

The google bus conflict: functionalism research paper examples

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and Tumin's Views on Social Stratification Theory

There has been a growing controversy in San Francisco over corporate buses used by Google and other tech companies to shuttle employees from their homes in San Francisco to corporate campuses forty miles away in Silicon Valley. The buses have been described as oversized ominous looking limousines, with tinted windows, and WiFi. The shuttles are free, only for corporate employees and use the exact same routes and stops as the public transportation system. They also cause traffic congestion and delay public bus routes. After the city failed to restrict the shuttles, protestors took to the streets, breaking windows, slashing tires and creating human barricades to block the buses. The Google buses have become powerful symbols for income inequality and social class stratification. Protestors believe the tech industry is ruining San Francisco by causing rents to skyrocket, forcing middle-class residents to leave the city. This process of gentrification reveals the disparity in wealth between the new tech workers and the longtime residents of the city. Nurses, police officers, school teachers and other middle-class workers have been priced out of the city. The funky independent stores that once lined the streets are closing because of rising rents.

Analyze from the Functionalist Perspective, this entire process is completely normal, natural and necessary. The increasing income stratification in San Francisco also serves an important societal function. The tech workers are smarter, more educated and more productive than the protestors. Therefore they are entitled to more money, power, prestige, better neighborhoods and, in this case, free shuttles to work. Even if aspects of this

inequality are unfair, such as the inconvenience and taxpayer expense caused by the shuttles, it is necessary to encourage and motivate people to study hard, go to school and work at Google. Davis and Moore believed that an unequal distribution of societal rewards is absolutely necessary. They believed that the rewards provided by a particular job (San Francisco housing, free shuttle) reflect its importance to society.

Social stratification theory, on the other hand, disagrees with the functionalist theory. Tumin would argue that just because people have a fancy house in San Francisco or a private shuttle does not mean that their job is more important to society than a school teacher. Tumin's research indicated that gender and family social and economic status determined social status, not utility to society. Tumin refuted Davis and Moore's theory with a simple argument: If social status inevitably came from productivity, we would like in a meritocracy, where the smartest and hardest working rise to the top. However this is not the case. In fact, social stratification prevented more qualified people from social mobility. He would argue that Google employees come from predominantly affluent families with the financial resources for college. With their education and social connections, they get highly paid, prestigious jobs. This stratification has nothing to do with being productive to society. It simply has to do with money and economic power. Google and their employees use their economic power to exploit the public bus infrastructure and make the city increasingly expensive to live in because they can, not because of the positive role they play in society.

The Google bus conflict could be seen as a representation of society as a

whole, which is increasingly divided into two groups, the rich and everyone else. The Google employees are rich, and get special privileges as a result. Davis and Moore would explain this inequality as a function of a societal reward system for their intelligence, skill, hard-work and productivity. Google admits they use the shuttle program to recruit young employees that want to live in San Francisco. Interestingly enough, many want to live in the city to enjoy all it has to offer, but many say they have been priced out of Silicon Valley, but even more affluent older tech workers, and are forced to live in San Francisco. The strata may be numerous and difficult to quantify. Tumin would explain that the Google bus exploits public resources, inconveniences less affluent commuters and pays little or no taxes simply because it can, and that is what social inequality is all about. In Marxist terms, Google is the ruling class while the protestors are lumpen proletariat, who have finally decided to overthrow their nerdy masters. The housing situation would also raise interesting issues. The Google workers get to live in San Francisco because they want to, and are able to pay more than the middle class people who are being forced out. The Functionalist perspective would explain this is as simple market dynamics. The Google workers deserve to live where they want, less powerful people get to live in less desirable and prestigious cities like Oakland. However, the Google shuttle has expanded its routes into Oakland.

Work Cited

Kelly, Heather. " Google Bus Stunt Reveals Tensions in San Francisco." CNN. Cable News Network, 11 Dec. 2013. Web. 06 Nov. 2014.

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