Freedom of constructing identity? essay

How much freedom do Individuals really have In the creation of their identities? Critically discuss by drawing on the theories and concepts of Interpretive sociology (such as the work of Irving Coffman and ethnomusicology) and one of the following: 1) Michel Faculty (Post-structuralism) 2) Pierre Broodier (Structuralism) Assessment Task: A 3500 word assignment which meets learning outcomes: 1 & 3. Number of words: 3816/3500. Pages: 20.

In sociology, there has been debate into how identity is constructed, with major differences into how identity is constructed depending upon on which epistemological position Is taken by sociologist of whether the social structure or the agency which is the most influential in society and whether or not either should or can be studied in order to study society due to its limitations either on whether it can be studied or not or whether or not It would be useful to study It exclusively.

In the investigation of identity, it is important to understand that there is great knowledge offered from both sociology as well as social psychology In understanding identity. However, for the purposes of this essay, the focus will be on the sociological explanations of identity, with focus on the workings of Irving Coffman on symbolic Interactions and ethnomusicology as well as on Michel Faculty on the his version or his contributions to post-structuralism or social constructionist.

Identity Is defined as being the categorization made by ourselves of who we are as well as by others in society, categorizing on who we are. Many forms

of groups of identities in society of which most if not but all of us belong to are age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class.

As well as many others. Often, identity Is soused upon in times of what is described as identity troubles or identity conflicts (Lawyer, 2012); whereby social conflicts such as riots and violent attacks occur between different communities who have different Identities.

Some examples of this involve cases of terrorism such as the 7/7 bombings as well as the Northern Ireland " troubles". However, it is important to Investigate the deeper concept of identity of how It is constructed, and what it Is, as well as how It functions and Influences us, rather than only focusing on the identity troubles or conflicts as is the main focus in society's thinking or public opinion or In the media. There are many different forms of identity ranging from personal identity, political identity as well as many others.

The focus of this essay will be on social identity due produced by sociology.

Social identity is the focus on studying the social groups in society of who are categorized or identified by a significant factor which can be studied and is the subject of being studied sociologically. There is also a long-standing debate in sociology of whether structure or agency should be focused on in investigating society as well as in producing theory or inclusions of society.

The view that social structure is the most influential in society (Giddiness, 1976) is widely associated with the belief that individuals have very little if not, any freedom at all in constructing their identity, due to its deterministic position that it takes in believing that the social structure around us in

society determines our actions and is external to us, thus resulting in us having very little control of ourselves in society and of who we are.

However, on the other hand, the alternative or opposite view taken of the belief that agency is more influential as argued by Archer (2003) and should also be the focus on sociologists when studying society takes the view that although there may be social forces in society, it is important to investigate the agencies such as the social institutions, social forces and social contexts in society in order to not understand society and how it works, but also, leads on how to bring about social change in society, through changing agencies.

Alternatively, there is also a third approach to investigating identity, proposed by many sociologists as an approach to study both structure and agency, and not only gust either as it is better to have an understanding of the roles both structure and agency have to play in society, and thus gain a more holistic understanding of how society functions and thus gain a better understanding of how to bring about change in society.

Giddiness (1976) and Archer (2003) are fundamental to the debate on the role of structure and agency of which both also propose theories of society related to structure and agency.

Furthermore, there are also other sociologists such as Pierre Broodier (1977) and Michel Faculty (1971) who offer additional greater insight and heron into studying society but in a more different way than Giddiness and Archer who exclusively study either structure or agency only, whereas Faculty and Broodier propose different concepts, such as Boride's field, habits and

capital. Additionally, in the study of structure and agency also involves using either of the different ways of studying society with structure more associated with macro- sociology and agency seen as more micro-sociology.

Additionally, an important point to remember in investigating identity is that membership or associating with an identity does not simply mean sharing values tit other members with the same identity, but instead, identifying the differences The works of Michel Faculty and his great contribution to post-structuralism or social constructionist offer great knowledge or understanding identity.

Social constructionist or post-structuralism defined by Faculty argues that identity is socially constructed or in other words created by people.

A sociological approach to investigate identity involves greatly of the debate of the structure versus agency debate whereby it is argued whether or not structure or individuals which are able to be investigated in society. Much of the debate leads to structure although being the most holistic explanation and being able to understand the most about society, it is limited due to it being argued to not able to be studied due to it being out of our awareness and out of our ability to control.

