

The functionalist,
marxist and feminist
ideologies of
contemporary society
assign...



In this assignment, I am going to briefly explore the definitions of Functionalism, Marxism, and Feminism and how their ideologies affect contemporary society in Great Britain. In doing so I will give examples that expand upon the definitions and illustrate that such ideologies are evident and still have an impact on the society we live in. Functionalists believe that all elements within a society interconnect and work together. They compare society to a human body where everything is useful and needed.

Even things like crime have a purpose, which through Functionalists rose tinted glasses is that it creates jobs for policemen etc. It is a system used by cultures, which concentrate on, and emphasises the functional interactions of their societies, i. e. why and how certain rituals, daily chores etc. are performed. It makes “ law-like” generalisations, which are employed to explain and predict social phenomena. Talcott Parson (1902-1979) was an American sociologist who was converted to functionalism under the influence of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski.

Parson stated that “ the social system is made up of the actions of individuals”. His starting point was the interaction between two individuals. Those individuals were faced with a variety of choices about how they might act. However, those choices are influenced and constrained by a number of physical and social factors Parsons determined that each individual has expectations of the other’s action and reaction to their own behaviour, and that these expectations are derived from the accepted norms and values of the society which they inhabit . These social norms are generally accepted and agreed upon.

George Murdock (an American anthropologist 1897-1985) was another well known Functionalist, who said that the family have four universal functions, Sexual, Reproductive, Economic and Educational. Although some problems with Functionalism are that not all elements within a society interconnect, it argues that society itself changes to accommodate new dynamics, it fails to provide an explanation for wars and conflicts that may arise in particular societies. Functionalism and Marxism share one theory on structured society- whilst Functionalism believes that society is based on consensus, Marxists believe society is based on conflict.

Marxism is a sociological perspective based on Karl Marx's (1818-1883) ideas that that work is a social activity and that the conditions and forms under and through which people work are socially determined and change over time. For Marx, different classes have dissimilar interests, which is another source of social disruption and conflict. Karl Marx believed that our society divides everyone up into two classes the bosses and the workers. Marx called the bosses the bourgeoisie and the workers the proletariat.

The bourgeoisie are those who " own the means of production" and buy labour power from the proletariat, thus exploiting the proletariat. The proletariat are those individuals who sell their labour power, (and therefore add value to the products), and who, in the capitalist mode of production, do not own the means of production". According to Marx, the capitalist mode of production establishes the conditions that enable the bourgeoisie to exploit the proletariat due to the fact that the worker's labour generates excess value greater than the worker's wages.

Marxists also believe that the working (proletariat) class never challenges how society is run because since birth they have been “ brainwashed” into believing their position is deserved. They argue that everything that is responsible for socialising individuals such as family, education, media etc are controlled into making the ruling (bourgeoisie) classes norms and values seem normal. Louis Althusser a French Marxist philosopher argued that the function of those cultural institutions is to maintain and legitimate class inequality. As with all other theories, Marxism has come across lots of criticism.

Finally the last ideology is Feminism. Feminism is a sociological perspective that involves various movements, theories, and philosophies which are concerned with the issue of gender difference, advocate equality for women, and campaign for women’s rights and interests. The history of feminism can be divided into three waves. The first wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the second was in the 1960s and 1970s and the third is from the 1990s to present. Feminism has changed perspectives in a wide range of areas within Western society, ranging from culture to law.

Feminist activists have campaigned for women’s legal rights , for women’s right to bodily integrity and autonomy, for abortion rights, and for reproductive rights (including access to contraception and quality prenatal care); for protection from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; and against other forms of discrimination. In the news recently there has been lots of talk about the glass ceiling which is an imaginary term used to describe the

invisible barriers that exist within organisations and which block women from attaining senior executive positions.

A recent survey by the Chartered Management Institute found that it would take women 187 years to achieve equal pay with men, judging by the current rates of progress towards closing the earnings gap. Its annual salary survey showed the average woman in British management earned ? 32, 614 a year compared with ? 46, 269 for their male counterparts. So even though women have fought for years to have equal rights there is still some work to do. In conclusion, I have discussed a few examples of the way the underlying ideologies are still impacting on our society.

Within Functionalism an obvious example would be the way some right wing policy makers identify ' immigrant' populations as a negative influence on society. An example of this is how some Muslims society and culture due to the actions of the minority of extremists. Right wing policy under the conservatives made huge changes to the way collective organisations such as ' unions' could take joint action against measures that corporate business imposed on them, Such as the miners strikes of the '70's.

Finally when you look at the historical role of ' the female' in society it has been dramatic in how social policy from all governments has undermined and de-valued the role they have to play. New Labour has followed this marginalisation by penalising the role of the mother in child care with setting sanctions in the way it changes childcare allowance, for example. What is very evident is that these ideologies affect every area of society today.