

Assess the sociological explanations of the role of culture in contemporary socie...

[Politics](#), [Marxism](#)



Assess the sociological explanations of the role of culture in contemporary society Culture is the behaviour, beliefs and characteristics of a particular group of people. Age groups, ethnic groups and social groups etc... are all examples of groups of people that possess their own unique culture. The people within a culture are expected to follow the norms and values that are passed down through generation to generation. Over the past 30 years, different cultures have gradually intermingled due to an increasing number people immigrating to different countries, which each bring their own cultures, be it religious or pop culture etc... . This is particular visible in many western countries such as Britain, Canada and the United States, as there is a much higher level of ethnic diversity. The amalgamation of different cultures has also shaped people's views on things like sexuality, gender roles and age roles etc... Functionalists believe that culture benefits the whole of society. They believe that if everyone in society shares the same beliefs and ideas, i. e. a value consensus is reached, and then society as a whole can be kept in a civilised manner. They also believe that socialisation is a key factor, to shaping culture and society. Primary socialisation is taught by parents who teach children what they expect of them. It also develops their own personal characteristics, beliefs and values, which are largely influenced by their parents and family. Secondary socialisation is taught mainly by teachers in schools. Teenagers and young adults learn what is expected of them in larger society, outside of their home (e. g. what is acceptable and not acceptable based on age or gender etc...). Tertiary socialization occurs when individuals are integrated into the world and being to gain new ideas and values of socialization. Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist during the

late 19th century and early 20th century, believed that culture is collectively formed and only exists collectively, meaning that culture can only be developed by a group of people and not by an individual. He believed that culture has many relationships with society, including a logical relationship (the idea that power over individuals belongs to certain cultural categories, and beliefs such as God), a functional relationship (the idea that culture creates common beliefs amongst individuals in society, strengthening social order). However, the functionalist explanations are based on a more traditional society. They are outdated as some ideas do fit today's multi-cultural society. The classical Marxist theory culture as a way of expressing a ruling class ideology. This is where the bourgeoisie control the superstructure of society, the proletariat (working class) creating a false class consciousness, which further creates a false description of reality and the relationships between them and the proletariat. They also believe that culture reinforces the class structure. This means that culture is a way of maintaining the ideas of what each class can achieve. For example, the classical Marxist theory believes that in society, the rich population will always achieve higher than the poorer population, as they can afford to carry on their education to the highest level, whilst the poorer population are sifted out of the educational system at the earliest possible stage. The classical Marxist theory does not take into account the times when the working class rejects their control under the ruling class. This can be in the form of riots, strikes or even a group of people, who are in their own subculture who share the same beliefs about the relationship between the working class and the ruling class (e. g. skin heads, punks). Neo-Marxist

believes that the working class are being distracted from revolting against the ruling class. One of the most widely adopted forms of neo Marxism is the Frankfurt school. Two of its key members, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, came up with the theory of "the culture industry". This is the idea that popular culture is like a factory that produces standardized cultural goods (e. g. film, radio, magazines) that are used to manipulate mass society into being content, no matter how poor the quality of their lives are. They believe that mass culture encourages the working class to buy things that are false needs, which leads to a commodity fetishism. This is when capitalism affects the way people interact with each other based on the economic class they belong to. For example, under capitalism, everything that can be exchanged becomes a commodity. Things like labour can become a commodity, by selling your labour to an employer you are commoditizing yourself, and that defines the kind of relationship you and your employer will have. Overall, the neo Marxist theory sees that the population are passive victims of mass culture, who are distracted from the realisation of the quality of their lives. Neo-Marxists at the Birmingham University adopted Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony. This was an idea thought up by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, that capitalism would have to face and tolerate oppositional cultures. These are usually sub cultures, particularly within youth culture, that stand against capitalist values. Stuart Hall gave the example of the skinhead as an oppositional culture, as he argued that they do not follow the norms and values set in place by capitalism, and resist capitalist views. This theory however is highly theoretical and lacks primary data. Feminists believe that culture is dominated by male ideas. They

believe that men control women to serve their own interests, and that women are seen as “second class citizens”. The idea that females from an early age, are brought up being brainwashed by culture and society into thinking that women cannot strive to achieve high goals like men can. This is visible in the mass media. For example, in many soap operas and sitcoms, women are portrayed as home makers, cleaners or secretaries, whilst men are portrayed as having high powered jobs. In the 1950’s, all advertisements for things like kitchen appliances or cleaning products were women orientated, and many T. V commercials for these often saw the male as the breadwinner, returning home from work to his wife. However, this theory is becoming outdated as women in contemporary society are given the same opportunities as men. For example, women now have equal job opportunities as men, as many of them are entering previously male dominated occupations. The interpretive, interactionist approach or the action theory as it’s more commonly known, is the idea that culture is made up of every body’s individual actions in society. It believes that people’s views and explanations of culture are moulded by the social groups in which they belong to. These interpretations of culture by individuals in society come together to form what is known as the actionist theory. This theory however does not take into account shared beliefs or a value consensus. It also conflicts with the idea that culture cannot be formed by an individual, and can only be formed when there is a group of people. Semiotic culture attempts to define culture as types of symbolic human activity, creation of signs and a way of giving meaning to everything around. In this idea, culture is understood as a system of meaningful symbols, signs words and images.

This approach can be adopted by any theorist (e. g. Marxist, feminist) no matter where they stand on the sociological spectrum. Post modernists theories of culture are based around the idea that society is adopting new cultures all the time. This is what is known as cultural diversity. Post-modernists believe that individuals are free to choose and design their own culture and identities. They also may pick up a hybrid culture, which is a mixture of different cultures that is usually found in countries where there is a large culture diversity. Overall, I think that most of the theories have valid plausibility and evidence, especially Horkeimer's and Adorno's neo_marxist theory. However, Theory I find most plausible is the functionalist theory. I find that it has the most supportive evidence out of all the theories.