However, on the other hand, or vice versa, investigating or explaining society through agency is limited as it can only explain if only to a limited extent, as agency is diverse and can be explained using multiple agencies as well as to a certain degree only.

Thus, in investigating identity, it is highly important to insider both structure and agency as important issues when studying identity. Although, Giddiness & Archer talk much on structure and agency, there is far greater insight into the role of structure and agency in the construction of identity such as by Burke & Stets (2003).

There is great amount of use of social-structure in the investigation of identity such as by Burke & Stets (2003). Additionally, it can also be hard sometimes to define the identities in society people have and the different interpretations linked to them.

There are many different identities in society ranging from sexuality, gender, ethnicity and class, although here is also a great sub-division and in-depth understanding or explanation of the identities. In this essay, there will be great in-depth focus on the issues concerning the identity of sexuality.

Apart from sexuality, there is also a heavy emphasis on gender as also being socially constructed. This is because sociologists argue of the point that there is necessity of the need to distinguish between sex and gender. Oakley (2005) argues that sex and gender need to be distinguished as being separate as sex is what is naturally or biologically determined, in contrast to gender which refers to the social roles and preferences between males and females, of which is social constructed. Gender is mistakenly or assumed to be the same as sex says Ann Oakley (2005).

Therefore, feminists such as Oakley (2005) argue or advocate for the need to make people aware of the distinction of sex and gender, in order to prevent the oppression or discrimination of females or women, simply due to gender

assumptions, of which are socially constructed and thus have no biological basis. A key contributor to this debate is the sociologist Anne Oakley, who since the sass's harmoniously as a single term and instead campaigns for greater awareness of the preferences between sex and gender; that sex is biological and that gender is socially constructed.

There are many examples of gender discrimination or of gender differences such as career and education choices as well as particularly in the role of bringing up children or child-rearing or mothering, whereby it is assumed it is always the biological mother or the female who must have this role. However, mother is defined as being the career or primary guardian of the child (Reilly 2008), and although justified as being the role fixed for women only, the role of a mother could also apply o the biological father of the child who may choose instead to be the primary care- giver of the child.

Thus feminists argue that women have been oppressed by the patriarchal society which identifies women as being mothers and thus expects them to be mothers and not being allowed the opportunity to choose a career bringing them economic power of which traditionally has been usually only the male or the husband, whom is identified as the breadwinner, who has the economic power of the home, thus oppressing women.

Furthermore, in addition to Faculty's comments on the social construction of sexuality, Coffman (1977) also comments on how gender is socially constructed through the interpretation of gender often mistakenly being assumed as being the same as sex. In the " Theory of Society', Saffron's (1977) article " The Arrangement Between The Sexes", Coffman (1977)

emphasizes the distinction between gender and sexuality. Wincher & Sanderson (2003) argues that gender identity is a highly significant issue in psychology in comparison to other identities which are deemed less significant than gender identity.

Sexuality is an identity in society which has been found to have greatly changed in cent history, particularly on issues of LOST since the sass's.

However, much of the focus has been on issues of recognizing homosexuality of gays and lesbians in society, with the most recent fundamental change in society of gay marriage coming into law in 2013 with it being in force from 2014. However, there is arguably still little change or place in society for people with other sexualities such as bisexuals and much more free and diverse sexualities.

Faculty & Hurley (1988) studies and analyses the development of homosexuality throughout time, focusing on what Faculty describes as the " discourses" or the information associated with homosexuality over time, of which changes through each generation, but not progress as is the general assumption. Faculty & Hurley (1988) suggests that homosexuality was not previously defined as a category but was Just defined as a sex act.

Therefore, Faculty argues that since the categorization of sexualities, it has brought homosexuality greater power, thus generating enough Moreover, interactions, such as Irving Coffman, argue greatly on the change in the way sexuality has been interpreted over time. It can generally be seen that the views n sexuality and the different types of sexuality have changed throughout time. There has been a gradual shift since the 18th Century from

the only sexuality of heterosexuality being allowed up to today, whereby there has been a shift to a more diverse view of sexuality.

