

Two sociological theories and two psychological theories



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The Johnson family Scenario

In this assignment I will explore two sociological theories and two psychological theories impacting on the Johnson family. I shall begin by exploring sociological theories analysing and defining them and in the second half of this assignment will then explore psychological theories. I will also look at the professional interventions available in social work. I shall endeavour to indicate their strength and weaknesses incorporating their relationships to issues of class, race, culture gender and sexuality. I will then reflect on the influence of these theories on my own development to achieve social work professional status.

Max Weber defined consensus as existing when expectations about the behaviour of others are realistic because the others will usually accept these expectations as valid for themselves, even without an explicit agreement.

For Marxists, consensus is a highly ideological concept used to perpetuate class rule by attempting to disguise the extent of conflict within society.

(Answers. com) Durkheim is known to have drawn an analogue of the functionalist perspective view in which he said that 'society is a system of interrelated parts each of which relies upon the other parts for efficient functioning.'(Cunningham, J & Cunningham, S). These institutions are essential for maintaining that society works harmoniously and orderly.

The view of the functionalist is that the use of power is acceptable and generally beneficial to society. They share norms and values which help them to determine the right from the wrong. There is an acceptance from the functionalist's positions that conflicts will occur but will only be

temporary and can quickly be resolved. Society should be adequately prepared to deal with instances of anti social behaviour so that society as a whole benefits. In the functionalist perspective schools' first role is to emphasise proper behaviour and knowledge that is necessary to maintain a civilised society. According to the functionalist, the children in the Johnson's should therefore be sent to school to be equipped with this weapon and the fact that they are truanting could easily be viewed as anti social behaviour.

Karl Marx did not at all agree with capitalism's theories of consensus and in his writing highlighted the conflict theory, although acknowledging structural integration of society's institutions such as political, legal or religious which he described as the superstructure. His view was that workers in the class system like Desmond a car mechanic and Mary a cook at a primary school were being exploited and that there should be equality on control, power, wealth and the best education. Marxists felt that it was those with the means of production that had the power and therefore significantly influenced the rest of the society. This causes a difference of interest among social groups which in turn causes conflict. As both Desmond and Mary are working this creates pressure on parenting skills and has probably forced Desmond to decide sending Eustace to a residential home.

Marxists perceive functionalists as deceiving as they say the norms and values which they claim are the backbone of society are in fact their norms and values that only help to strengthen their positions perpetuating the unequal social system. Marxists argued that the workers were being replaced by machines in their roles of employment and this resulted in them losing their skills, assuming monotonous jobs, separated from each other by <https://assignbuster.com/two-sociological-theories-and-two-psychological-theories/>

the noise and would return home dehumanised and physically exhausted.

Marx believed the proletariat would realise the exploitation, join together and revolt overthrowing the system and establishing true systems

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The Marxists view of social work is that it is an agent of the state and as such reinforces the interest of the ruling class. Their view is that the state in capitalists societies serves the interests of the ruling classes and do not treat their citizens equally even in cases of welfare services. They further state that the image of caring that they create is only a myth which serves to enhance the profits of the capitalists that the social workers serve through the state. The Marxists do not see the necessity of the social control role of social work but an agent of state bent on socially controlling those that are already marginalised and excluded. In this view social workers tend to be ignorant of the poverty they are meant to be addressing from the society by empowering service users to take action and bring about change. The Johnson family appears overcrowded in their residence and this is associated with poverty. Social workers have found themselves working with tied hands as the system is tightly regulated and procedural thereby restricting social workers from exercising their knowledge.

Functionalists viewed the institution of family to be the best organisational basis for society. Talcott Parsons (1955) insists that the family retains two 'basic and irreducible functions'. These are 'the primary socialisation of children' and 'the stabilisation of adult personalities.' So this view will explain that for the family to maintain stability, it needs support to ensure normality.

This perspective then explains that if there are signs of antisocial behaviour <https://assignbuster.com/two-sociological-theories-and-two-psychological-theories/>

such as truancy then the family unit needs to be supported. According to Murdock (1949) family performs four important functions i. e. providing new members of the society by reproduction, providing stability for adults through sexual gratification, providing for the economic well being and educating the young to socialise into society's norms and values. Eustace's wondering and confusion could be viewed as hindering by the functionalists because it is affecting Mary who they expect to be participating in the society both as a mother and a worker as it is the institute that will influence good behaviour of children.

Functionalists believed that the family is a positive institution, a view that meets well with the needs of an advanced industrial society. The functionalists would view Eustace's confusion as costing the society in terms of health care for Mary and himself. Eustace's problems must be rectified in order to get Mary 'functioning' well again and become productive in the society. Functionalists highlight the ideal family type in a modern society, as the nuclear family. The view of the nuclear family comprises of a breadwinner husband (in the scenario this would be Desmond) and dependant wife and children. Mary cannot be classified as dependant as she is also working and earning.

