Perspectives in Modern Social Theory

SOC 306

University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
Open and Distance Learning Course Series Development

General Editor: Prof. Bayo Okunade

Vice-Chancellor's Message

The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, IPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple plat form for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfilment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.

Prof. Abel Idowu Olayinka
Vice-Chancellor

Foreword

As part of its vision of providing education for "Liberty and Development" for Nigerians and the International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre's provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.
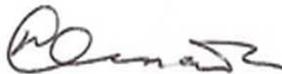
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About this course manual

Perspectives in Modern Social TheorySOC 306 has been produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. All course manuals produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centreare structured in the same way, as outlined below.

How this course manual is structured

The course overview

The course overview gives you a general introduction to the course. Information contained in the course overview will help you determine:

- If the course is suitable for you.
- What you will already need to know.
- What you can expect from the course.
- How much time you will need to invest to complete the course.

The overview also provides guidance on:

- Study skills.
- Where to get help.
- Course assignments and assessments.
- Margin icons.

We strongly recommend that you read the overview *carefully* before starting your study.

The course content

The course is broken down into Study Sessions. Each Study Session comprises:

- An introduction to the Study Session content.
- Study Session outcomes.
- Core content of the Study Session with a variety of learning activities.
- A Study Session summary.
- Assignments and/or assessments, as applicable.
- Bibliography

Your comments

After completing Perspectives in Modern Social Theory we would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to give us your feedback on any aspect of this course. Your feedback might include comments on:

- Course content and structure.
- Course reading materials and resources.
- Course assignments.
- Course assessments.
- Course duration.
- Course support (assigned tutors, technical help, etc.)

Your constructive feedback will help us to improve and enhance this course.

Course Overview

Welcome to Perspectives in Modern Social Theory SOC 306

Throughout human history, man has been largely occupied with the quest for knowledge. This search has been in the direction of trying discover man himself, or more generally understand social relations or the society as a totality. A cursory look at the works of early theorists like Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Karl Marx, George Simmel, George Mead, Charles Cooley among others would reveal that they were remarkably interested in the nature of social life, how it originated, developed and more especially how the perceived society, social events and social interactions differed.

The answers which sociologists obtain from the questions that they ask depend to a large extent on availability of accurate data. However, there are differences in interpretation of data based on the sociologist's general view of the factors that govern society. The tendency to view society from a standpoint of what society is like gives rise to the existence of a number of sociological theoretical perspectives.

A theoretical perspective consists of a way of looking at various aspects of the world. It is an orientation that suggests methods for studying social experience and finding explanations for it. Theoretical models serve as aids. They are mental constructs that allow one to visualize things. A sociological theoretical perspective may focus on particular features of society, which the sociologist wishes to highlight. While one perspective helps to formulate a picture, it necessarily limits experience by giving only a restricted view. Nonetheless, a good perspective also serves a function of broadening horizon of what one can see. In all these there are similarities within the sociological theoretical perspective, and no one perspective provides a complete picture of society. Through the years sociology has evolved several theoretical perspective representing overall views of what society is really like, and how social phenomenon should be interpreted within contemporary. There are three major theoretical respective. They are structural-functionalist, conflict and symbolic interactionist perspectives.

This course is therefore designed to expose students to the perspectives in modern social theory. The course has been divided into five (5) different units to cover the course content.

Getting around this course manual

Margin icons

While working through this course manual you will notice the frequent use of margin icons. These icons serve to "signpost" a particular piece of text, a new task or change in activity; they have been included to help you to find your way around this course manual.

A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarize yourself with the icons and their meaning before starting your study.

Activity	**Assessment**	**Assignment**	**Case study**
Discussion	**Group Activity**	**Help**	**Outcomes**
Note	**Reflection**	**Reading**	**Study skills**
Summary	**Terminology**	**Time**	**Tip**

Study Session 1

The Sociological Perspective

Introduction

We will commence this course with an over of sociological perspective. In doing so, we will point out the different levels of sociological perspective. We will also discuss the importance of sociological perspective and the concept of sociological imagination.

Learning Outcomes

Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

1.1 Identify different levels of sociological perspective

1.2 explain the concept of sociological imagination

Terminology

Sociological perspective	The study of human life and social interactions, as well as how those interactions shape groups and society as a whole.
Sociological imagination	A person's ability to connect his personal experiences to the society at large

1.1 Sociological Perspective

Central to the discipline of sociology is a distinctive point of view generally referred to as the sociological perspective. This perspective of sociology involves seeing through the outside appearance of people's actions and organizations (Berger, 1963). By this, he meant that sociologists identify general patterns in the behaviour of particular individuals. This in no way downplays the uniqueness of the individual. Sociologists are especially interested in how people cluster into groupings with others who have similar backgrounds and characteristics. As a result they focus on the group associations and relationships of these persons under observation.

Sociologists' distinctive perspective also points to the fact that they recognize that various categories or groups of people are quite often affected differently by society. As a result of this situation the general categories into which people are grouped go a long way to determine

their particular life experiences. To illustrate this fact there is abundant evidence that societies do not always have similar expectations from people of various stages in life. For example, because societies attach their particular meanings to age, the differences between children and adults are not just dependent on biological factors. Rather they are largely influenced by what the society sees as appropriate role for those in a particular state of life. There is abundant evidence that different societies do not always have the same expectations of people who are regarded as being of a particular age. For instance most Nigerian traditional societies accorded higher level of independence to children than is the situation today in modern industrial societies. This former situation is also relatively manifested today in rural societies where especially male children are allowed a much greater freedom to make personal decisions what obtains in the urban centres. Macionis (1997:2) also reports that there is high level of independent among children of native American Hopi as compared with other North American children.

The sociological perspective involves seeing beyond what meets the eye in observing social scenes or activities. It, therefore, provides additional insights (not perhaps readily observable by others) about why people act in particular ways. As a result of this perspective in their study of society, sociologists are interested to discover how what appears to be individual decision or action is in reality the socially generated decision, which is the result of being a group member. For instance, in addition to personal reasons for marrying early, or seeking a particular employment or for seeking employment directly after primary education, social forces are recognized to be actively at work.

Sociology is more than just acquiring knowledge; it involves developing a sociological imagination as rightly put by Wright Mills (1959). Sociology teaches us to identify general patterns of behavior in particular individuals and to be systematic in explaining the social influences on these behavior patterns. A sociologist must look at a wide array of evidence before accepting any single explanation. According to Haralambos and Holborn, (2008), although sociologists vary in their perspectives, methods and values, they all share the same aim of understanding and explaining the social world. Combining the insights offered by different approaches might be the best way of achieving this goal.

ITQ

Question

The term "sociological imagination" was first coined by _____.

- A. Berger
- B. Durkheim
- C. Lemert
- D. Mills

Feedback

You are correct to select option D [Mills]

Structural theories of society, such as functionalism and Marxism, emphasize the importance of society in shaping human behavior. On the other hand, interactionism emphasizes the importance of human behavior in shaping society. Many sociologists today believe that good sociology must examine both the structure of society and social interaction. They believe that it is only by combining the study of the major changes in the society and individual lives that sociologists can develop their understanding of social life. This idea is not new. It was supported by Max Weber and Anthony Gidden's theory of structuration where he explained the duality of the structure. However Mills called it the ability to study the structure of society at the same time as individuals lives the 'sociological imagination'. Mills further argued that sociological imagination allowed people to understand their private troubles' in terms of 'public issues' 'Unemployment' war and marital breakdown are all experienced by people in terms of the problems they produce in their personal lives. They react to them as individuals and their reactions have consequences for society as a whole. However, to Mills, these issues can only be fully understood in the context of wider social forces. For example, very specific circumstances might lead to one person becoming unemployed, but when unemployment rates in society as a whole rise, it becomes a public issue that needs to be explained. The sociologist has to consider the 'economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals'

1.2 The Sociological Imagination

The sociological imagination refers to the ability to understand the relationship between our lives as individuals and the large social forces that help shape our lives. This advocates that human behaviour must be understood in a broader social context. Most societies for instance, have a long cultural-heritage which encourages self-reliance and independence. Despite the 'heritage of self-reliance', in these societies, such societies are also bound by social structure and history. According to Marx (1978), he argued that men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. In this lecture, we shall consider what the sociological imagination is, and then examine its importance in understanding human behaviour and society in general.

According to Mills, then, sociology should be about examining the biography of individuals in the context of the history of societies. The sociological is not just to use to sociologist; it is important to all members of society if they wish to understand, change and improve their lives. Perhaps sociology can be seen as succeeding when it allows people to achieve this imagination, and the theories examined in this course can be judged in these terms.

Box 1.0: The learning point and things to remember in this study unit includes:

- Sociological perspectives involves seeing beyond what meets the eye in observing social scenes or activities

- Sociological imagination requires us, above all, to think ourselves away from the familiar routines of our daily lives in order to look at them anew.

ITQ

Question

How is sociological imagination related to a person's awareness of themselves in the society?

    A. It allows us to make the connection of what is happening to us personally to the wider, broader social world.
    B. It allows us to go beyond personal observations to understand the more complex social issues.
    C. It allows us to see the consequences of certain situations on a social level.

Feedback

All the answers are correct.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, you learnt:

- The 3 major sociological perspectives include; Functionalism, conflict and Symbolic interactionism perspective
- A sociologist must look at a wide array of evidence before accepting any single explanation.
- Sociological perspective is important to the sociologist because the discipline involves the ability to think imaginatively and to detach oneself as far as possible from preconceived ideas about social relationships.
- Sociological imagination is the ability to 'think ourselves away' from the familiar routines of our daily lives in order to look at them anew.

Assessment

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SAQ 1.1 (tests Learning Outcome 1.1)
How can we correctly define sociological perspective?

SAQ 1.2 (tests Learning Outcome 1.2)
What is sociological imagination?

Assessment

Bibliography
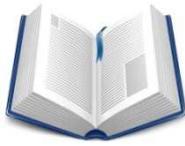
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Study Session 2

The Social Theory

Introduction

We commenced this course with an examination of the levels of social perspective and the concept of social imagination. We will continue our study in session by exploring social theory: its meaning, levels of analysis and functions.

Learning Outcomes

Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

2.1 define social theory

2.2 identify levels of sociological analysis

2.3 enumerate functions of social theory

Terminology

Theory	A supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained.
Social theory	Frameworks of empirical evidence used to study and interpret social phenomena

2.1 Social Theory: Meaning

Sociology has been distinguished by its array of theory. Theory helps us understand society better. Without theory, we shall be left with a mass or corpus of data, facts that at best remain unintelligible (or silent). A theory is an account of the world which goes beyond what we can see and measure. It embraces a set of interrelated definitions and relationships that organizes our concepts of and understanding of the empirical world in a systemic way. (Marshal, 1998).

The word theory is used in many different ways. It is sometimes used refer to models or ways or perceiving reality which impose perceptual frameworks or structures on that reality. In sociology, for instance, the idea of social evolution, structural-functionalism, conflict perspective, symbolic interactionism are examples of theoretical models used to by sociologists to explain the nature of social life or the way society is organized.

A theory is also used as an expected idea or fact about a phenomenon or the relationship between two or more phenomena. In another context a theory is seen as a set of logically consistent logically complete definitions and propositions about human group life. A theory is also defined as a systematic explanation for a set of facts and laws. A fact here refers to something that has been observed, while a law is a universal gene rationalization about a class of facts. Theories, it is claimed usually arise from a leap of imagination, from inspiration or from what is called the Creative approach to the observe character or behaviour of things. At inception, theories usually contain abstract; unverified or unclarified concepts and statements about the behaviour of the things and their interrelationships. The veracity statements or concepts contained in theories therefore requires verification. Furthermore a theory is a set of ideas that provides an explanation for something. A sociological theory is a set of ideas that provides an explanation for society.

To Macionis and Plummer (2005), a theory is a statement of how and why specific facts are related. Theory is an attempt to make sense of our experiences. 'It is a set of interrelated statements that provides an explanation for a class of events. It allows the binding together of a multitude of facts so that we may comprehend them all at once. With theory, we can see relationships among events that are not evident in isolated bits of data. And it allows us to organise our search for knowledge, about the many different and often puzzling aspect of our experience. A good theory, then tells sociologists which facts are important, how they are related to one another, and what conclusions one draw from them' (Zanden, 1990). Sociological theory is therefore seen as a body of ideas, usually abstract and complex, used to explain human society. Through sociological theory, we make intelligible and comprehensible how human beings live their social life. The main function of social theory is to illuminate, and clarify. Theory has an explanatory power, linking to otherwise unrelated classes of facts together. Theory occupies a central place in sociology (Ritzer, 2008). Sociology is highly theoretical discipline. In sociology you have different theoretical perspectives (Giddens, 2006).