Since the 18th century, upon the enlightenment period which brought about great change and the dominance of science in society than traditional beliefs, thus bringing about the great need for categorization or terminology and study of society; in other words the birth of modern sociology. In the case of sexuality, there was not such definition or research produced on sexuality, as the general assumption was that there were males and females with a male and female who were married in a monogamous married relationship.

After categorization of sexuality, heterosexuality was not emphasizes much but was taken as the norm in society, with other sexualities being seen as highly deviant as well as to a large extent, illegal, such as people being hanged for being convicted of conducting acts of homosexuality, of which would be hard to believe today with events such as Gay Pride and the legalization of gay marriage.

Today, there is also a great in-depth study on territoriality as well as on the traditionally studied topics of LOST in sexuality.

Katz (2007) has done great research into heterosexuality, in which has been little studied on as it was assumed as the social norm. Coffman (1971) is criticized by many on his theories or idea of people having a " front- stage" and a " back-stage" as it seems very simplistic and not very realistic. In relation to Saffron's work on symbolic interactions, religious identity is highly

applicable with Saffron's (1971) ideas of how symbols are interpreted differently and what they represent.

This is relevant as most religions often have religious symbols of which an be seen in Deuterium's (1965) study of religious symbols as being either sacred or profane.

In Saffron's book published in the late sass's, The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life, Coffman suggests and compares people as being actors, suggesting that we play different identities and roles in different social contexts.

From this, Coffman (1959) argues that we play dual roles at home and work as we act the role of being very kind and polite at work, trying to conform to social norms, but at home or in private, we are freer to express our own true beliefs and do not think about the other's feelings, hush acting as though we have different identities when in different social contexts. Moreover, Coffman (1959) argues of the importance of how our interpretation of symbols plays a role in our construction of identity and in our understanding of society. This is what Coffman terms or conceptualizes as " symbolic interactions".

This is particularly useful when comparing different societies, particularly when may mean that we have different interpretations of the same things.

For example, in some societies, snakes are considered to be a pet and interpreted as being an animal which is to be loved, however, in many societies such as in historic times, snakes were considered themselves to be evil, even if they caused no harm, which is illustrated in many historic texts

such as in the bible as well as in the Quern, whereby snakes are regarded as being agents of the devil; which seek to cause evil and should be refrained from or killed.

Thus, this can be described as being the exact opposite or being different interpretations of the same thing. Burke & Stets (2003) offers great in-depth knowledge into a sociological approach to identity as well as glimpsing a little on social-psychology. Burke & Stets (2003) offer great insight into sociological aspects of identity such as on identity and the self, but also focuses on key issues of structure and agency.

They support the view that there is a structure in society but it can be changed by individuals of the self particularly through reflexivity and adhere particularly to the structural symbolic interactions perspective to investigate identity. Clarke (2004) criticizes both Faculty and Coffman for their lack of emotion, passion or motivation in the construction of self. Jenkins (1996) argues that firstly it is important to understand categorization if we are o understand the social world or the sociological enterprise, and then we can find out and crucially understand the ways, the social contexts, in which processes of categorization work.

Gummers (1982) in his book Language and social identity, in chapter 1, he makes a key point that in order to understand identity, it is not only the ethnic, social and political differences which influence or are influenced by identity, it is the social process of communication which is vital in influencing identity. This also relates to Faculty's concept of power and knowledge, as the use and the way language is said and used influences how others in

society identify and perceive the speaker to have a form of identity which is assumed by others.

In chapter 2, Gummers, (1982, edited in Gummers, 1982) discusses thematic structure and progression in discourse, which may relate to Faculty's (1971) concept of " discourse". Furthermore, Gummers, also heavily references Saffron's ideas and work in his book especially when discussing interaction. Coffman argues that our interactions through communication not only conveys the content of the message, but also portrays an image of ourselves, in other words, an aspect of our identity.

Gummers (1982) study of Greek-American's use of language showed that although Greek-Americans spoke English in America, they were likely to use phrases and use language similar to the way Greek language is used. Created whilst we are young through solicitation or when going through a major change based upon social identity factors such as changes in politics and sexuality.

However, it is important to remember that identity is lifelong process as we do not always gain the same knowledge at the same time. Often, people have multiple even contradictory identities throughout their lifetime.

This may be due to new learning experiences which may influence a person's thinking and causes changes in their thinking about their own identity. Kathy Woodward (2004) answers the question of how identity is formed in the opening of her book on questioning identity of gender, class and ethnicity. Woodward (2004) suggests that identity is formed or created through interaction between people.

