

Understanding the sociological analysis of divorce sociology essay



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Divorce is considered a major social problem in the United States of America (USA). Divorce impacts the lives of many people outside of the divorcing family including many aspects of society. Divorce is playing an active role in reshaping the culture of the USA by changing the definition of the family (Schaefer, 2008). Because divorce is a problem in the eyes of Americans it merits sociological analysis using the Sociological Imagination and the three sociological perspectives: Functionalism, Conflict Theory and Interactionism. The definition and concepts of Sociological Imagination will be outlined first. The social issue of divorce will be viewed from this set of concepts to see how divorce affects individuals and society as a group. A description of the major ideas and concepts in each of the three major sociological perspectives will be followed by an analysis of divorce by each perspective. Using each of the perspectives will uncover useful insights and information concerning this issue. Finally, concluding ideas will be presented and supported.

To be able to see the interaction between the person and their community, for example, is crucial to developing a Sociological Imagination. However, Sociological Imagination is much more complex than Mills' definition. When a sociologist uses his or her " Sociological Imagination" it is the " imagination" part that is most interesting and enlightening. For example, you walk into a room filled with people talking and engaging in normal social behavior. Without intending to you begin to observe those people and their actions in a very biased way. You bring cultural, gender and economic biases with you as a normal part of your consciousness. Observing objectively, thus scientifically, would be out of the question in this situation. Now, imagine you

are an alien observing the same group of people interacting in the room. Because you are not a human you do not have human biases such as viewing a male doing the dishes with disdain. It is easy for the alien observer to truly see interactions in a scientific manner. The alien observer would not think that any action or behavior is unusual or wrong, the action or behavior simply is. Sociological Imagination is an amazing way of observing human social behavior and human groups because it encourages the observer to see objectively and then ask the most important question in sociology: why?

Divorce must be considered using microsociology and macrosociology when using the Sociological Imagination. Divorce affects the family, a microsociological group, immediately and sometimes drastically. Divorce affects the entire country, a macrosociological group, sometimes long after the divorce and in many small ways that add up to bigger problems. It can be argued that divorce is only a personal problem. Take, for example, a young married woman without children. Divorce would impact her economic status and economic future. For a young woman going through a divorce negatively affects her ability to provide basic housing and nourishment needed to be a productive citizen.

She might even need to file bankruptcy to be able to move on with her life in a meaningful way. This can be seen as only her problem. She will have to deal with bad credit scores for years to come and may have to take lower paying jobs or live in undesirable apartments as a result. She may become depressed and perform poorly at her job as well. These personal hardships carry over into her family and workplace groups quickly and with detrimental effects. However, using the Sociological Imagination provides insight into <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-the-sociological-analysis-of-divorce-sociology-essay/>

how divorce influences much more than her and her family. Divorce impacts the society she lives in several ways. The bankruptcy she filed would negatively affect the already unhealthy economy. Because of her low credit scores she might not be able to earn as much as she is actually capable of thus, she will spend less on essentials than she might otherwise. As she is pushed deeper into a lower socioeconomic status her spending will also fall which slows economic growth. Because she has become poor she probably cannot afford private healthcare, so she relies on public healthcare to provide her with medication to combat her depression. Her divorce had become a public problem. The Sociological Imagination encourages observations such as this to better understand the implications of personal issues on a societal scale.

There is another way to look at the young divorcee's personal problem when using the Sociological Imagination from a macrosociological view point. It can be argued that her divorce is rooted in a deeper social issue within the culture that she lives. For example, the social issue of poverty could have caused her divorce. Many marriages end because of financial hardships. If the divorcee and her then spouse were living on wages that placed them under the poverty level the stresses of providing adequate housing and nourishment would have been great. There are many other social issues that could contribute negatively to a marriage such as domestic violence causing divorce to occur.

The Functionalism perspective in sociology states that society is structured the way it is in order to maintain its stability thus, its survival (Schaefer, 2008). The key concepts are balance, harmony and evolutionary, not <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-the-sociological-analysis-of-divorce-sociology-essay/>

revolutionary, change within the current scheme. The way the society functions now is the way it should be because everything serves a purpose. This perspective sees society as a complex system that promotes stability by guiding individuals with a social structure that provides certain social functions. Anything that disrupts the current social structure or functions is seen as dysfunction. If some part of a society does not contribute to the current architecture of stability it will not remain. Manifest and latent functions of institutions are of particular interest to this perspective because they illuminate facets of society's structure. The Functionalism perspective overlaps with conservative political views and deals with macrosociological groups such as an entire country.