Following Zanden, (1990), a theoretical perspective is a way of looking at various features of the world, an orientation that suggests methods for studying the social experience and finding explanation for it. Each theoretical perspective has a commanding fellowship, disciples or advocates, who propagate, use its core assumptions. Some sociologists follow rigidly one theoretical perspective in all their social analyses of situations and social problems. Others, are more flexible and shift or use these perspectives depending on the nature of social problem, or issue being discussed. However, three main theoretical perspectives seem dominant in sociology. These are Functionalist, Conflict and Symbolic interactionism. However, a way of seeing is a way of not seeing.

ITQ
Question
Theories must be _____.

A. formulated prior to research
    B. exclusively sociological
    C. based on pre-existing facts
    D. testable

Feedback
The correct is D [testable]

2.2 Levels of Sociological Analysis

In pursuing sociology's subject matter, some sociologists concentrate on small groups and their characteristics patterns and processes of intimate and face to face interaction between people. This small scale of sociology is called micro sociology. 'Micro sociology involves the detailed study of what people say, do and think; moment by moment as they go about their daily lives'. In the contrast to this there is another form of sociological enquiry by which sociologists concentrate on larger groups and attempts to explain the sociologists concentrate on larger groups and attempts to explain the fundamental patterns and processes of large scale social relations. This is called macro sociology. The reality however is that both levels of sociology are usually necessary for an adequate understanding of events and activities in society. This is because both the micro and macro aspects of society inter-relate with influence and shape each other. Thus, for instance, while the large society shapes the individual and small groups, it is in turn shaped by them. Of vital importance is the fact that whatever level the sociologist's focus is on, concentration is on social and not individual behaviour. Sociology's subject matter is the group. The size of the group may, however, vary according to the sociologist's interest. Sociology can be seen as the social science which seeks to discover the connections that bring together all social sciences into a comprehensive integrated science of society. However, sociology is more than just a gap-filler for other social sciences. The reality is that the discipline does have its own distinctive subject area, namely, the patterns and processes of all human social relations.

According to Nnonyelu, (2009), the dominant perspectives could be could be classified under macro or micro sociological theories or, system versus social action theories or seen along the perspectives of positivists or phenomenologist. Olusegun (2013), in Olutayo and Akanle (eds), stated that there are two broad levels of theoretical in sociology. These levels are generally considered as macro/structure and micro/agency analyses. The works of many sociological theorists fall within one of these broad categories. Macro/structure sociological analysis is theoretical attempt to explain social phenomenon or deal with society by the way of examining the entire or substantial aspect of structure or system of society. As Chakravorty's (2009) explained theories that

focused on structure are mainly 'concerned with how societies are organized, developed and what methods and strategies are adopted to respond to the vagaries of life that also include deviance and unsocial element'. According to Babbie (2005) subject of interest for theorists of macro-structural persuasion may include 'struggle among economic classes in a society, interrelations among major institutions in society, such as government, religion, and family'. Structural-functionalism and Conflict theories are examples of macro theory; this macro theory is also called grand theory.

On the other hand Micro/agency level of theoretical analysis in sociology, is more concerned with the individual, action-related level of analysis. Theories of this level concentrate on face to face social interaction to understand and explain social phenomenon. Theorists of this persuasion attempt to understand any system such as large corporate organisations, educational institutions, churches, hospitals, prisons or even the society at large from the analysis of everyday human actions and the meaning attached to them. This goes without saying that micro-theorists prioritize individual roles over the structure (Chakravorty 2009) in theoretical explanation of social world. For example, to understand the institution of family, micro-theorists explore hoe individuals shape and experience family life (Macionis 2007) in contrast to macro approach which views family as a structural system. This level of analysis views all social phenomena and institutions from the constructionist perspective emphasising meaning and interpretation of individual experience as they live their lives. In short, micro sociological theory understands society by asking 'how interaction in micro context affects larger social processes'. Some examples of micro approach to analysis of social world include symbolic interactionism, (Egbue 2002).

2.3 Functions of Social Theory

In sociological researches and analysis, just as in the natural sciences, a theory is used to focused the intellectual attention of the researcher, to his chosen area of interest. In every social institutional level of analysis, theories exist as explanatory models of the problems that prompted their emergence. For example F. Engels (1968) talked of the origin of the family; E.B Tylor (1871) theorized on the origin of religion. Durkheim in his Elementary forms of religious life also theorised on the origin of the religion. Such theorises exist as rational explanation models of the problems they are believed to address. (Obiajulu 1997).

Theory ensues a hypothesis formulation, accepted that the assumptions of any theory must look logically coherent to its adherent in any scientific discipline, there is a need, very often, to verify if the premises on which the assumption of a theory is based is worth retaining. This is important because of the dynamic nature of social phenomena and by implication scientific knowledge arising from them. It is important because such societal changes pose new problem and challenges which need to be analysed for enhanced social life to continue.

ITQ

Question

How will you classify levels of sociological analysis?

Feedback

Level of sociological analysis could be classified under macro or micro sociological theories or, system versus social action theories

As a tentative statement, usually derived from a theory, with a view to knowing if the assumptions of a theory is worth retaining in the light of the new relevant data, a hypothesis has a reinforcing effect on a theory. Theory suggests a hypothesis. Hypothesis directs one mind to determine if the hypothesis, a tentative statement, will be accepted or rejected. In effect, hypothesis is used in verifying a theoretical explanation of a given problem example if one theorizes that virus infection of an operated patient leads to the patient's death. It can be inferred that when a doctor registers increasing rate of unsuccessful operations that such a development may be out of unsanitary nature of the environment on which the surgery has been performed. In this regard one can hypothesize, if one want to verify the above theory that: the more unhygienic a doctor is while operating on a patient the higher the rate of his unsuccessful operations. This guess excludes other factors likely to cause the death of such patients (for example factors like of drug given to them, paramedical staff working with doctor etc). These are excluded for they are not covered by the hypothesis.

If the assumption of a theory is correct, it is expected that a hypothesis derived from such a theory should reinforce the logic sustaining the theory. Going by the example above, if we classify doctors according to their levels of hygienic condition and watch the patients they operate upon, one will expect those operated upon by unhygienic ones to be infested by virus and perhaps die as a result. Where the data collected in the process show the reverse of the expected, the hypothesis is rejected. The rejection spurs further question which makes the scientist take to any of those extraneous variable previously excluded by the rejected hypothesis. The drug may be the issue of interest this time. If the hypothesis arising from this guess is affirmed, the theory of virus infection may be modified. This can lead to emergence of another theory on the same problem. Scientific knowledge is not close-ended. In criminology, an aspect of sociology, we have biological, psychological, ecological, cultural, economic etc theories of crime. None of these is devoid of anomalies.

Theories as a guide to comparative studies, when sociologists are interested in comparing human societies, the aim is often to establish a testable knowledge about them. A theory is indispensable in this regard. Sociological theories on the development of human social institutions have their basic assumptions. It is these assumptions that help the sociologist to classify, systematically arrange the phenomena of interest to him in two or more societies being compared. In this way, theories guiding the comparison process of study can be accepted reformed

reformulated or even rejected. When theories are used to classify ideas the essence is often to show a given scientific community what is meant or expected, without a detailed explanation of the process or assumption of the theories mentioned. For example, to christen a sociologist as a hard-nosed functionalist is indicative that the person so described, perceives social reality from the tradition of conservative sociologist like Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, in a capitalist social framework. In such societies, progressives or radical are concepts that are used to qualify advocates of collective ownership of the means of production. Such classification schemes do attract state attention and interest.

Theories equally assist the sociologist to predict trends of events being studied. When the structural adjustment programme was introduced in Nigeria in 1986, opponents of the policy were quick to point out that the policy has never worked in any periphery nation of the world. In effect Nigeria is bound to be worse off taking the policy as a strategy of development. This prediction has been proved a fact. (Obiajulu 1997).

Box 2.0: The learning point and things to remember in this study unit includes:

- A sociological theory is a set of ideas that provides an explanation for society.
- Level of sociological analysis could be classified under macro or micro sociological theories or, system versus social action theories
- Theory ensues a hypothesis formulation

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, you have learned that:

- A sociological theory is a set of ideas that provides an explanation for human society
- Micro and Macro levels of analysis are the two levels of analysis in sociology
- Social theories are functional

Assessment

Assessment

SAQ 2.1 (tests Learning Outcome 2.1)
How will you define Social theory?

SAQ 2.2 (tests Learning Outcome 2.2)
Differentiate between micro and macro level analysis

SAQ 2.3 (tests Learning Outcome 2.3)
Mention two functions of social theory

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Study Session 3

Structural-Functionalist Perspective

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will discuss the structural-functionalist perspective. You will highlight the major assumptions of this perspective and ihe major issues this perspective tries to explain in sociology. We will cap the session with a critique of the perspective.

Learning Outcomes

Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

3.1 describe structural-functional and their major assumptions

3.2 identify the major theorists of this perspective and their contributions

3.3 point out the basic criticism of the perspective

3.1 Structural-Functionalist Perspective

According to Ritzer (2012), in many ways functionalism enjoyed the status of being almost synonymous with sociology especially in the united state, a hegemony that lasted even until the late 1950s. Functionalism is no doubt one of the most resilient theories in sociology till date. Although it has been variously argued that the theory has waned in relevance and importance. The proponent of this system theory was August Comte (1798-1857), other proponents include Herbert Spencer (1820-1979), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), Functionalism, or Structural Functionalism, or the Functionalist paradigm describes the elements in society that create social stability FOR THE GREATEST NUMBER OF PEOPLE. This paradigm, like the Conflict paradigm, is very interested in the structure of society and how it impacts people's lives. Functionalism compares human societies to living organism and maintains that parts work together to unison to ensure survival and life, every part of the society must function in harmony (equilibrium). Take for example, human beings, for anyone to live, the heart, brain, kidney, liver, legs, intestine, head, eyes, nails and every other part for that matter must perform well and proportionately to guarantee wellbeing and productivity. Once any of these organs does not perform well, sickness and even death may occur. For example if the heart does not supply blood by ceasing to function, the person dies and people start to talk about heart attack or cardiac arrest. The same way parts of human or living organisms must function harmoniously to ensure survival of the organism. Every part of the society must function in agreement if society

would not disintegrate. Society can be described as a group of people who share a common culture, occupy a particular territorial area and feel themselves to constitute a unified and distinct entity. For society to exist, unify and make existence and human interaction orderly, institutions and structures are created to that regulate behaviour behavioural patterns through norms and values that must be inculcated by the society and internalized by members through socialization process. Social structures are patterned relationships among members that have endured over time, so they are not arbitrary and can pattern human actions to create model behavioural patterns. For Otite and Ogionwu (2006), social structure may be considered as abstraction based on observation social relationships that make up society and the social structure is an intricate blend of the people, institutions and subsystems. These form the basic unit of analysis of functionalism. However, Functionalism sees the social structure as creating equilibrium or balance. It also describes the various elements of society that maintain that balance. Families, political institutions (politics), education, religion economy are all examples of social institutions. Within functionalist framework, these institutions must resonate the norms and values of the society to ensure acceptable behaviour since conformity is esteemed while deviation is considered inimical to societal survival. As people are born into the family, it is expected to teach the ideals must be inculcated in the religion, education, economy and so on to prevent snag in the society (or the socialization process). Ritzer and Goodman (2003: 229) opined that the primary concern of functionalism is the large scale social institutions of the society, the interrelationship and constraining effects on actors. For Abraham (1982:75) functionalism is nothing more complicated than asking one of the following questions. What structures are involved? What functions have resulted? What function take place in terms of a given structure?

Similarly according to Olayinka and Olutayo (2013:32), similarly, Rex, (1980:75) considered the claims of functionalism, to appear as emphasis on the importance of the social as distinction between explanation in terms of the motives of individuals and explanation in terms of requirement of social systems, excluding speculation about human motives and has thus appeared to meet the behaviourist type of criticism of sociology; substituting objectivity for subjectivity as determinable factors of human behaviour thus attempting to eliminate value judgement from sociology and bringing the fact that social actions do not only have immediate and isolate consequences but also systematic long term ones. According to the functionalist it is the society that moulds the individual. The individual is thus seen to be at the mercy of the society and when considered within functionalism, it is in relation to the consequences (functions) of the actions. This is because the concept of function and functional prerequisites are central to functionalism. One of its basic premises is that society is structured to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Unfortunately, this perspective ignores minorities and is unable to explain inequality except to say that it must have a social function—it must make society more adaptable—simply because inequality has always existed. Functionalism describes, analyzes, and is interested in any social element that maintains the status quo— keeps things as they are—and maintains social balance between and

among all of the institutions of society (the family, education, religion, law/politics/government, the economy, medicine, and media).