This flows similarly with Saffron's and Faculty's thinking on identity formation or constructed in that it is socially constructed. Woodward (2004) also suggests that the ways in which we can shape our identities largely through structural means.

Hacking (2004) compares and contrasts the works of Michel Faculty and Irving Coffman and argues that they are both not to be compared for the differences they have, but instead have many features in common when investigating identity, such as looking at how identity is socially constructed. What's more is that there are also impacts of people having certain identities. This is more commonly termed or defined as " identity politics" whereby identity is linked or associated with social status as certain identities may be valued or classified or categorized as being much more privileged or possessing a higher position in society Han others.

Faculty portrays a similar argument in relation to identity and power in prisons, whereby Faculty argues that there is a clear outline of power in the prisons through the hierarchy of power and authority of which is clearly outlined with the different identities which are constantly expressed in the prison setting with prisoners being told what to do by prison officers who are higher than them on the hierarchy of power and constantly and continuously use or implement their position of authority or power throughout daily life in the prison.

Thus it can be argued by some sociologists, that this social construction of identity does not allow freedom of construction of identity. In conclusion in order to answer the question of how much freedom individuals have in the

creation of their identity, it can best be answered as being a composition of individuals having the freedom but choosing to adapt to the social influences and norms of society.

In summary, both Coffman, on his work on symbolic interactions and ethnomusicology as well as the Michel Faculty's (1971) work on post-structuralism natural, as is the general assumption. Thus identity being socially constructed leads o the conclusion that it can be changed more easily in society as opposed to views that social structure determines identity.

Thus, Faculty's contribution to post-structuralism or social constructionist along with Saffron's contribution to symbolic interactions and ethnomusicology, both help in understanding identity and the freedom of individuals in constructing identity, but only to a limited extent due to their only being a limit to the amount of knowledge about identity due to the reductionism approach of only focusing on a small section of the knowledge on identity which contributes to there being a lack of logistic knowledge presented in this essay on identity.

Additionally, in conclusion, it can be summarized that identity is socially contracted with there being great contributions from the social-constructionist theory on identity which best describes the construction of identity.

Although social constructionist is fairly new, rooting mainly in the sass's, it roots heavily from other sociological perspectives and theories which are much older such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, social psychology as well

as addressing previous criticisms with the addition of what is crucially focused on in this essay of symbolic interactions, toting greatly from Saffron's work as well as from post-structuralism, which roots heavily from Faculty's work. Thus, it can be concluded that identity is not determined by nature, but instead more of a social construction.

Therefore, in response to the question of the freedom of individuals in constructing identity, from the information provided from Saffron's (1971) work on symbolic interactions and ethnomusicology as well as from Saffron's (1971) work on post- structuralism or social constructionist, it can be concluded that individuals do have a certain degree of freedom in constructing identity, but it is often not determined, UT influenced by many social forces and influences rooting from social constructionist of our own making of constructing identity and categorization.

However, it is also important that there is also a critique of this essay in the fact that it does not provide a holistic explanation to explaining the question on identity as it has a limited knowledge from focusing on Saffron's (1971) work and Faculty's work only, and not considering or focusing much on other explanations of understanding identity, which may provide an alternative explanation or conclusion in explaining the redeem of individuals in constructing identity. In comparison, Faculty and Broodier sit at near opposites or come from different perspectives which criticism each other in the structure versus agency debate.

Structuralisms such as Broodier, argue that structure is the most influential in society and should be the focus on in sociology, whereas, post-

structuralisms, such as Faculty, which developed in response to the criticisms of structuralism argues structure and agency are both influential and should be studied together in sociology. Thus the focus of this essay is limited to mainly the agency side other argue that structure is the most influential and should focused on when studying or investigating identity.

Thus, there is a degree of freedom of individuals in constructing their identity, but in similarity to the way identities are socially constructed; social forces which lead to the processes of construction of identity are also socially constructed, thereby awareness of sociological forces can bring about changes such as the rise of feminism seeking to abolish the oppression suffered by women.

References Archer, M. S. (2003). Structure, agency, and the internal conversation.

Cambridge, I-J: Cambridge University Press. Broodier, P. 1977). Outline of a theory of practice. Cambridge, U. K: Cambridge University Press.