) on Family: An interesting variation on Parsons' warm bath theory, Zaretsky argued that family life gave proletarian men something they could control and a space where they could be the "boss". This provided a clear function for capitalism because it meant that workers would tolerate the powerlessness and frustration of being exploited at work because they had this private domain where they were "king of the castle" and could take out their stress and frustrations. This again ties in with Fran Ansley's Marxist-feminist perspective of women being the "takers of shit".

Marxists see families as essentially a conservative institution that helps to preserve capitalism. They also weaken the position of individual workers in relation to the boss. If you think you are not being paid enough or being treated badly, a single person may well choose to walk away and hope that they can find better employment soon. Or they can join with other workers and go on strike and temporarily do without pay by way of a protest to push for better pay or conditions. But when that worker has to also take dependents into account (e.g. a spouse and children) that becomes a much more difficult decision. This weakness benefits the boss.

Evaluating Marxist views on the role of families and households

Engels' theory is certainly not a very romantic take on marriage! Clearly family must be about more than what happens to your money when you die. After all, people who do not have property also choose to live in families (although Engels would argue this is because they are influenced by bourgeois ideology). Functionalists point out that, in the vast majority of societies, humans live in families and that in fact the essential form and function of those families remain quite similar: it is not simply a feature of capitalist society. However, a counter-argument to that is that Parsons himself suggested that the nuclear family evolved to suit an industrial economy (as we'll consider in the next section) which could be said to back the idea that it is a feature of capitalism rather than all societies. Despite some experiments with communal living and alternative households immediately after the Russian Revolution, people have continued to live in family groups in communist countries too. Zaretsky's theory is clearly outdated: it assumes the worker is male and that there is only one worker in the family. It also ignores the other benefits that all family members may get from family life: the emotional support, comfort and generally the positive benefits.

Sociology

Conflict theory: Feminism

Feminist theory is a major branch of sociology. It is a set of structural conflict approaches which views society as a conflict between men and women. There is the belief that women are oppressed and/or disadvantaged by various social institutions. Feminist theory aims to highlight the social problems and issues that are experienced by women. Some of the key areas of focus include discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, objectification, economic inequality, power, gender role, and stereotypes. Feminists share a common goal in support of equality for men and women. Although all feminists strive for gender equality, there are various ways to approach this theory.

Some of the general features of feminism include:

- An awareness that there are inequalities between men and women based on power and status.
- These inequalities can create conflict between men and women.
- Gender roles and inequalities are usually socially constructed.

An awareness of the importance of patriarchy: a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women.

Types of Feminism

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism is rooted in classic liberal thought and these feminists believe that equality should be brought about through education and policy changes. They see gender inequalities as rooted in the attitudes of social and cultural institutions, so they aim to change the system from within. Liberal feminists argue that women have the same capacity for moral reasoning and agency as men, but that the patriarchy has denied them the opportunity to practice this. Due to the patriarchy, these feminists believe that women have been pushed to remain in the privacy of their household and thus have been excluded from participating in public life. Liberal feminists focus mainly on protecting equal opportunities for women through legislation. The Equal Rights Amendment in 1972 was impactful for liberal feminists which enforced equality on account of sex.

Marxist feminism

Marxist feminism evolved from the ideas of Karl Marx, who claimed capitalism was to blame for promoting patriarchy, meaning that power is held in the hands of a small number of men. Marxist feminists believe that capitalism is the cause of women's oppression and that this oppression in turn, helps to reinforce capitalism. These feminists believe that women are exploited for their unpaid labour (maintaining the household and childcare) and that capitalism reinforces that women are a reserve for the work force and they must create the next generation of workers. According to Marxist feminists, the system and traditional family can only be replaced by a socialist revolution that creates a government to meet the needs of the family.

Radical feminism

Radical feminists posit that power is key to gender oppression. They argue that being a woman is a positive thing but that this is not acknowledged in patriarchal societies. The main belief of radical feminists is that equality can only be achieved through gender separation and political lesbianism. They think the patriarchy can be defeated if women recognize their own value and strength, establish trust with other women, and form female-based separatist networks in the private and public spheres.

Sociology

Other websites that you can read information on:

<https://www.tutor2u.net/sociology/reference/what-is-feminism-introduction-to-a-level-sociology>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=6iaazUBqWzI&embeds_referring_e_uri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tutor2u.net%2F&feature=emb_imp_woyt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuUX2-eByrc>