ITQ

Question

_____ a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability

Feedback

Structural-functionalist perspective.

Functionalist view society from the perspective of it being a system. To them, society is a system, a combination of separate parts or interconnected parts that together form a whole. Continuing this analogy, functionalists argued that just as an organism has certain basic needs that must be satisfied if it is to continue to exist. Thus social institutions such as the family, state, education, economy and religion also has basic need that must be met if they society will continue to exist. Social institutions are not seen as an isolated entity rather they are understood with reference to the contribution they make to the system as a whole. The basic needs or necessary condition of existence are known as functional prerequisites of society. Functional prerequisite refers to the strategic, basic and fundamental conditions or means a society must satisfy to be considered healthy and surviving and once these are not met, the society is noted to be in danger and may disintegrate and become extinct. A functionalist for instance may see corruption, violence and execution of criminals as serving as deterrent for others and thus justifying the continuous existence of the supporting institutions like the legal institution due to the function they perform. Hence, even though corruption is very endemic in Nigeria, and so many other African nations, to the extent that Nigeria was rated 35th most corrupt nation in the world by The Transparency International (TI) in 2012, functionalist may still consider corruption as functional in Nigeria and yet argue that anti-corruption crusade; the establishment and empowerment of anti-corruption agencies are functional prerequisites in Nigeria. Just as Davis and Moore (1967) claimed that all societies have some form of social stratification, and George Murdock (1949) maintained that the family exists in every known human society, so did a renowned functionalist Talcott Parsons argue social equilibrium(which entails peace, order, security, protection of lives and property). The process of socialization and social control are fundamental to the equilibrium of the social system. All the parts of the society function for the betterment, upkeep and promotion of order in the society, and that various parts (institutions) has various roles and functions they play in order to maintain peace and solidarity in the society. According to Durkheim crime or deviance is normal for any society. Durkheim further stressed that all agents, organs, structures of the society are functional. Functionalism views society as a system, that is as a set of interconnected parts which together forms a whole. According to Obiajulu (2006). the main assumptions of functionalism can be summarized as being:

1. The view that the society is a functional unity, internally consistent and a harmonious structure which is sustained by its different cultural forms.
2. All routinized social forms, (institutions) have positive functions in the society. It is this functions that justified their continued retention.
3. No society can endure without its established, accepted and shared customs, values, material objects and symbols.
4. The social system is self-regulating. The society has its in-built mechanism for conflict resolution, society resists rapid change. It therefore makes no sense investigating conflict, disharmony, and revolutions in the society.
5. The plausibility of teleological reasoning is explaining social events. The end is the cause of the steps towards its realization for example social rules like incest taboo exist for organized social life to be possible.

ITQ

Question

Which of the following statements are TRUE of structural functional theory?

A. Structural functional theory sees society as a complex and interconnected machine.
B. Structural functional theory uses a macro-level orientation.
C. Both "structural functional theory uses a macro-level orientation" and "sees society as a complex and interconnected machine"
D. All of these are true of structural functional theory.
E. Structural functional theory is focused on individual interactions in society.

Feedback

Option C is correct!

3.2 Pillars of Functionalist Thought in Contemporary Sociological Analysis

3.2.1 Talcott Parsons (1902- 1979)

The contributions of Talcott Parsons to functionalism appear greater than that of any other functionalist (Olutayo and Olayinka 2013:34). In the same vein (Obiajulu 2006:44) confirms the above assertion, parson developed functionalism to its highest level. Influenced by Max Weber's theory of social action, Parson's unit of analysis of what makes for social order is individual action. He argued that individual action is goal-centre. Parsons works on functionalism were so great and ambitions that his name is nearly synonymous with functionalism, especially in American Sociology. (Olutayo and Olayinka 2013:35). Parson developed and

published his first major work. The structure of social action (1937). The fundamental goal of Parsons theorising was on the identification of the contribution that social organisation and arrangements made to the production and reproduction of social order (Crow 2005, Turner 1998). His motive was to provide a general (grand) theory that was capable of accounting for the "smooth", "harmonious" and "orderly" existence of society as against the extent explanation of classical philosopher like Thomas Hobbes' war of everyone against everyone; Spencers' survival of the fittest and everyone to himself/herself, God for us all. He therefore like other functionalists, hinged his theory on value consensus, roles and expectations within physical and social allowance, institutional normative regulation to human actions to ensure conformity through efficacious socialisation and internalisation of "agreed" social ideals. Parsons functionalism is nothing but an explanation of the social institutions as the cornerstones upon which society rests, the functional interrelationships and how human behaviours are conditioned to exterminate dissent and ensure conformity is thus the desirable (functional) as conflict is the antithetical and not to be tolerated. To achieve social harmony therefore, roles are created and expectations attached to them as governed by rules (norms) to make actions predictable towards the achievement of the ends. Implicit in the forgoing is the unwavering desire by Parsons to ensure survival of the society. To achieve this therefore, there are minimum criteria that the social system must satisfy and this is what Parsons called Functional Prerequisites (Olutayo and Olayinka 2013:37). Any society that could not satisfy these prerequisite is doomed to disintegration. For Abraham (1982), in Olutayo and Olayinka 2013:37, for easy analysis, these functionalism prerequisite could be grouped into 3: Functional prerequisite with respective to the individual, functional prerequisite with respect to the society (as regards mechanisms for social control, functional prerequisite with respect to culture.)

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ITQ

Question

Media uses and gratifications are societal.

    A. True
    B. False

Feedback

Reflect on the two; which sounds more like it exists outside of individual personal choice: functions or uses?

The statement is false because while media uses are societal, gratifications are personal choices

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Functional Prerequisite

Parsons viewed society as a system. He argued that any social change has four basic functional prerequisites: adaptation, goal attainment, integration and pattern maintenance. The functional prerequisites given by parson have come to be popularly known as the acronym AGIL, A for adaptation, G for goal attainment, I for integration and L for latency for pattern maintenance.

Adaptation: the society must over-power environmental constraints, if it must survive. A group of people that live in "harsh" environment must device socio-cultural and physical means that will ensure their survival. Suitable clothing, shelter, rules, values and general behavioural pattern must be evolved to achieve adaptation. The economic institution is often cited as the institution that performs this role but it is important to note that there should be no clear cut or strict institutional allocation of roles in the AGIL schema as functions may overlap across the institutions depending on the society in question as it relates with its environment (Olutayo and Olayinka 2013:37).

Goal attainment: presupposes that every society has goals that must be met to ensure survival. The political institution is the favoured institution in the literature for this goal (role) as the government especially as democracy gains ground, is expected to coordinate activities and set national agenda through policies. Goal are also set by individual families, entrepreneurs and even within religious bodies as "mini societies" (Olutayo and Olayinka 2013:38). All goals and their attainments must be within the purview of instituted norms, values and laws of society.

Integration: Is the need of the social system to ensure harmony by preventing or setting crises emergent in society. This prerequisite is essentially internal as it is basically the coordination of activities of the institutions and the behaviours of the individual to ensure order, peace and harmony. Since conflict is unwelcomed in functionalist societies, integration thus occupies a vital place among other prerequisites. The legal institution is the usually acted for the performance of this role. Again the implication for such arbitrary allocation of roles across institutions for Africa is strategic integration in Africa is far beyond the legal institution. As a matter of fact, an extra-judiciary settlement of disputes and integration is far more favoured in African traditional societies and even those who claimed to have democratised or democratising.

ITQ
Question
Which of the following is NOT one of Talcott Parsons's functional imperatives?
A. adaptation
B. integration
C. goal attainment
D. personality system

Feedback

Parson's functional imperative are three: adaptation, integration and goal attainment.

Latency or Pattern Maintenance

This is the sustenance and maintenance of values and norms of society. Basic norms that maintain and regulate behaviour in society are to be maintained and preserved to have a clear understanding of expectations among members. This is primarily achieved through socialization the life long process of inculcation of norms and values into members (Olutayo and Olayinka 2013:37). According to Obiajulu, (2006) functional prerequisites are performed by major institutions of the society. The economic institution of society helps every society produce goods and services. If it does not do this, society may not survive. The political organisation moderate how the society pursues conflicting goals, interests and values. Through the legal institution, the society moderates and resolves conflict. This helps existing norms to be respected, and for social life to continue. Cherished societal values beliefs are also being handed down from one generation to another for the society to go on. Agents of socialization like the family, school, the church perform these roles (Obajulu 2006).

Olutayo and Olayinka, further opined that Parsonian functionalism has been rated to be about the most influence for social analysis within functionalism, it has also been subjected to considerable criticism both for its content and style of expression (Crow 2005) in Olutayo and Olayinka 2013:39. His notion of moving equilibrium hardly explains the nature of change and conflict. Parsons is also guilty of extreme abstraction, normative and over-ambition with no empirical usefulness making it useless for pragmatic sociology (Crow 2005, Mills 1959) in Olutayo and Olayinka 2013:40. Totalizing theories without cultural specificity is today becoming very unpopular as contemporary social dynamics have proved the worth of culturally specific explanations of social issues. Talcott also worked on pattern variables A and B. According to Parsons, with the expectation of family life, pattern variables A are typical simple societies; and pattern variable B are typical of advanced and industrial societies. Social change therefore requires a movement towards the adoption of pattern variable B. Parson accepted that pattern variables A will not disappear completely even in the most advanced societies.

Parsons Pattern Variable

Parsons identified two sets of cultural values, which he called pattern variable. Variable A and B. These pattern variables consist of the ways that society answers basic questions such as 'how should reward be allocated to individuals?' and 'should members of society look after their own interests or those of the social groups to which they belong?' The two set of variables are summarized in table 1. According to Parsons, with the exception of family life, pattern variable A are typical of simple societies; and pattern variable B are typical of advanced industrial societies. Social change therefore requires a movement towards the adoption of pattern variable B. If a society fails to do this it will stagnant,

for pattern variable A stop a society from developing. For example, in the traditional Hindu caste system a person's role in society was ascribed at birth. This prevented the most able individuals from filling the most important social roles. The caste system therefore meant that society was not run efficiently and social progress was held back.

Parsons accepted that pattern variable A will not disappear completely even in the most advanced societies. They are retained within the family, because they provide emotional security that is necessary for the successful socialization of children.

Table 1: Talcott Parsons Pattern Variable A and B

Pattern Variable A	Pattern Variable B
Ascription	Achievement
Status is ascribed; it is determined by the type of family into which a person is born.	Status is achieved through a person's own efforts: for example, through hard work.
Diffuseness	Specifity
People enter into relationship with others to satisfy a large range of needs: for example, the relationship between mother and child.	People enter into relationship with other to satisfy particular needs: for example, the relationship between a customer and shopkeeper.
Particularism	Universalism
Individuals are differently towards particular people: for example, they are loyal to their family but not to strangers.	Individuals act according to universal principles: for example, everyone is equal before the law, so a policewoman would arrest her husband if necessary.
Affectivity	Effective Neutrality
Gratification is immediate. People act to gratify their desires as soon as possible.	Gratification is deferred: for example, saving money to put a deposit on a house in the future.
Collective Orientation	Self-Orientation
People put the interest of the social groups to which they belong before their own interests.	People pursue their own interest first, rather than those of the social groups to which they belong.

Source: Haralambos and Holborn (2008:861).

Value Consensus

Value consensus forms the fundamental integrating principle in society. If members are committed to the same value, they will tend to share a common identity, which provides a basis for unity and cooperation. From shared values derive common goals. Values provide a general conception of what is desirable and worthwhile. Goals provide direction in specific

situations.   Roles provide the means whereby values and goals are translated into action. A social institution consists of a combination of roles. For instance, a business firm is made up of a number of specialized roles which combine to further the goals of the organization. Parsons further opined that the content of roles is structured in terms of norms, which define the rights and obligations applicable to each particular role. Norms can be seen as specific expressions of values. Thus the norms that structure the roles of the manager, accountant, engineer, and shop-floor worker owe their content partly to the value of economic productivity. Norms tend to ensure that role behaviour is standardized, most general level-the central value system –to the most specific –normative conduct-the social system is infused with common values. This provides the basis for social order.

ITQ

Question

Parsons argued that _____ was the major binding force between various elements of the social world.

    A. society
    B. the economy
    C. the fiduciary system
    D. culture

Feedback

You are right to point out "culture".

Social Equilibrium

The importance Parsons placed on value consensus led him to state that the main task of sociology is to analyse the 'institutionalization of patterns of value orientation in social system.' When values are institutionalized and behaviour is structured in terms of them, the result is a stable system. A state of 'social equilibrium' is attained, the various parts of the system being in a state of balance. According to Parsons, the two main ways in which social equilibrium is maintained. The first involves 'socialization', by means of which society's values are transmitted from one generation to the next and internalized to form an integral part of individual personalities. Family and educational institutions are the major social institutions responsible for this function. Social equilibrium is also maintained by the various mechanisms of social control which discourage deviance and to maintain order in the system. The process of socialization and social control are fundamental to the equilibrium of the social system and therefore to order in society.

