

Functionalism and marxism: education and employment



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Sociologists study human society. Their subject matter includes human behaviour in various social contexts, social interaction, social institutions and organisation, social change and development (Haralmbos, Van Krieken, Smith & Holborn 1999). For this reason, unemployment is an issue which sociologists delve. Unemployment has far reaching affects in all areas of society. Stratification in the areas of age, race, class, gender, ethnicity, sex and disability is rife amongst the employed and unemployed alike, unemployment creates further segregation amongst these already stratified people. This essay will look at unemployment from the functional and conflict theory perspective, as well how four main institutions (family, education, government and health) are affected by unemployment. It will also look at Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim and their contribution to sociology and the theory of functionalism and conflict. Unemployment affects almost everyone to some degree during their lives, the need to understand how we can deal with the issue is becoming critically important to society as a whole.

Functionalist Theory

Function is an unclear term, often used by orthodox sociologists to define the logical and social place of roles, institutions and structures in terms of the production and reproduction of a society as a social system - as in the idea that the function of the family is to socialise new members of society (Bessant & Watts, 1999).

Functionalists believe everything serves a specific function in our society and these functions need to be understood. Everyone has a role to fill in this functional society, in other words we need to have stratification so as

everyone has a purpose. Functionalists are very boundaried and thin within the square. For this theory to really work, there needs to be a consensus amongst the individuals that make up society, they need to believe everything is in the best interest of this so called utopia. There is obviously no conflict of interest. This does not seem possible in this modern age, so can functionalism still be considered a plausible theory. It does of course have its merits, yes everything does have its function, but these functions are up for a degree of interpretation and change. Unfortunately functionalism does not explain change except in a gradual evolutionary way.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is a body of theories including marxism, which claims that all social orders are fractured by social conflict, typically between classes and other groups, over control of valued resources including wealth, power and property (Bessant & Watts, 1999). Conflict theorists believe that conflict is the basis of social order and that a minority of people with power are able to impose their will over others. There is a conflict of interest, people have different goals and purpose. They will use whatever means to gain this, even to the detriment of others in their society. Those with more power and money have the ability to gain a higher level of services by the main institutions in our society (such as education and health), thus creating a greater level of stratification in society. This in turn creates more conflict as those who cannot get the services they need turn to deviant or dependant methods to gain the same basic needs. Unfortunately it is a vicious circle which continues to breed contempt from both sides of the fence in our society.

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Durkheim

Durkheim (1858-1917) was one of the original 'founding fathers' of positivist sociology (functional theory), his concern was how to preserve society. The basis for social order (how society hung together and worked over time) was not economic but moral for Durkheim, expressed in the type of solidarity that a society exhibited (Willis, 1999).

Durkheim was particularly concerned to distinguish social facts, which he sometimes described as "states of the collective mind," from the forms these states assumed when manifested through private individual minds. This distinction is most obvious in cases of customs, moral and legal rights and religious beliefs etc.

Marx

For Karl Marx (1818-1883), the transformation had to be understood primarily as a change in the economic structure of societies; a change in the means by which economic production was organised from a system called feudalism to one called capitalism (Willis 1999). Marx was a man looking to understand society, he followed many different paths and was alienated many times for his ideas. His theories on value and surplus value, accumulation, exploitation, pauperization, crisis and appropriation, class struggle and revolution made no immediate impact on the workers' movement, until after his death in 1883 (Rius 1999).

Unemployment

We are entering a new phase in world history – one in which fewer and fewer and fewer workers will be needed to produce the goods and services for the global population...For the whole of the modern era, people's worth has been measured by the market value of their labour...now new ways of defining human worth and social relationships will need to be explored (Rifkin 1996). Life has changed, globalization and feminism have had a huge impact on the work environment around the world. Technology has also made many jobs redundant. Unemployment has become an issue allaround the globe, explanations of this phenomom are plenty. How does unemployment serve a purpose, or is it just another chance for the powerful to stamp on those with less power? The government views the unemployment situation as an idividual problem. It is due to the lack of training of the individual, they now make people have training to continue to get unemployment benefits. This is a great idea as far as keeping the individual busy and increasing the self-esteem and knowledge, but what then? We are now creating alot of qualified people for positions which don't exist. We need to look at why there are not enough positions to employ these individuals. If it is not lack of skills, then what is it? Could it be that they government or us as a society are not doing enough to promotebusiness in Australia, instead sending our work load overseas for cheaper labour. We need to look at why the positions are non existant rather than assuming it is the individuals fault. Unemployment affects our society in so many ways. The four main institutions I am looking at are family, education, health and government.