The functionalist view of the family as ideological is criticised as a conservative stance. Some feminists' criticise this view as being unrealistic as it does not recognise the oppression of women in families. However, they defend the claim that the functionalist view of family life is shared by many people, if not only as an aspiration. The nuclear family is seen as traditional and positive. Marxism states that the family is a product of capitalism and is <https://assignbuster.com/two-sociological-theories-and-two-psychological-theories/>

therefore an exploitative institution. They argue that families are not built upon love but are founded from necessity. Women therefore become the property of men and all roles within families exist in order to maintain a capitalist state.

There are two classes in the society according to Marxism. One is the ruling class and the other is the subject class. The Johnson family would be classified as a subject class and their employers like the garage owners where Desmond works would be the ruling class. This is opposed by functionalist who claims that there are many classes in society and points to a division of labour.

Eustace's situation is also causing friction between Desmond (a father and mechanic) and Mary thereby threatening the institution of family. However a Marxist would hold a different view putting the blame on Mary being over worked and thereby causing her to be depressed. They highlight the lack of care from the employers who do not pay well enough keeping most of the profits to themselves prompting Mary to work long hours.

Desmond is said to be impatient with Eustace who he sees as stressing his wife at home 'while trying to do her job.' This appears a functionalist view where Desmond is concerned about Mary being disrupted in doing her job hence not able to contribute to the income.

Mary and Desmond might have moved to the UK in response to the big drive for workforce after the world war. They were promised better lives with luxurious facilities only to realise when they arrived in the UK that it was not the case and they had to work extremely hard to earn a living. Desmond's <https://assignbuster.com/two-sociological-theories-and-two-psychological-theories/>

role would be to provide and Mary also performing this role as she also works. Caring for Eustace could be seen by Desmond as preventing Mary from performing the task expected within her role, a view that the feminists would regard as oppressive.

Whilst various sociological school of thought tries to explain family circumstances and possible interventions that may assist families it is not adequate in itself. In this context I will now turn to psychological perspectives. The essay will examine psychological theories of behavioural approach, which developed through the works of Thorndike (trial and error learning), Pavlov (classical conditioning) and Skinner (operant conditioning) who all believed that the environment controlled behaviour.

Behavioural theory is based on a " scientific method" (Banks, 2001. p. 73) and on what can be " observed, studied, measured and reliably changed" (Feltham, 1995; cited in Adams R, Dominelli L & Payne M, 2002. p. 144). It argues that internal states such as thoughts, intentions and feeling are not observable and replicable, hence are not open to scientific analysis, it aims to eradicate or reduce behaviours that are deemed problematic while positive behaviours are encouraged, an agreement between the service user and the practitioner through the process of positively reinforcing and rewarding consequences that a service user consider valuable. Payne (1997) in his " token economies" (Payne, 1997. p. 133) argues that this helps reinforce and strengthen the desirable behaviour.

This theory sees the behaviourist assuming that most behaviour is learned as a result of our interactions with our environment, including emotional

development, perceptions of the external world, social behaviour and personality.

Milner and O'Byrne (1998 p112) describes Classical conditioning occurring when there is an association of "conditioned and unconditioned stimulus" such that the former stir up a response previously evoked only by the later. This was similar to Pavlov's (1911) conclusion in his famous 'Dog-Salivation-Experiment'. If applied in this case study it would first try to identify the original stimulus, in this case, the loss of a loved one Susan, the response, Eustace's confusion and Mary's anxiety and depression. 'Those associated with unpleasant or stressful feelings may become conditioned stimuli for feelings of anger and anxiety later on'. (Birch A, 1997, p139).

Another theory of behaviour Operant conditioning claims that learning occurs when voluntary behaviour arises from an individual and becomes more or less likely to be repeated depending on its results as demonstrated by Skinner (1953) in his 'Skinner-Box-Experiments' with a cat and a pigeon. In the Johnson family scenario, Mary is a service user with depression and anxiety which Milner and O'Byrne argues "ABC Approach" (Milner and O'Byrne, 1998. p. 114) is necessary in identifying and analysing the behaviour that needs modification in agreement with the service user. Mary has gone to see the doctor on her own accord and therefore there is an agreement. This would involve establishing the Antecedent (caring for her father and the family), and the consequences (depression and anxiety). The consequences will either "strengthen or weaken behaviour by reinforcement or punishment" (Payne, 1997. p. 114). In Mary's case it is the depression and anxiety that is undesirable. The distinctive characteristic of operant
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conditioning relative to previous forms of behaviorism is that the organism (Mary) can emit responses instead of only eliciting response due to an external stimulus (the practitioner). It is likely that Mary would respond positively if the right responses have been reinforced.