ITQ

Question

For Parsons, the _____ process helped to ensure that an actor's pursuit of his/her own interests also served the interests of the system as a whole.

    A. social control

B. exploitation
C. socialization
D. role

Feedback

The answer is socialization

3.2.2 Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

Durkheim was interested on the variables that enhances social order, or what he called social solidarity and social differentiation. He attributed the existence of social order to a mythical force he christened Social facts. For him social facts includes: beliefs, norms, values, conventions, mores as created and shared in any society. According to Obiajulu (2006), social facts to Durkheim is external to the individual, general to the society and constrains man expressing his free will. "Society is external to the individuals and exerts constrains over him. Social institutions confront the individual, not merely as an external facts, which he must take account of in his actions but also as constraining forces which impose themselves upon him irrespective of his individual free will". According to Giddens(1977:293), Durkheim opined that social order arises when social facts constrains the individuals and when deviance is punished. He advocated two ways of explaining social facts as being determining the causal factors or origins and determining its usefulness to the society. In his rules of sociological method, Durkheim demonstrated how social facts can be studied through empiricism (Obiajulu 2006).

Durkheim saw social differentiation as arising from an increase in population of a society or what he called Moral density. Such an increase for him necessitates division of labour and role specialization in the society. This is the basic of his conceptual categorization of human societies into Mechanical-Organic Solidarity Continuum. The later is more differentiated than the former in terms of level of socio-institutional development, out of increasing moral density.

To Durkheim, mechanical solidarity society is a village in which everybody knows everybody by a matter of a face to face contact. In this type of society the general consciousness is supreme. The rules and the punishment are harsh and include ostracization for even the not-so-big offences. There are practically little or no division of labour. The same individual is a farmer, a carpenter, a mason to build his own house, a wine-tapper and a trader to sell the little products of his farm. In this type of societal solidarity many things are controlled in common. for example, children are our children, wife is our wife. In this type of society there is a communal mentality known as mechanical solidarity mentality.

Organic solidarity: stage of evolution can be compared to our township, urban or city society. In this stage the general common level of division of labour and specialization whereby an individual is a specialist in one or two types of labour. Thus, you have the trader who is not a mason, or a manson who knows nothing about tailoring etc. Association between individuals is on the volutaristic level. There is increasing atomization in relationship. Durkheim proposed the processes of evolution of society.

The mechanical solidarity evolves into the organic by the creation of four densities:

1. Geographic density: Whereby the geographic area grows dense; by the creation of buildings, roads, markets and supermarkets, increased transportation system and so on.
2. Population density: Whereby the population becomes heterogeneous through immigration. People from diverse areas live in the geo-political area; society becomes culturally pluralistic.
3. Communication density: Whereby there is increasing means of communication and increasing possibility of selective opportunity as to whom to communicate with, as opposed to the compulsory communication of the mechanical solidarity (village) type
4. Moral density: Under this there is increase in free choice of compliance to the norms, rules and regulations of the society. There is increasing diversity of moral codes and also selective obedience and alternative obedience to them in time and space.

For Emile Durkheim society is greater than the sum of its parts. As soon as individuals come together on permanent basis a general conscience is created which hangs over the individual wherever he goes in that society. Emile Durkheim was a sociologist of social solidarity. His other contribution include the work on suicide. Suicide is a factor of the society and the individuals solidarity with the society. There is the altruistic suicide, egoistic suicide and anomic suicide and for Durkheim suicide is seen as resulting from the breakdown of society cohesiveness and the normative factors of society.

ITQ

Question

What was Emile Durkheim's key insight on suicide?

A. That suicide is an individual phenomenon and is undertaken for personal reasons
B. That suicide has a social basis when looked at collectively
C. That some groups never commit suicide
D. That structural functional theory is correct

Feedback

- Suicide has a social basis when looked at collectively

3.2.3 Robert K. Merton (1968)

Merton's main contribution is the elaborate identification and discussion of the 3 major short comings in functionalism which he referred to as the notion of functional unity, universal functionalism and indispensability.

Functional Unity: The first postulate holds that every element in society contributes to the healthy existence of the society by working in accordance with others. That is, for any artefact or institution to be in any society at any point in time means it serves a purpose. This premise is

predicated upon the organism analogy which serves as the main frame of functionalism. For example, the postulates maintain that for poverty to be present, or even endemic, in a society suggests that it is necessary for the maintenance and existence of the society in question. For Merton this assumption is fundamentally flawed as artefacts', institutions or even values do not serve equal purpose for societies and even members of same society and complex industrialised developing industrializing societies pose a challenge to such assumptions as interests and artefacts become 'arrow of God' through which different groups perpetuate selves interests. Therefore from the poverty example above, it may be asked to whom is poverty a problem in a society known to have plenty of resources? How is it perpetuated? Why are there attempts at its eradication? It is against this background that Merton suggested empirical investigation of the dynamics of functional unity rather than assuring that it exists a prior

Universal Functionalism: Is that every existing social and cultural element serves a positive purpose which accounts for their existence. This postulate, like others has been subject of considerable attack which is why Merton 'endured' its reformation. Events in Africa, especially with its weak and political system negate such proposition in its entirety. Quiet a lot of parastatals, behavioural patterns or even institutions exist in these societies with little 'positive' usefulness to the society as a whole but only for the interest of a cabal. Examples abound but corruption, unemployment, rigging of election and influx of westernization are cases in point.

Indispensability: Which states that some institutions, norms, values and behavioural patterns are so basic and fundamental in the functions they perform in society that they cannot be jettisoned (overlooked) in other words, their absence means social disintegration making them functional prerequisites. This assumption is equally rejected by Merton as he believed that a particular institution, for example, may perform so many roles while same roles may have more uses than one which may cushion the effects of dispensed institution(s). Olutayo and Olayinka (2013:43) To account for the intricacy in the practicality of the 3 postulates in social analysis, Merton suggested the concepts of functional alternatives, functional equilibrium, functional substitutes, functions, dysfunctions, latent and manifest function.

Latent and Manifest Functions

Merton further distinguished between manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are those known to, and intended by, the participants in a specific type of social activity. Latent functions are consequences of that activity of which participants are unaware ab initio. For example a student of University of Ibadan had a manifest function of coming to U.I to acquire knowledge in order to eke out a living, while on the process of studying in U.I the student may fall in love which may result in marriage. Marriage was the latent function while studying was the manifest function.

Another major preoccupation of Merton's functionalism is of social change. Merton gave his popular anomie theory to explain internal nuances and contradictions that may propel change in society. Once a

society has goals and the means predicated upon differential access to means is bound to elicit differing responses from members of society. Some will conform, some will innovate, others will ritualized, some retreat while others will rebel.

ITQ

Question

Robert Merton used the concept of dysfunction to deal with:

    A. the negative consequences of social facts.
    B. deviance on the part of an individual.
    C. revolution and political change.
    D. monopolies and markets.

Feedback

    A. the negative consequences of social facts.

3.2.4 The Structural Functionalist Perspective's Explanation of Socialization

Talcott Parsons a functionalist saw socialization as vital to the process by which a value consensus is produced in society. Through socialization in the individual internalizes society's values, they become part of his or personality. Through this process individuals take on society's culture, making their behaviour largely predictable, and contributing to social order. The creation and maintenance of a value consensus allows society to meet basic needs (What the functionalists called functional prerequisites, such as the need for common culture or pattern maintenance). The socialization process is coercive, forcing us to accept to the values and norms of society.

The values and norms of society are agreed upon by all members of society because there is a "social contract" in effect which protects us from one another and keeps society stable and balanced. People follow and accept the values and norms of society in order to maintain their own safety as well as maintaining the social order. Functionalist perspectives tend to see socialization as an entirely positive process. Through socialization the individual becomes a competent and conforming member of society, and this benefits society as a whole.

ITQ

Question

Which of the following would NOT be considered a social fact?

    A. The laws of society
    B. Robert Merton
    C. Capitalism as the economic system of society
    D. Cultural norms

Feedback

    • B. Robert Merton

3.3 Structural Functionalist Perspective's Explanation

3.3.1 The Structural Functionalist Perspective's Explanation of the Social Structure

The social structure exists in time and space, is objective/external, concrete, coercive. And relatively static. Members of society see the social structure as legitimate (acceptable and working properly) and therefore strive to maintain that social structure. Legitimation (acceptability) maintains social equilibrium or balance which maintains the status quo. The structure itself creates consensus. The social structure is stable

3.3.2 The Structural Functionalist Perspective's Explanation of Bureaucracies

The bureaucracy exists to serve the needs of society. The bureaucracy provides for the economic and social needs of a society and helps to maintain social stability. The bureaucracy is a major characteristic of large-scale industrial societies. The bureaucracy is the response to large-scale formal organizations.

3.3.3 The Structural Functionalist Perspective's Explanation of Deviance

Functionalist theorists see crime and deviance resulting from structural tensions and a lack of moral regulation within society. If the aspirations held by individuals and groups in society do not coincide with available rewards, this disparity between desires and fulfilment will be felt in the deviant motivations of some of its members. Durkheim saw crime and deviance as social fact; he believed both them to be inevitable and necessary elements in modern societies. Deviance is also necessary for society, according to Durkheim; it fulfils two important functions. First, deviance has an adaptive function. By introducing new ideas and challenges into society, deviance is an innovative force. It brings about change. Second, deviance promotes boundary maintenance between "good" and "bad" behaviour in the society. Deviance is usually dysfunctional for society and arises from conditions of anomie. Deviance may be functional for society because it may bring about necessary social change. Deviance is integral to human societies. Deviance exists in all societies, and all societies create institutionalized methods of preventing and punishing deviance.

3.3.4 The Structural Functionalist Perspective's Explanation of Inequality

Inequality is less widespread than the Conflicts believe. Inequality, in general, is functional for society because it engenders competition which

serves as an incentive for people to attempt to rise to the top. Inequality, overall, is highly dysfunctional for society because it fails to permit large groups of people from competing for the goods of society. Inequality is always functional (adaptive) for some segments of society and dysfunctional (non-adaptive) for others.

ITQ

Question

_____ is a zoomed out look at the social structures and institutions that shape society.

Feedback

Macro-level Orientation

3.3.5 The Structural Functionalist Perspective's Explanation of the Family

The family creates well-integrated members of society and teaches culture to the new members of society. The family provides important ascribed statuses such as social class and ethnicity to new members. The family regulates sexual activity. Family is responsible for social replacement by reproducing new members, to replace its dying members. Family gives individuals property rights and also affords the assignment and maintenance of kinship order. Families offer material and emotional security and provide care and support for the individuals who need to be taken care of.

3.3.6 The Structural Functionalist Perspective's Explanation of Education

According to the Functionalists education enhances the operation and stability of society by systematically teaching certain cognitive skills and knowledge, and transmitting these skills and knowledge from one generation to the next generation. Education has several manifest and latent functions for society. Cultural transmission passes cultures from one generation to the next and established social values are taught thoroughly. Education also serves to enhance social and cultural integration in society by bringing together people from diverse social backgrounds so that they share widespread social experiences and thus acquire commonly held societal norms, attitudes and beliefs.

3.3.7 The Structural Functionalist Perspective's Explanation of Religion

The functionalist perspective examines religion in terms of society's needs. Functionalist analysis is primarily concerned with the contribution religion makes to meeting those needs. From functionalist perspective, society requires a certain degree of social solidarity, value consensus, and harmony and integration between its parts. The function of religion is the contribution it makes to meeting such functional prerequisites- for example its contribution to social solidarity. Religion (along with the

family and law) serves to legitimate (make acceptable) the social structure of any given society. Religion (along with the family and law) helps to maintain social stability and balance by binding people to the normative aspects of their society. Religion (along with law) provides a system of behavioural guidelines for society. Durkheim saw religion as the conscience of society and held that religion is man's relationship with the sacred. Religion plays very important role for society; such as being the catalyst for social stability.

3.3.8 The Structural Functionalist Perspective's Explanation of Social change

Functionalism has often been criticized for failing to provide an adequate explanation for social change. If the system is in equilibrium, with its various parts contributing towards order and stability, it is difficult to see how it changes. Parsons approached this problem by arguing that in practice, no social system is in a perfect state of equilibrium, although a certain degree of equilibrium is essential for the survival of societies. The process of social change can therefore be pictured as a moving equilibrium. The adaptation, goal attainment, integration and pattern maintenance are interrelated; a change in one will therefore produce response in the others. Once a disturbance has been introduced into an equilibrated system there will tend to be a reaction to this disturbance, which tends to restore the system of equilibrium. This reaction will lead to some degree of change, however small, in the system as a whole. Although social systems never attain complete equilibrium, they tend towards this state. Social change can therefore be seen as 'moving equilibrium'.

