

Sociology
interpretivism versus
structuralism
assignment



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Interpretive or social action perspectives examine smaller groups within society and unlike structuralism, are concerned with the subjective States Of individuals. Symbolic interactions, a branch of interpretative sociology, emphasizes the importance of individual roles that contribute to human interaction. The goal of interpretive sociology is to understand the meaning behind actions in a social context through a consideration of a subject's unique point of view; in addition, how an individual's action affects society as a whole.

Unlike structuralism, it ascertains that an individual has free will and is not just controlled by a society from which it is separate. This is a view point that no other theories take into account and for this reason, it is possible for us to say that interpretative has more relevance in modern society than structuralism theories. The interpretive theory was partly based in response to the criticisms of structural theories. Interpretations accuse structuralisms of being too deterministic; they suggested that human action only occurred as a result of society and its structures.

Interpretations disagreed with this, preferring to live that human actions occurred out of the free will of the individual; the idea that one thing does not determine another. Structuralism also generally disregarded the importance of individual actions and interpretations on society; it solely focuses on the structures of society and does not acknowledge an individual's influence on it as a whole. This therefore shows that interpretative may be a more relevant theory for understanding modern society as it takes into account important things, like free will and differing perceptions, which structuralisms overlook.

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Interpretations also argue that the search methods favored by structuralisms are ineffective and do not produce a valid representation of society. They claim that scientific or quantitative methods of studying human behavior are not as effective as qualitative research methods due to the fact that humans are unpredictable creatures; put in the same situation twice, they may act differently. Quantitative methods of research usually don't cover the emotions and perceptions that influence a decision or action and they are also sometimes incapable of recording certain social actions in number or statistic form.

Qualitative research methods, however, do this effectively and, according to Interpretations, produce a more accurate view of society. Additionally, a research method developed by Weber called 'Overstress' describes how a researcher may try to understand another person's experience by 'stepping into their shoes'; he can do this by learning from the other person, through conversations and interactions that give the researcher greater insight.

Through these views, we see that interpretive theories may be more applicable to modern societies due to the fact that they use less rigid, infinite research methods.

Interpretative sociology also brings about a different view on social change. Structuralisms think about social change in terms of the structures of society; both functionalism and Marxism believe that social change arises as a result of the actions of large institutions or groups of people. However, they ignore the influence individuals have on social change and the way individuals react to it. The fact that interpretative acknowledges and explains

how individuals influence social change may make it more relevant in modern society.

Max Weber, the founding father of interpretative, believed that it was social actions that should be the focus of study in sociology. To Weber, a 'social action' was an action carried out by an individual to which an individual attached a meaning. He described four different types of social action; traditional action, which is done habitually and requires almost no conscious thought, affectual action, an action based off emotion, value rational action, an action of working towards a desirable goal with the certainty that it will be achieved and an instrumentally rational action, to do things in the most efficient way of achieving a goal.

This break down of social actions help show the interaction between the individual and society's structure, an idea Weber supported; for example the traditional action of reading is brought about by the institution of education. Though some branches of interpretative (ethnomusicology and phenomenology) reject the idea Of social Structures even existing, Weber successfully integrates the individual and society, thus exhibiting the accuracy of the view in question. On the other hand, structuralism paradigms may still be considered of more relevance in today's society than Interpretations.

Sociologist Scouts argued that interpretative fails to explore the shared nature and meaning of society; it ignored the idea of the collective conscience and didn't acknowledge that in society there exist shared norms and values. It focuses too much on the individual perception and

interpretation of society and ignores the fact that societal rules and norms play a role in an individual making decisions and acting on them. For example a person may be hungry but realistic that they don't have food in their fridge. Social norms like dressing before going out will govern this person into changing out of their pajamas and into day clothes.

Similarly, when they arrive at the grocery store instead of picking food and leaving without paying, the person will most likely obey social rules and pay for the food. In this way, we see that actions are not just influenced by the perceptions of the individual. Like everyone else, they will dress in proper clothing when going out and will wait in line to pay for their groceries. This shows that interpretative may not be as relevant in modern societies as it claims to be, as the ideas of the structural theory are still adhered to today.

Functionalism, a structuralism view, may hold equal or greater relevancy than interpretative for many reasons. The role of consensus, the collective conscience and the importance of the institutions in society are covered in functionalism but completely ignored in interpretative. Functionalists acknowledge that for society to exist value consensus must exist, meaning we must have a shared group of values that we use to keep social order; the legal system represents this to some level.

Acts like murder are universally considered wrong and are therefore punished in a court of law; less important things like cutting a queue are still against society values and are punished less brutally as they cause significantly less unrest in a society. Other important things like the collective conscience and the idea that people work to achieve similar goals

are also largely lacking in the interpretative theory. Thus, the significant issues addressed in the functionalist theory can be used to show that structuralism theories are still relevant in modern societies.

Marxism, also a structural view, covers even more ground that interpretative deems non-relevant for understanding modern society. Unlike functionalism it is a conflict theory, stating that social order is derived from conflict between the bourgeoisie (the rich) and the proletariat (the poor). As a theory, it focuses extensively on the class system and shows the importance of the power that endowed human beings have over their more lacking counterparts. In Marxism, the way an individual acts may be influenced by a more powerful individual; something interpretative overlooks.

For example, a proletariat man may decide to work in a factory where he experiences extreme exploitation because of two things; he has no other option and he is unaware that he is being exploited. Both situations are created by the more powerful bourgeoisie man; the poor man has no other work option because the bourgeoisie control all the capital, and in turn the jobs and the bourgeoisie man has control over the institutions in society that form the knowledge the proletariat man has (education, religion, family) In this way, the bourgeoisie have almost complete control over the way the proletariat perceive and interpret society.

This observation challenges the view in question and shows that Marxism is still relevant today due to the fact that capitalism is more rampant in today's society. Feminism, as a structural conflict theory, also points out what interpretative fails to. Feminism focuses on the conflict in society that exists

between men and women. One of the main things that feminists pointed out at its inception is the fact that sociology has always been from the viewpoint of men. This shows that men and women perceive the world differently and because of the difference in how they are treated, they may exhibit different social actions.

For example, a man is more likely to vie for a leadership position than a woman, simply because they are generally perceived as aggressive and leaders. Similarly, a woman may perceive a situation, like entering a pub full of men, as undesirable based on her gender. Interpretative fails to point out that gender is a large influence on how an individual perceives the world and society around them. In this respect, feminism proves itself to be still relevant in society today. A criticism of Max Weber's four types of actions arises due to the difficulty of applying them universally.

It is difficult to apply these four definitions to every social action in every society; some social actions may be more than one or none of the actions described by Max Weber. With all sorts of different influences on social actions, including the disparity of different societies around the world, this action theory may not be as relevant as we thought. This point reduces the relevancy of interpretative as a whole as it is not universally applicable. Yet another criticism of Max Weber concerns the research method called 'Overstress'.

While ideal, it is generally very hard to achieve; getting an empathetic understanding of an actor's meaning is difficult, especially because the researcher, as a human being, may interpret the actor's meaning differently.

If a person claims that they have been taking a path on the same road for twenty years, even after their spouse, who used to accompany them, has died, the researcher may perceive that to be effective even though the person means to portray it as only traditional.

In this sense this type of research may not be effective and may even be less effective than quantitative research methods. In conclusion, while interpretative discusses many crucial points like the role of the individual in society, something that structuralism theories tend to ignore and overlook, like all theories it has flaws that prevent it from becoming the most relevant theory in modern society.