Behaviourism models are advantageous due to their easy adaptability and practicability by inexperienced practitioners without extensive training than would be expected of a " psychodynamic approach" (Adams, R, Dominelli, L and Payne, M, 2002. p. 144) in facilitating an effective outcome. Payne (1997) also argues that the prescribed " explicit, structured guidance...and assessment instruments employed" (Payne, 1997. p. 134) gives unskilled practitioners the confidence to apply behavioural theory and procedures in interventions. My perception is that as behavioural intervention focuses on negative behaviour that needs modification, it is empowering the service user to choose and self determine the behaviours that need modification in partnership and therefore the practitioner is recognising and respecting individuality. The role of the practitioner is to facilitate and support the service user. Thus, labelling and making judgement on the service user is avoided and is then directed to the behaviour.

Behavioural approaches have been criticised by some practitioners as being " excessively mechanistic" (Banks, 2001. p. 73) and " non-human" (Payne, 1997. p. 122) in some of its methods, conducts and terms used, as they do not take into account service user individuality and will to choose. It is true that Mary would be different from other service users who would have used the same theory. The behavioural approach overall intervention emphasis is on the need to change or modify the client behaviour rather than those

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around the client who may be the problem. In the case scenario it is probably Desmond who we need to convince that Mary and Eustace need his understanding and cooperation as well as dealing with the fact that the family were not offered support to grieve and move on with life after the death of a

loved one. Milner and O'Byrne (1998) point out that social workers tend to do as they find " easier to change an individual than challenge the status quo" (Milner and O'Byrne, 1998).

Attachment has been defined as " an affectionate bond between two individuals that endures through space and time and serves to join them emotionally" Kennell 1976.

John Bowlby described attachment as a " lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194). Bowlby believed that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers had an impact lasting throughout their lives. Adult attachment theory helps Social Workers understand how people feel and act within close relationships, particularly in stressful situations. Attachment is not different in adulthood and in childhood as they all will give and receive support. Attachment relationships can be secure or insecure. Attachment is clearly influential in both professional and personal settings. As a Social Worker knowing about the attachment theory can help to make the right steps in order to protect the child and the family.

Mary Ainsworth expanded greatly on Bowlby's original work with behaviour experiment which she named " Strange Situation". In the study children
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between 12 months and 18 months were left alone with a stranger with the mother returning a moment later. The study revealed three major styles of attachment: secure attachment, ambivalent-insecure attachment and avoidant insecure attachment. A fourth one was later added on by researchers Main and Solomon called disorganised insecure-attachment.

It is clear that Mary has a bond with her father and hence his condition is affecting her psychologically. The fact that Mary and Desmond's relationship seemed to be strained by having Eustace living with them shows that they are experiencing lack of intimacy support for one another.

The scenario mentions the death of Susan in the family and appears that Eustace, Mary and the Kids have been affected. Loss through death is a normal part of life experienced by everyone. The grief process varies in length and this also depends on the strength of the attachment. This period is usually very painful as the affected seek to adjust or cope without their loved one. Collin, Murray-parkes (1972) describes bereavement as an illness, thus in turn prompted Mary to see her doctor for help. The Johnson family appears not to have gone through the grieving process. Eustace is showing a lack of interest in normal life by wondering and could be his way of searching for his wife. 'The grieving process involves psychological suffering (Birch, A , 1997 p251)

Grief is defined as " the process of psychological, social and somatic reactions to the perceptions of loss" (Rando, 1984). This explains that the individual is affected mentally, physically as well as socially. Bereavement is defined as " the state of having suffered a loss" (Rando, 1984).

According to Bowlby excessive separation anxiety is usually the result of adverse family experiences, such as repeated threats of abandonment or rejections by parents, or to parent's or siblings' illnesses or death for which the child feels responsible. The truancy of the children could be a result of the feeling that they felt 'abandoned' after the death of Susan who at one stage raised them for three years when their parents moved to the UK and could have bonded with the children. They have been living in the same house and this could have kept them close.

A key principle of an attachment based practice is the acknowledgment that young children develop a range of adaptive strategies that are designed to help them cope with, survive and function in whatever situations they happen to find themselves, The children could be truanting as way of coping with the loss.

As Eustace is wondering and possibly searching for his wife, it could be that he is thinking of joining her wife where ever she is. This brings Eriksson's stages of development Integrity v Despair. Integrity is contentment with what you have achieved and Despair is the feeling that you have achieved nothing. As Eustace could be nearing the end of his life he will probably look back with integrity. He had his child who also got married and had her own family. He has lived for more than sixty years and although it does not look like he lived a porch life he was not homeless and up to this day still has a loving daughter taking care of him. Eustace will probably be looking forward to dying with contentment.

Applying sociological and psychological theories as well as social work values has been a challenge for me considering my ethnic background of African origin as much as the Johnson family who travelled to settle in the UK, a country with different norms, cultures and values. I feel I empathise more with the Johnson family, in relation to the impact of new norms, culture and a new way of living.

Studying social work has challenged some of my beliefs and prejudices and hence the toleration of others, provide recognition and ability to challenge discrimination. Adherence of work values have provided me with further understanding of being respectful of other peoples, views, religion, culture and preferences which is of paramount significance to become a social work practitioner. (GSCC 2002).