ITQ

Question

Concepts such as latent and manifest functions, as well as unanticipated consequences, help Merton establish which of the following points?

- A. that actors have little agency in structural functionalism
- B. that not every structure plays a purely positive function
- C. that order is produced by a one-to-one ratio of manifest and latent functions
- D. that exploitation may be latent or manifest with unanticipated consequences

Feedback

- Option B is the valid answer here.

3.4 Functionalism: A Critique

ITQ

Question

How will you define social function?

Feedback

Social function is an act that contributes to the maintenance of a structure.

As popular and resilient as functionalism is within sociology, it appears the most vulnerable to critism(Olutayo and Olayinka 2013). A common criticism of functionalism is the emphasis on value consensus. That is a universal agreement and general interest exist among members of society as to what dominant value is and this forms the basis of societal integration. Teleological proposition also ranks very high on the scale of criticisms against functionalism. Functionalists maintained that an institution or element to subsist in any given society it must attest to its functional utility, which is not practicable in the society. Another criticism which sees functionalism as deterministic. That human beings are reduced to robots without control over their actions except as codified by the society even when society is nothing but an abstraction and can only be a point of reference in relation to human actions.

Functionalism is also guilty of ambiguous concepts, grandness and speculative untestability concepts like 'system', 'structure', 'functions', 'consensus', and 'integration' for example are all often loosely defined even among functionalists themselves and largely immeasurable. For Giddens (1996), system and structure appear chronologically in the literature of structural functionalism and neither is specific to it. The capability of explaining change within functionalism has been a contentious issue over time. While critics are of the opinion that the concept of the value consensus and moving equilibrium negate change, merton's strand punches a big hole in this criticism.

ITQ

Question

Which of the following is NOT a criticism of structural functionalism?

    A. It is ahistorical.
    B. It cannot deal with the process of social change.
    C. It focuses too narrowly on the micro, behavioural level of analysis.
    D. It does not deal with conflict.

Feedback

All the options except "C" are criticism against structural functionalism.

Box 3.0: The learning point and things to remember in this study unit includes:

- Functionalism emphasizes the importance of moral **consensus** in maintaining order and stability in society and functionalist see the society as a system with different parts.

- According to Parsons to ensure survival of the society there are minimum that the social system must satisfy and he called **functional prerequisites**.

- Durkheim attributed the existence of social order as to a mythical force he christened **social facts**

- Merton distinguished between **latent** and **manifest functions**

- Functionalism has been criticised for overemphasis on value consensus.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, you have learned that:

1. The Functionalist paradigm describes society as stable and describes all of the various mechanisms that maintain social stability.
2. Functionalism argues that the social structure is responsible for all stability and instability, and that that the social structure is continuously attempting to maintain social equilibrium (balance) among all of the components of society.
3. The Functionalist paradigm does a very good job of explaining the ways in which the institutions of society (the family, education, religion, law/politics/government, the economy, medicine, media) work together to create social solidarity (a social contract in which society as a whole agrees upon the rules of social behavior and agrees, more or less, to abide by those rules) and to maintain balance in society.
4. Parson's functional prerequisite is represented by his AGIL mode
5. Merton distinguished between manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions and latent functions. Manifest functions are those known to, and intended by, the participants in a specific type of social activity, while latent functions are consequences of that activity of which participants are unaware ab initio.

Assessment

SAQ 3.1 (tests Learning Outcome 3.1)

What are the major assumptions of functionalism?

SAQ 3.2 (tests Learning Outcome 3.2)

Outline the major modern functionalist theorists and their contributions.

SAQ 3.3 (tests Learning Outcome 3.3)

Mention 2 criticisms of functionalist theory

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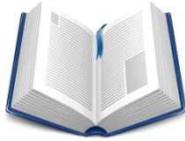
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Study Session 4

Conflict Perspective

Introduction

In this Study Session, you will explore another perspective and its major assumptions: conflict perspective. You will discuss on the major theorists of this perspective and their contributions. You will also examine various criticism marshalled against this perspective.

Learning Outcomes

Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

4.1 discuss conflict perspective and its major assumptions

4.2 identify the major theorists of this perspective and their contributions

4.3 outline the basic criticism of the perspective

4.1 Overview of Conflict Perspective

Conflict theory offers a radical alternative to functionalism. The sociologists of the 1950s showed little concern to the subject (conflict) and when they treated it at all, it was to dismiss it briefly as a purely disruptive phenomenon. It was during the 1970s that it become increasingly influential as a result of the following reason:

a) The decline in functionalism
b) The ability to provide answers which functionalism failed to provide
c) It was more in keeping with the tenor and mood of the times.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) suggested that social behavior could best be seen as the process of conflict: the attempt to dominate others and to avoid being dominated. Marx focused primarily on the struggle among economic classes. Specifically, he examined the way capitalism produced the oppression of workers by the owners of industry. Marx's interest in this topic did not end with analytical study: He was also ideologically committed to restructuring economic relations to end the oppression he observed. The conflict paradigm is not limited to economic analyses. Georg Simmel (1858–1918) was particularly interested in small-scale conflict, in contrast to the class struggle that interested Marx. Simmel noted, for example, that conflicts among members of a tightly knit group tended to be more intense than those among people who did not share feelings of belonging and intimacy. Karl Marx and George Simmel were the two German sociologists that wrote on the conflict perspective. Marx

argued that the nature of society is based upon its economy and that class conflict is inevitable in all capitalist and competition, treating the latter as an indirect form of conflict. Other modern conflict theorists are C. Wright Mills, Ralph Dahrendorf and Lewis Coser. They broadened Marx's views to include conflict among segments of a society. They do not limit themselves to economic determinism and class conflict. To them conflict is pervasive. It exists between republican and democrats, unions and management, industrialists and environmentalists and so on. Conflict theory perspective starts its analysis with a critical examination of the social order. Rather than identify or support the position of functionalists that value consensus propels social order, they argue instead that it is force and constraint that hold society together. Indeed, it was Dahrendorf who in 1958 called a reorientation of sociological analysis from a preoccupied with social order, consensus and harmony to exploring the pervasive issues of conflict. Conflict theory recognises that conflict is ubiquitous in social life. Conflict theorists emphasise the importance of interests generated various types of conflict as normal aspects of social life, rather than abnormal or dysfunctional occurrences.

ITQ

Question (True / False)

The dominant approach among structural functionalists is macro analysis approach, while conflict sociologists analyze society using the societal functionalism.

Feedback

False! It's the other way round. The dominant approach among structural functionalists is societal functionalism, conflict sociologists analyze society using the macro analysis approach.

Marx had shown eloquently how these conflicts have crystallised into two antagonistic classes in modern society the bourgeoisie, expropriator, oppressor or the capitalist on one hand, and the proletariat, worker, expropriated and oppressed on the other. He also showed that class struggle characterise preceding societies, and that these entire struggle characterised revolve around the economy. Inside Marx's powerful methodological tool-the dialectical method which he clothed with materialism, he showed how a given ruling class which he categorized as affirmation or thesis, and how that mode of production will bear fruit that will arise to contradict it. This, Marx represents as antithesis or negation. In Marx's view, the inevitable clash between the thesis and anti-thesis will culminate into a higher social order called synthesis or reconciliation, which off course starts the whole process all over again.

Dahrendorf, another conflict theorist disagreed slightly with the primacy given to the economy by Marx. Dahrendorf was more inclined to accepting authority, the exercise of authority or lack of it as the explanatory variable behind conflict. He used formal organisations or what he called imperatively coordinated associations to justify his assertions. Conflict theory contends that people are constrained by their position and unequal distribution of advantage on the behaviour of an individual, such as unequal amounts of power, wealth and prestige. These

advantaged groups enjoy certain power, privileges and prestige, and thus fight to ensure the enslavement of the dominated or disadvantaged group. For instance the rich are externally in opposition to the poor, men versus women, in ethnic or Apartheid South Africa, the Whites pitched against the black, in countries that have malignant ethnicity like Rwanda, the Tustsis, against the Hutus. Typically, those on top strive to protect their privileges, societies disadvantaged counter by attempting to gain more resource for themselves. The conflict perspective is therefore a framework for building theory that envisages society as an arena of inequality that generated conflict and change.

Conflict theory showed how the disadvantaged groups continued, through deft manipulation of the social structure, to use their power to shape the workers religious beliefs, leisure activities and consumer preferences. This scenario would implant in the proletariat a sense of false security which Marxists call false consciousness, making the workers believe that all is well, and that potentials exist for their improvement if they work harder. In this way, misleading cultural orientation will make them not to take their fate in their hands postponing the evil day. Marx believed that a time will come when workers will regain true consciousness out of certain objective realities, and revolt against the extent order. Such a revolution may lead to seizing the reigns of governmental apparatus, and use it thereafter to change the inhibiting, discriminatory social structure.

Conformity theory captures the dynamic nature of social life. Unlike functionalists, they give primarily attention to social change. Change like conflict is universal and pervasive. Change however is not accidental, but arises from the unending clash between the classes, and its resolution. However, their guiding assumptions can easily be outlined using Marx's account of class conflict.

4.2 Major Theorists of Conflict Perspective and Their Contributions

4.2.1 Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Conflict Theory

The ideas of Karl Marx contrast sharply with those of the Functionalists, but like them, he sought to explain the changes in the society that took place over the time of the industrial revolution. When he was a young man, Marx's political activities brought him into conflict with the German authorities; after a brief stay in France, he settled permanently in exile in Britain. Marx's view was founded on what he called the materialist conception of history. According to view, it is not ideas or values human beings hold that are the main sources of social change, as Durkheim claimed. Rather, social change is prompted primarily by economic influences. The conflicts between classes-the rich versus the poor-provide the motivation for historical development of capitalism. Capitalism is a system of production that contrasts radically with previous economic systems in history, involving as it does the production of goods and services sold to a wide range of consumers. Those who own capital, or factories or machines, and large sum of money, form a ruling class. The mass of the population make up a class of wage workers, or a

working class, who do not own means of their livelihood but must find employment provided by other owners of capital. Capitalism is thus a class system in which conflict between classes is a commonplace occurrence because it is in the interests of the ruling class to exploit the working class and in the interest of the workers to seek to overcome that exploitation.

According to Marx, in the future capitalism will be supplanted by a society in which there are no classes-no division between rich and poor. He didn't mean by this that all inequalities between individuals will disappear. Rather, societies will no longer be split into a small class that monopolizes economic and political power and the larger mass of people who benefit little from the wealth their workers creates. The economic system will come under communal ownership, and a more equal society than we know at the present will be established. Marx's work had a far-reaching effect on the twentieth century world. Until recently, before the fall of soviet communism, more than a third of the earth's population lived in societies whose government claimed to derive their inspiration from Marx's ideas. In addition, many sociologists have been influenced by Marx's ideas about class divisions.

The Conflict paradigm describes the inequalities that exist in all societies around the globe. Conflict is particularly interested in the inequalities that exist based on all of the various aspects of master status—race or ethnicity, sex or gender, age, religion, ability or disability, and SES. SES is an abbreviation of socioeconomic status and is comprised of the combined effects of income, education, and occupation. Every society is plagued by inequality based on social differences among the dominant group and all of the other groups in society, according to the Conflict paradigm. When we are analyzing any element of society from this perspective, we need to look at the structures of wealth, power, and status and the ways in which those structures maintain the social, economic, political, and coercive power of one group at the expense of all other groups.

Dialectics: The basic assumption of dialectics is contradiction. The law of opposites. Marx posited that in societies are inherent contradictions capable of and necessary for social change and development. Marx, together with Engels, started his dialectics from a comprehensive erudition of Hegel's and concluded that though Hegelian dialectics was the greatest achievement of classical German philosophy. It was insufficient to for the explanation of change in society. That is, while Hegel placed contradiction in ideas and thought process as necessary and sufficient factors in occurrence of change in society, Marx believed that in the material base. Thus, the assumption that material condition are fundamental in that they are constitutive of all aspects of social, political, philosophical, ideological, history. The material base being primarily the economy, upon which every other substructure rests, a contradiction in it necessary propels change. Thus the conception of Marx's dialectics as dialectical materialism due to its emphasis on material base of society, economy is contradistinction from Hegelian dialectics which was predicated on ideas or philosophies.