Conflict Theory is a perspective that views society as groups that are struggling over power or resources (Schaefer, 2008). The key concepts are tension, inequality and revolutionary change. Society is the way it is because of inequality, and this inequality should be actively opposed. This perspective views society as an arena of disparity that generates conflict and change. Change is seen as a positive force for a society. Conflict theorists are interested in why some people have so many resources while others have so few and how this is either being maintained or changed. The Feminist view is closely related to the Conflict perspective because both deal with inequality (Schaefer, 2008). Feminist view looks at disparity between the genders in terms of women's lower statuses in most societies. It asserts that gender inequity is the force that is at the center of behavior and the status quo. Both the Feminist view and the Conflict perspective overlap with

liberal political views and focus on macrosociological groups such as American women.

The Interactionist perspective, also known as symbolic Interactionism, generalizes about individual social interactions as a way to see society as a whole (Schaefer, 2008). The key concepts are interactions, relations and symbolic meanings. This perspective views society as a product of everyday interactions. Humans are viewed as living in a world of meaningful objects with an emphasis on the importance of symbols. This perspective is closely related to social psychology. The dramaturgical approach and nonverbal communication are of particular interest to this perspective because they help to clarify how personal interactions are accomplished. The Interactionist perspective overlaps with libertarian political views and deals with microsociology such as a symbolic exchange between coworkers.

Divorce when viewed from the Functionalism perspective contributes to the stability of the society as a whole. Fewer divorces would actually be dysfunctional because divorce serves a purpose. For example, as a result of divorce many lawyers, judges and court officials are employed. The public system of healthcare employs doctors, nurses and social workers that treat and care for the poorer people in society including those that have lost so much because of divorce. Without the current rates of divorce many people would be unemployed. Unemployment would destabilize societal structure therefore divorce rates must remain where they are to ensure survival of the social scheme. The status quo must remain in place.

Divorce when viewed from the Conflict perspective must be analyzed as a microcosm of society. Conflict theorists would describe the divorce as the competition for resources and power within the marriage where both parties cannot come to an agreement.

The struggle over resources generates tension that results in a change in the marital status. Looking at divorce from the Feminist view can be seen as conflict between a woman that is addressing the inequality stemming from her gender role and a man that does not want to relinquish power or resources to her. For example, she may have wanted her own checking account with private access to funds while her husband saw this as an unacceptable amount of power for her to have. The resulting tension caused a revolutionary change in their social structure. Divorce is seen in this light as a positive force because it is changing an inequality.

Divorce when viewed from the Interactionist perspective examines the choices that each individual has made, the interactions between husband and wife, and the symbolic meaning of marriage and divorce. Nothing is right or wrong is it simply a way of looking at society from a very small scale while determining how these interactions shape the larger group. A symbolic Interactionist would ask the divorcee what she thought about the meaning of marriage and divorce. Her information taken with thousands of other interviews would form a picture of the current meaning of divorce. For example, the institution of marriage as a symbolic contract between a pair of people and the community has changed. Marriage was at once a status symbol and rite of passage. It used to mean you were on the right track in life and providing stability to your community. Conversely, divorce was seen <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-the-sociological-analysis-of-divorce-sociology-essay/>

as a great shame and something to be hidden if at all possible. Today multiple divorces are not uncommon. The stigma attached with divorce has declined just as the “necessity” of marriage has declined. Using the Interactionist perspective uncovers the changing meaning of divorce as a symbol in society.

Of the three sociological perspectives the Conflict perspective and Feminist view offers a more convincing and applicable view of divorce. It answers “why” divorce happens in the most logical way. Americans are the most self-centered and arrogant people in the world. American culture upholds money, beauty and power as the most important goals one should work towards attaining in life. These values do not promote long term relationships. They promote conflict. For example, tensions arise in a marriage because of the struggle over money, property and power in a relationship. When one person in the marriage becomes unable to handle the disproportion of resources a disagreement occurs. Women’s historical gender roles are still in effect. Because women are still expected to manage a household while working a full time job frustrations arise. These issues as well as countless others contribute to the current divorce rates. The Feminist view supports this idea by saying that the center of the problem is gender inequality while examining the ways in which it is still occurring. Conflict perspective explains how these problems arise and how they cause divorce by uncovering the perceptions, attitudes and values within the culture that give rise to the conflict.