Firstly the family, unemployment places added financial and mental strain on the family. The lack of income can cause many families to have to live

without the basic necessities which we take for granted, they then need to turn to welfare agencies in order to survive. Lack of income also means children often have to miss out on school activities

and sports programs as the family budget can no longer stretch the distance. This monetary strain can cause breakdown in both the individual and family. This can turn in domestic violence, alcoholism, gambling, family dysfunction and even suicide. Unemployment has such wide ranging affects on family life. Alcoholism, smoking, the illegal use of drugs and crime are associated with unemployment (Makkai 1994). This can then be made even more significant when there is further stratification caused by age, disability, ethnicity, gender, sex, class and race. For example, if your race was one that expected the men to work and the wife to stay at home and raise the children. When you become unemployed, you may lose your standing as both a husband and member of your community, as you can no longer provide appropriately for your family. Each of these aspects further increases the impact of unemployment.

Secondly, there is education. Public versus private is already a hotly argued issue, do children get a better education from private or public education. This is not an issue for Australians who cannot afford the private education system. It is still a struggle though to pay for books, uniforms, excursions, camps and other school activities. Add in unemployment and the issue becomes even harder. If you currently have your children in private education and become unemployed, you may not be able to meet the financial demands. Taking your child out of their school and changing them to the public education system can then be very traumatic for everyone

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involved. Once again add any of the other stratification issues mentioned before and the situation can become very volatile. You may have certain reasons for attending special schools, if then cannot afford to maintain this situation what happens to your child. For example, a special school for your disabled child, mainstream public school may not be able to handle your child's disability. Your child is then left in a situation which is detrimental to their well being.

Thirdly, government, unemployment is such a hot issue with voters that the government must be seen to be doing as much as they can to help the situation. They are always making promises to decrease the unemployment rate, unfortunately the unemployment rate does not really give an accurate picture of how many people are out of work. It is only those who are registered as looking for work. The government provides welfare and training for unemployed but they do not seem to see the bigger picture. The government also creates stratification by having different payments and services for different races, rather than basing services provided on an individual needs basis. For example, Austudy and Abstudy.

Finally, health system, the health system is hit hard by unemployment especially with the drop in bulk billing. Many unemployed people cannot afford to go to a non-bulk billing doctor so instead go into their local emergency department. This is causing congestion in the emergency department. There is also an increase of illness (mental and physical) and suicide amongst the unemployed. This is creating a huge draw on our medicare and health system. Those on low incomes or unemployed cannot afford to have private health insurance, so are therefore not getting all the

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help they need. We are creating a system where people are leaving illnesses and injuries until they are quite serious due to the fact that they cannot afford to see a specialist.

We will now look at what the functionalists and the conflict theorists say about it.

Unemployment (Functionalism)

Functionalists believe unemployment serves a purpose in society. We need unemployment in our society, it plays its own part. For all those who are or have been unemployed, it is hard to see how it can possibly be good for society, part of the master plan. Unemployment creates so much misery and further increases the problem of stratification.

Those in the underprivileged class have to rely on government handouts, which only creates further poverty as those people struggle to make ends meet. This in turn affects the family structure by adding extra money pressures. This is the point though, unemployed people create work for centrelink staff, welfare agencies, counsellors and keep cheap discount stores in work. It also maintains that there will always be someone to take the menial jobs that others don't want. Those lower classed people will do the jobs others won't. We need the divisions to make sure there are people to cover all types of places in society.

Unemployment (Conflict Theory)

Conflict theorists see unemployment as more evidence of those in a powerful or privileged position taking advantage of others. Power is the emphasis is <https://assignbuster.com/functionalism-and-marxism-education-and-employment/>

an employment situation, while employed you have a certain amount of power, both over your work environment and your own life. Once unemployed you become powerless, reliant on the government to provide you an income. Once in this position, an individual is likely to take a job which is below their abilities and for less pay, just so as to be earning an income. The difference in class and standing continues to increase. Those with money, do not need to stoop to this type of position, they can instead wait until an

appropriate job comes up or they can indulge in further education to improve their position even more.

Conclusion

Unemployment plays a major part in our society, its effects are wide reaching. The implication that unemployment is an individual problem due to lack of skills, only seeks to increase the problem. The idea that who we are is depicted by what we do as a job, creates further stratification of our society. Long-term unemployment has been shown to be one of the most important contributors to domestic violence and other forms of crime, as well as psychological illness and suicide (Baker 1993).

Whether we look at unemployment from a functional or conflict perspective, there is no right or wrong answer. We need to look at it from both perspectives to get a better idea of the situation, and then to look at possible ways of dealing with the issue. There will always be unemployment due to changes in the environment, whether they are biological or technological.

For this reason further insights into how society deals with unemployment is <https://assignbuster.com/functionalism-and-marxism-education-and-employment/>

necessary. Stratification is a principal aspect of the evolution of a society's social identity, when this is compounded with unemployment, alienation and dysfunction becomes a consequence.