According Olayinka and Olutayo 2013, 'dialectical materialism became a general ontology of nature, history, and thought that enabled its adherents to discover the laws behind the phenomena '. The phenomena are the processes of change which Marx sought to explain. Dialectics, as used by Marx, is thus handed down to social scientists, and development practitioners as a tool for investigating the course of history through systematisation of strategic dialectical undercurrents rather than that which is 'known', 'obvious,' 'given', and 'acceptable' in the community of 'scientists'. Economic determinism considers the economic substructure of means of labour to be of paramount importance in determining the systems, and so forth. Against this background, it holds that the holders of economic powers hold every other power in the society and can affect any policy and change necessary for the sustenance of their interests. A change in the economic system leads to change in every other substructure of society. Change in specific mode of production is set in motion through the satisfaction of human basic needs by acting on nature (Olutayo 2002). The essence of Marx's implicit economic determinism was to give the basis of exploitation of man by man. The logic is that once the bourgeoisie monopolise the economic machinery, they use it to acquire power, manipulate religion, ideas and the conception of morality in society. When this is done, the proletariat are consequently kept in perpetual servitude preventing imminent change.

ITQ

Question

Karl Marx defined the proletariat and the bourgeoisie classes as:

  A. Workers and the owners in a capitalist society
  B. Socialists and feudalists in different time periods
  C. Robots and factory workers in the Industrial Revolution
  D. Rural and urban landholders

Feedback

- Karl Marx defined the proletariat as workers and the bourgeoisie classes as owners in a capitalist society.

4.2.2 Ralf Dahrendorf: Power and Dialectical Change (1959-)

We move now to Ralf Dahrendorf's theory of power and dialectical change. Dahrendorf sees conflict as universally present in all human relations. But Dahrendorf doesn't see the inevitability of conflict as part of human nature; he sees it, rather, as a normal part of how we structure society and create social order. In this sense, Dahrendorf is concerned with the same issue as Talcott Parsons: How is social order achieved? However, rather than assuming collective agreement about norms, values, and social positions, as Parsons does, Dahrendorf argues that it is power that both defines and enforces the guiding principles of society.

Dahrendorf sees the interests of power and class in dichotomous terms: you either can wield legitimated power or you can't. Now that I've said

that, I need to qualify it. Remember that Dahrendorf calls the social relationships organized around legitimated power imperatively coordinated associations. One of the ideas implied in the term is that social relations are embedded within a hierarchy of authority. What this means is that most people are sandwiched in between power relations. That is, they exercise power over some and are themselves subject to the authority of those above them. However, this idea also points out that embedded within this hierarchy of power are dichotomous sets of interests.

Associated primarily with the work of conflict theory, Dahrendorf arose primarily as a reaction against structural functionalism and in many ways represents its antithesis. Where structural functionalism sees a near harmony of purpose from norms and values, conflict theory sees coercion, domination, and power. Dahrendorf saw both theories as addressing different situations, depending upon the focus of the study. According to Dahrendorf, functionalism is useful for understanding consensus while conflict theory is appropriate for understanding conflict and coercion.

For Dahrendorf the distribution of authority was a key to understanding social conflict. Authority is located not within people but within various positions. Authority is created by the expectation of certain types of action associated with particular positions, including subordination of others and subordination to others. Various positions of authority exist within associations. The fault lines that spring up around competing loci of authority generate conflicting groups. The conflict between these groups pervades their interaction, with the result that authority is often challenged and tenuous.

Much as Merton looked at latent and manifest functions, Dahrendorf identified latent and manifest interests, or unconscious and conscious interests. The connection between these two concepts was a major problematic for conflict theory. Dahrendorf posited the existence of three types of groups: quasi- groups, interest groups, and conflict groups. Dahrendorf felt that, under ideal circumstances, conflict could be explained without reference to any other variables.

4.3 Conflict Perspective's Explanations

4.3.1 The Conflict Perspective's Explanation of Socialization

The conflict perspectives on socialization tend to agree that socialization can be an effective way of producing conformity, but they disagree that this benefits society as a whole. The socialization process is coercive, forcing us to accept the values and norms of society. The values and norms of society are dictated and enforced by the Bourgeoisie. The Proletariat follow and accept the values and norms of the Bourgeoisie because all of the institutions of society, particularly education, religion, and the economy are shaped to serve the exploitative purposes of the Bourgeoisie.

4.3.2 The Conflict Perspective's Explanation of the Social Structure

The social structure exists in time and space, is objective/external, concrete, coercive, and relatively static. The group is the basic unit of society and of analysis Roles, statuses, groups, and institutions exist for the protection and maintenance of the elite; the social structure is based on relations of exploitation often based on master status. There is no consensus among groups or individual members of society; there is only conflict over wealth, power, and status. The social structure is exploitative.

4.3.3 The Conflict Perspective's Explanation of Bureaucracies

The bureaucracy exists to serve the needs of the Bourgeoisie. The bureaucracy is exploitive, and creates an "iron cage" which traps the average worker. The bureaucracy is the primary characteristic of large-scale industrial societies. The bureaucracy is the rationalized and exploitive form of human interaction in large-scale formal organization.

4.3.4 The Conflict Perspective's Explanation of Deviance

Conflict theorists reject the idea that deviance that deviance is "determined" by factors such as biology, personality, anomie, social disorganisation, or labels. Rather, they argue, individuals actively choose to engage in deviant behaviour in response to the inequalities of the capitalist system. Thus, members of countercultural groups regarded as "deviant". For example they argue the laws are tools used by the powerful to maintain their own privileged positions. They rejected the idea that laws are neutral and are applied evenly across the population. Instead they claim that as inequalities increase between the ruling class and the working class, law becomes an ever more important instrument for the powerful to maintain order. This dynamic can be seen in the workings of the criminal justice system, which has become increasing oppressive toward the poor masses in Nigeria where the rich and powerful commit crime with impunity and are rarely persecuted.

Deviance is defined by those in power; therefore, what is deviant, is whatever offends the powerful, or whatever causes them to believe that they are losing power and control over the masses. Deviance is conditional, situational, and relative to time, place, situation, and culture. By declaring that certain groups are deviant or treating certain groups as if they are, in some way, outside the boundaries of mainstream society, the ultimate in-group is able to maintain its power. Deviance exists in all societies, and all societies create institutionalized methods of preventing and punishing deviance.

4.3.5 The Conflict Perspective's Explanation of Inequality

Inequality is generated and maintained by those in power in order to maintain their power. Various groups in society are delineated by those in power and then are pitted against each other in a struggle for wealth, power, and status. The powerful exploit everyone in order to engender false consciousness—the belief that the non-elites have the potential to become rich and powerful. The elites will do anything in order to maintain their power.

4.3.6 The Conflict Perspective's Explanation of the Family

The family works toward the continuance of social inequality within a society by maintaining and reinforcing the status quo. According to them, family was an outcome of the need of men to pass on their property to their own children. To them therefore the main function of the family is the reproduction of the capitalist system. Through inheritance, the wealthy families are able to keep their privileged social position for their members. The traditional family form which is Patriarchal, also contributes to the inequality of the sexes. Males have a lot of power and females tend to have less. Traditional roles of husbands and wives are differential valued in favor of husbands. The roles they do are more valued than the traditional housekeeping/child raising roles done by their wives. The traditional family is also a structure of inequality for both women and children.

4.3.7 The Conflict Perspective's Explanation of Education

Schools routinely provide learning according to students' social background, thereby perpetuating social inequality. Wealthy School districts have better buildings, state of the art technology, higher teacher salaries, more ancillary programs such as Art and Music and better sports equipment. Schools serve as a screening device to fill positions of unequal status. Tracking is a basic screening device - placing of students perceived to have similar intelligence and academic abilities in the same classroom. Credentialism is the overemphasis on educational credentials for job placement. The result is that many individuals are placed in jobs for which they are overeducated.

4.3.8 The Conflict Perspective's Explanation of Religion

To Marx, religion is an illusion which eases the pain produced by exploitation and oppression. It is a series of myths that justify and legitimate the subordination of the ruling class. It is distortion of reality which provides many of the deception that forms the basis of ruling-class ideology and false class consciousness. In Marx's words, Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. Religion is "the opiate of the masses." Religion acts as an opiate to dull the pain produced

by oppression. It is both an expression of real suffering and a protest against suffering, but it does little to solve the problem because it helps to make like more bearable and therefore dilutes demands for change. Religion acts as a drug, which keeps the proletariat from rising up against their oppressors. Religion serves to legitimate the social structure and serves the needs of the elite to oppress the workers. Religion lulls the workers into a false sense of security.

ITQ

Question

The sociological imagination:

    A. guides most people's ordinary conduct in everyday life.
    B. helps individuals to understand the true origins and character of the problems they face.
    C. makes us aware that issues such as divorce should be viewed as the private problems of individuals.
    D. cannot be applied on a global scale.

Feedback

The answer here is "B".

4.4 Conflict Perspective: A critique

The conflict perspective also has its own dose of criticism. Its overbearing interest in conflict, inequality, perennial struggles and divergent interests closes its attention to the equally valid unity that so often characterise societal life. It is plausible that some shared beliefs, ideas or consensus also run through the society making possible social solidarity. The conflict theory is also vilified for its attempts to generalise society to caste society in the mould of a system even if its image of the system is, unlike the functionalists, conflict prone. Since then, a new way of looking at society which focused on the individual and people's everyday situational experiences has arisen. Conflict theory has been criticized for being ideologically radical, underdeveloped, and unable to deal with order and stability. Both functionalism and conflict theory share the weakness of being able to explain only portions of social life.

Box 4.0: The learning point and things to remember in this study unit includes:

1. Conflict theorists believe that every social process has its opposing side, e.g landlord and tenant, commuters and taxi owners etc

2. Karl Marxs' materialistic conception of history assumes that conflict resolution especially in terms of a society' mode of production propels the society from one developmental stage to another.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, you have learned that:

1. In general, conflict theory seeks to scientifically explain the general contours of conflict in society: how conflict starts and varies, and the effects it brings.
2. The central concerns of conflict theory are the unequal distribution of scarce resources and power. What these resources are might be different for each theorist, but conflict theorists usually work with Weber's three systems of stratification: class, status, and power.
3. Conflict theorists generally see power as the central feature of society, rather than thinking of society as held together by collective agreement concerning a cohesive set of cultural standards, as functionalists do. Where power is located and who uses it (and who doesn't) are thus fundamental to conflict theory. In this way of thinking about things, power isn't necessarily bad: it is a primary factor that guides society and social relations.
4. Conflict has been criticised for its over bearing interest in conflict, inequality, perennial struggles and divergent interests closes its attention to the equally valid unity that so often characterise societal life.

Assessment

Assessment

SAQ 4.1 (tests Learning Outcome 4.1)

What are the major assumptions of Conflict theory?

SAQ 4.2 (tests Learning Outcome 4.2)

Outline the major modern Conflict theorists and their contributions

SAQ 4.3 (tests Learning Outcome 4.3)

Mention 2 criticisms of Conflict theory

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Study Session 5

Symbolic Interactionism Perspective

Introduction

Learning Outcomes

Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

5.1 examine symbolic interactionism perspective and their major assumptions

5.2 identify the major theorists of this perspective and their contributions

5.3 highlight the symbolic interactionism perspectives explanations on major issues in sociology

5.4 Outline the basic criticism of the perspective

5.1 Overview of Symbolic Interactionism

The symbolic interaction perspective, also called symbolic interactionism, is a major framework of sociological theory. This perspective relies on the symbolic meaning that people develop and rely upon in the process of social interaction. Although symbolic interactionism traces its origins to Max Weber's assertion that individuals act according to their interpretation of the meaning of their world, the American philosopher George Herbert Mead introduced this perspective to American sociology in the 1920s. According to Haralambos and Horborn (2008:881), Symbolic interactionism developed from the work of a group of American philosophers who included John Dewey, William I. Thomas and George Herbert Mead. Symbolic interaction is a perspective in sociology that places meaning, interaction, and human agency at the centre of understanding social life. This perspective grew out of the American philosophical tradition of pragmatism, an approach developed in the late nineteenth century by Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. Challenging the assumptions of classical rationalism, these thinkers regarded people as actors rather than reactors, treated "reality" as dynamic and pluralistic, linked meanings to social acts and perspectives, and viewed knowledge as a key resource for problem solving and reorganizing the world. George Herbert Mead brought pragmatist philosophy to sociology, working its assumptions into a theory and method for the social sciences. Drawing on the ideas of the pragmatist founders, as well as the theories of Charles Horton Cooley, Charles Darwin, and Wilhelm Wundt, Mead developed a distinctly

sociological account of human consciousness, selfhood, and action. Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a sociological and social-psychological perspective grounded in the study of the meanings that people learn and assign to the objects and actions that surround their everyday experiences. It is a theoretical perspective that was originally developed in the early half of the 20th century by scholars at the University of Chicago. SI is the most sociological of a range of social psychology traditions (others include cognitive sociology, discursive psychology, ethnomethodology, and rational choice-exchange theory) and was originally conceptualized by the philosopher George Herbert Mead, although he never used the term. The perspective was first given coherence by Mead's students from Chicago, who collected and, in 1934, published their notes from his social psychology courses in a book titled Mind, Self, and Society. In 1937, Herbert Blumer, one of Mead's students, coined the term symbolic interactionism and subsequently consolidated much of Mead's work into a Symbolic Interactionism.

Like Max weber, Symbolic interactionists are concerned with explaining social actions in terms of the meanings that individual give social actions in terms of the meaning that individuals give them, however they tend to focus on small-scale interactions rather than large-scale social change. George Herbert mead (1863-1931) is generally regarded as the founder of symbolic interactionism. In Mead's view, human thought, experience and conduct are essentially social. They owe their nature to the fact that human beings interact in terms of symbols, the most component of which are contained in language. A symbol does not simply stand for an object or events and in doing so, largely exclude other possible meanings. Symbols provide the means whereby humans can interact meaningfully with their natural and social environment. They are human-made and refer not to the intrinsic nature of objects and events but to the way in which people receive them. Symbolic interaction theory analyzes society by addressing the subjective meanings that people impose on objects, events, and behaviors.

Subjective meanings are given primacy because it is believe that people behave based on what they believe and not just on what is objectively true. Thus, society is thought to be socially constructed through human interpretation. People interpret one another's behavior and it is these interpretations that form the social bond. These interpretations are called the "definition of the situation." For example, why would young people smoke cigarettes even when all objective medical evidence points to the dangers of doing so? The answer is in the definition of the situation that people create. Studies find that teenagers are well informed about the risks of tobacco, but they also think that smoking is cool, that they themselves will be safe from harm, and that smoking projects a positive image to their peers. So, the symbolic meaning of smoking overrides the actual facts regarding smoking and risk. Symbolic interactionism is a school of thought in sociology that explains social behavior in terms of how people interact with each other via symbols; in this view, social structures are best understood in terms of such individual interactions.

Moreover, Mead believed that one's self develops through social interactions. Moreover, how people communicate and interact with each other depends on how they interpret factors such as language, actions,

and statuses (potential symbols). For example, one might interpret a handshake as either a friendly greeting or cool farewell, depending on context (the symbolism of a handshake varies). Sometimes symbols change; long hair in males once symbolized rebellion, but now does not.

Major Assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism

This is a sociological approach in which direct interactions between people are seen as the building blocks of society. In effect, society is whatever we accomplish through our interactions with each other. These interactions carry symbolic meaning. A symbol, of course, is something that stands for something else. Specifically, there are significant symbols—symbolic meanings that are shared across a group or society. Language provides us with many significant symbols, as do visual signs and symbols, body language, non-verbal cues, and so forth. These symbols identify an object or action for us, and often assign a particular social placement of it as well.

George Herbert Mead was a social theorist who made major contributions to symbolic interactionism. Mead claimed that human beings have a unique capacity for thought—they can comprehend symbolic meanings on a complex level unmatched by any other species. It is through these shared symbolic meanings that we define ourselves as individuals, and create a society.

According to mead, without symbols there could be no human interaction and no human society. Symbolic interaction is necessary since humans have no instructs to direct their behaviour. Humans are not genetically programmed to react automatically to particular stimuli. In order to survive they must therefore construct and live within a world of meaning. Role taking involves one person taking on the role of another by imaginatively placing themselves in the position of the person with whom they are interacting. For example if a person observes another smiling, crying, waving a hand or shaking a fist, they will put themselves in that person's position in order to interpret the intention and meaning. On the basis of the interaction they will make their response to the action of the other. Thus, if an individual observes someone shaking a fist, they may interpret this gesture as an indication of aggression, but their interpretation will not automatically lead to a particular response. They may ignore the gesture, respond in kind, and attempt to defuse the situation with a joke, and so on. The person with whom they are interacting will then take their role, interpret their response and either continue or close the interaction on the basis of this interpretation. In this respect human interaction can be seen as a continuous process if interaction, with each taking the role of another.

The self: Mead argued that through the process of role taking, individuals develop a concept of 'self' by placing themselves in the position of others they are able to look back upon themselves. Mead claimed the idea of a self can only develop if the individual can 'get outside himself' (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself. To do this they must observe themselves from the standpoint of others. Therefore, the origin and development of a concept if self lie in the ability to take the role of another. Mead distinguished two aspects of the

self the 'Me'(your definition of yourself in a specific social role and 'I'(your opinion of yourself as a whole). The 'I' is also called 'self concept' is built up from the reaction of others to you, and the way you interpret those reactions. It can exercise considerable influence over your behaviour. for example if you see yourself as cowardly on the basis of self-concept you have built-up, you are unlikely to act bravely in dangerous situations. The notion of self is not inborn, it is learned during childhood. Mead also discussed how we are taught these symbolic meanings within a framework of moral development. There is what he called the play stage and game stage.

Play stage: Small children engage in play—they imitate the behavior of others. At this point, they learn what Mead terms the particularized other. Children can imagine or empathize with what a specific person might desire or expect in a given situation. for example children playing roles that are not their own, children may play at being a parent, a doctor or a nurse. In doing so they become aware that there is difference between themselves and the role they are playing. Furthermore older children learn games—rules that apply to everyone all the time. Thus, at this stage they learn about the generalized other, general rules of conduct that are to be expected no matter who you are. For example, a younger child might be able to understand that "Mummy" would be angry if he stole a meat from the pot of soup. An older child can comprehend that stealing is wrong, period.

The play stage exposes us to trying out different social scenarios, but it is merely for play-we do not actually become Mummy, doctor or nurse. At the game stage, we are ready to take on different social roles ourselves. The second stage in the development of self is known as the game stage-In playing a game; children come to see themselves from the perspective of the various participants. In order to play a game, children come to see themselves from the perspective of the various participants. In order to play a game such as football or cricket, children must become aware of their relationship to the other players. They must place themselves in the roles of the others in order to appreciate their own particular roles in the game. In doing so they see themselves in terms of the collective viewpoint of the other players. In mead's terminology, they see themselves from the perspective of the generalized other. In Mead's view, the development of a consciousness of self is an essential part of the process of becoming a human being. It provides the basis for thought and action, and the foundation for human society. By becoming 'self conscious', people can direct their own action by thought and deliberation. They can set goals for themselves, plan future action and consider the consequences of alternative courses of action.

Mead further argued that symbolic interaction arose naturally, through the evolutionary process, to deal with situations of frustration and conflict over competing courses of habitual action. Symbolic interaction requires, in its essence, consciousness of self, internalized conversation, and evaluation of competing courses of action based on shared meanings derived from taking the role of the other. By implication, such interaction would have to involve both a memory of past interactions and projections into the future. As we have said, for Mead, this process could not occur except through the medium of human language, which would exclude all

nonhuman animals (in their natural setting) from consideration. For Mead, consciousness of self is largely a cognitive process.

Blumer a student of George Herbert Mead, systematically developed the ideas of his mentor. In Blumer's view, symbolic interactionism rests on 3 basic premises

1. Human beings act on the basics of meanings that they give to objects and events rather than simply reacting either to external stimuli such as social forces, or to internal stimuli such as organic drives. Symbolic interactionism therefore rejects both societal and biological determinism.
2. Meanings arise from the process of interaction, rather than simply from present at the onset and shaping future action. To some degree, meaning are created, modified, developed and changed within interaction situations rather than fixed and preformed. In the process of interaction actors do not slavishly fellow pre-set norms or mechanically act out established roles.
3. Meanings are the result of interpretive procedures employed by actors within interactions contexts. By taking the role of the other, actors interpret the meanings and intentions of others. By means of the mechanism of self-interaction, individuals modify or change their definition of the situation, rehearse alternative courses of action and consider their possible consequences. Thus the meanings that guide action arise in the context of interaction via a series of complex interpretative procedures.

Although George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) is widely acknowledged as the founder of symbolic interactionism, the origin of the theory could be traced to Marx weber's (1864-1920) concept of Verstehen which emphasizes 'understanding a particular setting from the point of view of the people within that setting', later development of the theory has involved such diverse thinkers as Erving Goffman (1922-1982), Herbert Blumer,(1900-1987) and many others. Among the notable symbolic interactionism thinkers, Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead, appear to have more influence on the theory than any other. In fact, it was Blumer, who in 1937 publication, coined the term symbolic interactionism. (Olesegun 2013:149).

ITQ

Question

Which of the following statements best describes symbolic interaction theory?

A. Symbolic meanings are shared when we talk to each other.
B. Patterns of interaction, when repeated, develop into social institutions.
C. The meanings of situations, of people, and of society itself, are created through social interaction.
D. All of these things are true of symbolic interaction.
E. None of these are true of symbolic interaction.

Feedback

- All of the statements are true of symbolic interaction.

The Elements of Symbolic Interactionism

Ritzer (2008) identified 7 principles of symbolic interactionism. These include:

- Human beings, unlike lower animals, are endowed with the capacity for thought;
- The capacity for thought is shaped by social interaction;
- The capacity for thought is shaped by social interaction;
- The capacity for thought is shaped by social interaction;
- In social interaction people learn the meanings and the symbols that allow them to exercise their distinctively human capacity for thought;
- Meanings and symbols allow people to carry on distinctively human action and interaction
- People are able to modify or alter the meaning and symbols that they use in action and interaction on the basis of their interpretation of the situation
- People are to make these modifications and alternations because, in part of their ability to interact with themselves, which allows them to examine and then choose one;
- The intertwined patterns of action and interaction make up groups and societies

Meaning: In the view of symbolic interactionism, human beings assign meanings to people, words, events things, situations and so on. The attachment of meanings to people and things allow individuals to interpret their own actions and those of others according to meanings given to them. In other words, human actions and attitudes are not determined by some actions in and of themselves (Thio 1989). Instead, they are conditioned by subjective interpretation of the actions of others in the course of daily interaction. Hence, to a symbolic interactionist, the interpretation and construction of meanings of actions are not created in isolation but as a result of interaction between and among people.

Symbols: Human social environments are inundated with symbols. A symbol is an emblem: that which by 'custom' or 'convention' here implies socially engendered or agreed practices sanctioned by societal norms. To a large extent therefore sanctioned by societal norms. To a large extent therefore symbols mean 'whatever people agree that shall mean' (Olusegun, 2013). Symbols are different kinds, gestures, signs, emblem, cars, flag or language can all stand as symbols as long as they represent something for people one of the most important symbols developed by human is Language. This is because it is the most important medium of social interaction. Indeed the heart of symbolic is language (Macionis 2007) as it allows people to properly order their world with less confusion.

Capacity for thought: Rather than being mere passive receptors of all social influences within the social world, human beings are active participants in all social activities. Human beings unlike lower animals

have the capacity to reflect on situations and design action based on internal process of the situations they are engaged in. In order words, human beings have critical minds and are able to adjudge situations rationally prior to reacting to them. This crucial assumption (i.e. that human beings possess the ability to think) differentiates symbolic interactionism from its behaviourist roots (Ritzer 2008). Unlike behaviourism which assumes that people respond to external stimulus (mostly unreflectively). However, the capacity for thought in human being is not fixed. Human thinking processes are developed and shaped in interactions.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective's Explanation of Socialization

The socialization process is voluntary, and we can accept or reject the values and norms of society at will. The values and norms of society change moment by moment based on our mutual, day-to-day interactions with one another. People follow and accept the values and norms of society only if those values and norms serve their own needs and permit them to be more comfortable in their society. Socialization is an important concept for symbolic interactionism. Interactionists believe that it is through socialization that people acquire symbols and meanings used in social situations. Symbolic interactionists believes that socialisation is asymmetrical rather than symmetrical. Kendall (2003) puts it, so symbolic interactionism believe that socialization is a two way process between society in which we live helps determine what kind of individual we will become, we have the ability to shape certain aspects of our social environments and perhaps even the larger one. (Olusegun 2013).

5.2.1 The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective's Explanation of the Social Structure

The social structure exists only in the minds of individuals and small groups and has no objective reality; it is subjective/internal, abstract, voluntary, and in constant flux. The social structure is based on social interaction, statuses, roles, groups, social networks, social institutions, and societies in which small groups and individuals create consensus. The social structure is subjective, abstract, and constantly changing. The social structure exists within every individual and it is through our everyday interactions with one another that the abstract social structure is created, and continuously re-created, every moment of every day.

ITQ

Question

Which of the following is the correct pairing?

    A. Symbolic interaction: macro-level orientation
    B. Symbolic interaction: micro-level orientation
    C. Interpretative sociology: focus on social structures
    D. None of these are correct.

5.2.2 The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective's Explanation of Bureaucracies

The bureaucracy consists of groups of people interacting with one another in patterned ways, on a day-today basis. The bureaucracy provides a mechanism for social intercourse among disparate groups and individuals. The bureaucracy is a major characteristic of large-scale industrial societies. The bureaucracy is the method by which large-scale formal organizations create interaction.

5.2.3 The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective's Explanation of Deviance

Sociologists studying crime and deviance in the interactionist tradition focus on deviance as a socially constructed phenomenon. They reject the idea that there are types of conduct that are inherently "deviant". Rather, interactionists ask how behaviours initially come to be defined as deviant and why certain groups and not others are labelled as deviant. Interactionists opine that deviance is conditional, situational, and relative to time, place, situation, and culture. Deviance is based on the perceptions of individuals. The language used to label groups or individuals as deviant, is highly symbolic and "coded." Individuals have the capacity to accept or reject the labels that society creates in the mirror.

5.2.4 The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective's Explanation of Inequality

Inequality is based on individual reactions to their own perceptions of the social structure. Because the social structure is subjective, inequality is also subjective and based on individual interpretations.

5.2.5 The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective's Explanation of the Family

Emphasizes exploring the changing meanings attached to family. Shared activities help build emotional bonds. Marriage and family relationships are based on negotiated meanings. Social resources are brought to the marriage by each partner including education, physical attractiveness, intelligence and family status.

5.2.6 The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective's Explanation of Education

Schools play a vital role in shaping the way students see reality and themselves. Authoritarianism prevalent in schools impedes learning and encourages undemocratic behavior later in life. Schools create serious difficulties for students who are "labelled" as learning disabled or less academically competent than their peers; these students may never be

able to see themselves as good students and move beyond these labels. Teacher expectations play a huge role in student achievement. If students are made to feel like high achievers, they will act like high achievers, and vice versa.

5.2.7 The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective's Explanation of Religion

Religion is a set of symbols that identify and join adherents. Religion is shared among groups and between individuals. Religion provides meaning to the individuals in the society.

5.3 Symbolic Interactionist: A critiques

Though symbolic interactionism perspective has contributed substantially to how sociologists explain society and by extension directed our attention to how research on human phenomenon could be conducted, the theory has some major flaws which have led to criticism of its assumptions. Some of these criticisms are highlighted below.

Symbolic interactionism has been criticised for being less precise or vague in terms of its conceptualisations. The perspective is believed to be too unsystematic and overly impressionistic in its method. Specifically, critiques have pointed out that the basic symbolic interactionism concepts are confusing and inaccurate which they say makes them less capable of providing firm a basis for theory and research (Ritzer 2008). For example, critiques believe the difference between concepts such as "me" and "I" is fluid and a less clear interactionists theorisation. Thus, the perspective is viewed as "marginally interesting but of little use or relevance outside small group of storytellers in marginalised journals" (Thomas 2006: 475). In addition, the theory has been thought to be a-structural. Critiques believe symbolic interactionsim does not recognise or emphasise the importance and constraint of social structure/institutions on everyday human interactions. The perspective is viewed to have been over-dependent on micro-/human interactional level for its explanatory framework (with understanding of meaning of social action as the point of departure) on society. However, the fact that under-standing of the meanings which people construct within a social setting is important in the study of individual group lives should not and does not totally foreclose the other facts such as the externality and the hold of structure on human beings in theorising on society.

Furthermore, according symbolic interactionism have often been accused of examing human interaction in a vacuum. They have tended to focus on small-scale face-to-face interaction, with little concern for its historical or social setting. While symbolic interactionism provides a corrective to the excessive of societal determinism, many critics have argued it has gone too far in this direction. Although they claim that action is not determined by structural norms, interactions do admit the presence of such norms. However, they tend to take them as given rather than explaining their origin. As Williams skidmore (1975) comments, interactionists largely

fail to explain why people consciously choose to act in given ways they might possibly have acted. In stressing the flexibility and freedom of human action, interactionists tend to downplay the constraints on action. In Skidmore's view, this is due to the fact that interactionism consistently fails to give an account of social structure; In other words, it fails to explain adequately how standardized normative behaviour comes about and why members of society are motivated to act in terms of social norms. Similar criticisms have been made with reference to what many see as the failure of interactionists to explain the source of meanings to which they attach such importance; critics argue that meanings are not spontaneously created in interaction situations. Instead, they are systematically generated by the social structure. Symbolic interactionists was also criticised for being less precise or vague in terms of its conceptualizations. Critiques have pointed out that the basic symbolic interactionism concepts are confusing and inaccurate which they say makes them less capable of providing firm a basis for theory and research (Ritzer 2008) for example critiques believe the difference between concepts such as 'me' and 'I' is fluid and a less clear interactionists theorisation.

Box 5.0: The learning point and things to remember in this study unit includes:

- Subjective meanings are given primacy because it is believe that people behave based on what they believe and not just on what is objectively true.
- People interpret one another's behavior and it is these interpretations that form the social bond. These interpretations are called the **"definition of the situation."**

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, you have learned that:

1. Symbolic Interactionism describes society as small groups of individuals interacting based on the various ways that people interpret their various cultural symbols such as spoken, written, and non-verbal language.
2. Our behavior with and among other people (our interaction) is the result of our shared understanding of cultural symbols. This is a micro-level paradigm that describes small-scale processes and small-scale social systems; it is interested in individual behavior.
3. The most important aspect of the Symbolic Interactionist paradigm is not so much that it is interested in small groups—although that is of great importance—as its interest in the interpretation of cultural symbols.
4. For Symbolic Interactionism, everything in society is based on

how we interpret our cultural symbols—media images, language, stereotypes, perceptions, and belief systems. Symbolic Interactionism does a very good job of explaining how various forms of language (including the images and the messages in the media) shape our interactions with one another and reinforce stereotypes.

5. It deals with the development of the self and the dynamic interplay between the individual and the society. In effect it focuses upon the relations between the individual and society that constitutes one of the most intriguing questions for sociology. Questions about the separateness of, and the links between individuals and society, the influences and effects of one upon the other and the implications of all these on societal development, are addressed by the symbolic interactionist perspective on sociology theory.

Assessment

Assessment

SAQ 5.1 (tests Learning Outcome 5.1)

What are the major assumptions of symbolic interactionism?

SAQ 5.2 (tests Learning Outcome 5.2)

Outline the major modern symbolic interactionist theorists and their contributions

SAQ 5.3 (tests Learning Outcome 5.3)

Mention 2 criticisms of symbolic interactionism theory

Bibliography

Reading

http://web.grinnell.edu/courses/soc/s00/soc111-01/IntroTheories/Symbolic.html

https://www.utwente.nl/cw/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20Clusters/Interpersonal%20Communication%20and%20Relations/Symbolic_Interactionism/

Notes on Self Assessment Questions

SAQ 1.1

Egbue (2002) described a sociological perspective as consisting of a way of looking at various aspects of the world. It is an orientation that suggests methods for studying social experience and finding explanations for it. The different sociological perspectives are:

- The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective
- The functionalism perspective
- The conflict perspective

SAQ 1.2

Wright Mills (1959), defines sociological imagination as 'the vivid awareness of the relationship between experience and the wider society'. He asserts that people do not usually define their personal problems in terms of historical change and institutional contradictions. Also, people do not usually think of the connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history.

SAQ 2.1

To Macionis and Plummer (2005), a theory is a statement of how and why specific facts are related. Theory is an attempt to make sense of our experiences. 'It is a set of interrelated statements that provides an explanation for a class of events. It allows the binding together of a multitude of facts so that we may comprehend them all at once.

SAQ 2.2

Macro level of sociological analysis deals with large, aggregate entities of society or even whole societies. It includes the struggle among economic classes in a society, international relations, and the interrelations among major institutions in society, such as government, religion, and family. Macro level aimed at understanding the "big picture" of institutions, whole societies, and the interactions among societies. Karl Marx's examination of the class struggle is an example of macro level of sociological analysis. While micro level of sociological analysis deals with issues of social life at the level of individuals and small groups. Dating behavior, jury deliberations, and student-faculty interactions provide apt subjects. Micro level of analysis aimed at understanding social life at the level of individuals and their interactions. Explaining how the play behavior of girls differs from that of boys is an example of micro level of analysis.

SAQ 2.3

1. A theory is used to focuse the intellectual attention of the researcher, to his chosen area of interest.
2. In every social institutional level of analysis a theories exist as explanatory models of the problems that prompted their emergence.

SAQ 3.1

1. The view that the society is a functional unity, internally consistent and a harmonious structure which is sustained by its different cultural forms.
2. All routinized social forms, (institutions) have positive functions in the society. It is this functions that justified their continued retention.
3. No society can endure without its established, accepted and shared customs, values, material objects and symbols.
4. The social system is self-regulating. The society has its in-built mechanism for conflict resolution, society resists rapid change. It therefore makes no sense investigating conflict, disharmony, and revolutions in the society.
5. The plausibility of teleological reasoning is explaining social events. The end is the cause of the steps towards its realization for example social rules like incest taboo exist for organized social life to be possible.

SAQ 3.2

1. **Emile Durkheim** (1858-1917), contributed to functionalism by developing the concept of social facts, explained how society evolved from mechanical-organic solidarity, studied suicide empirical and contributed immensely on religion.
2. **Talcott Parsons** (1902-1979), contributed to functionalism in his concept of functional prerequisite when he formulated the AGIL model, his works also covered pattern variable where he mentioned pattern variable A and pattern variable B, value consensus, social equilibrium among others.
3. **Robert K. Merton** (1968-), contributed by dealing with the criticisms of functionalism by coining concepts like universal functionalism, functional unity, indispensability, latent and manifest functions among others.

SAQ 4.1

i. Conflict theory recognises that conflict is ubiquitous in social life.
ii. Conflict theorists emphasise the importance of interests generated various types of conflict as normal aspects of social life, rather than abnormal or dysfunctional occurrences.
iii. Inside Marx's powerful methodological tool-the dialectical method which he clothed with materialism, he showed how a

given ruling class which he categorized as affirmation or thesis, and how that mode of production will bear fruit that will arise to contradict it. This, Marx represents as antithesis or negation. In Marx's view, the inevitable clash between the thesis and anti-thesis will culminate into a higher social order called synthesis or reconciliation, which off course starts the whole process all over again.

SAQ 4.2

1. Karl Marx(1818-1883) was the major proponent of conflict theory, his contributions includes: class conflict, dialectical materialism, social change, class, among others.
2. Ralf Dahrendorf (1959-) was concerned with authority, latent and manifest interests, quasi and interest groups, power, among other contributions

SAQ 4.3

1. The conflict theory is also vilified for its attempts to generalise society to caste society in the mould of a system even if its image of the system is, unlike the functionalists, conflict prone. Since then, a new way of looking at society which focused on the individual and people's everyday situational experiences has arisen.
2. Conflict theory has been criticized for being ideologically radical, underdeveloped, and unable to deal with order and stability.

SAQ 5.1

The basic treatise of this theory is that the individual and society are as two side of the same coin. Major component of the theory are as follows:

  i.   1 Day by day interaction with others is essential to the process whereby the individual becomes fashioned into a distinctive personality.

  ii.   2 In the attempt to make sense out of the world the individual seeks to attribute meaning to people's objects and events. Meaning itself derives from or arises out of the interaction that takes place among individuals in the course of their daily lives.

  iii.   Reality is as manufactured by individuals in the process of intervening in the world and interpreting continually what is occurring there. The world is therefore, a constructed reality.

  iv.   People are active beings who have the capacity for analysis carried out by this perspective of sociological theory is usually at the micro sociological level.

SAQ 5.2

1. George H. Mead (1863-1931), has was concerned with symbols, role-taking, the self among others.

2. Charles Horton Cooley was also another symbolic interactionist theorist.

SAQ 5.3

1. Symbolic interactionism has been criticised for being less precise or vague in terms of its conceptualisations. The perspective is believed to be too unsystematic and overly impressionistic in its method. Specifically, critiques have pointed out that the basic symbolic interactionism concepts are confusing and inaccurate which they say makes them less capable of providing firm a basis for theory and research (Ritzer 2008). For example, critiques believe the difference between concepts such as "me" and "I" is fluid and a less clear interactionists theorisation.

2. Symbolic interactionism has been criticised for being less precise or vague in terms of its conceptualisations. The perspective is believed to be too unsystematic and overly impressionistic in its method. Specifically, critiques have pointed out that the basic symbolic interactionism concepts are confusing and inaccurate which they say makes them less capable of providing firm a basis for theory and research (Ritzer 2008). For example, critiques believe the difference between concepts such as "me" and "I" is fluid and a less clear interactionists theorisation.