

Application assignment #1

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Application Assignment #1 1. What is the sociological imagination? This term, coined by sociologist C. Wright Mills, refers to looking at people's behavior and attitudes in the context of the social forces that shape them. As Mills said, to understand our experiences in life, we must understand our historical time period and the social forces that are sweeping the period in which we live. What are personal troubles? Another way of saying this is that we want to understand how our personal troubles (the problems we experience) are connected to the broad conditions of our society. How are personal troubles related to society? Different times in society have different views on things. Generation gaps have a lot to do with how we explain things in our lives. These attitudes are related to conditions in society. Change the conditions and our views will change with them. The winds of social change affect what we think and feel and what we do—and how we relate to one another. How is this connected to social location? The term social location refers to where you are located in society. It includes not only physical places, but also personal characteristics. Our social location is central to our relationships with others. Sociologists have documented that social location influences almost all aspects of our lives. (Henslin, 2011) Social problem: Explain marriage legally. My grandparents would argue with me on that. Back in the day marriage was between one man and one woman. Nowadays, marriage means something different. Marriage can be between a man and a woman, a man and women, a man and a man, a woman and a woman, and it is all normal in our society. You can be married to someone without church ceremony or any ceremony. There is such thing as common law marriage. We call people husband and wife just because they live together and have

child(ren) together but no papers on legal marriage. How do they file taxes? In a gay marriage who is mommy and who is daddy? Generations look at things with different perspectives because our norms are different.

2. What are the four characteristics of social problems? TWO ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS. A social problem is some aspect of society that people are concerned about and would like to change. Social problems have two key components. The first is an objective condition, some aspect of society that can be measured or experienced. The second key component of a social problem is subjective concern, the concern that a significant number of people (or a number of significant people) have about the objective condition. SOCIAL PROBLEMS ARE DYNAMIC. As society changes, so do these two essential elements: objective conditions and subjective concerns. In other words, social problems are dynamic. SOCIAL PROBLEMS ARE RELATIVE. A social problem for some is often a solution for others. A value may be defined as a belief about whether something is good or bad. COMPETING VIEWS. Since we live in a pluralistic world of competing, contrasting, and conflictive groups, our society is filled with competing, contrasting, and conflictive views of life. This certainly makes life interesting, but in such a dynamic world, whose definition of a social problem wins? The answer centers on power, the ability to get your way despite obstacles. (Henslin, 2011)

3. What are the four stages of social problems? The First Stage: Defining the Problem, the Emergence of Leaders, and Beginning to Organize. The Second Stage: Crafting an Official Response. The Third Stage: Reacting to the Official Response. The Fourth Stage: Developing Alternative Strategies.

4. What methods can be used to study social problems? To investigate social problems, sociologists choose from

several methods (ways of doing research). Which method they choose depends on two things: the questions they want to investigate and what is practical. First, they must determine what they want to find out about a social problem, for different goals require different methods. (Henslin, 2011)

Case studies Surveys Experiments Field studies

5. Should sociologists take sides? THE DEBATE AMONG SOCIOLOGISTS. Those who champion neutrality stress the position that sociologists enjoy no superior vantage point from which to make moral judgments. Sociologists do have knowledge and skills to offer, they say, but not morality. In their study of social problems, sociologists can indicate the potential consequences of different social policies, but they should not promote any particular policy or solution. To do so would be to hide a moral or value position under the guise of sociology. On the other side of this issue are sociologists who are convinced that they have a moral obligation to take a stand. " If sociology is not useful for helping to reform society, " they ask, " of what value is it? " They stress that sociologists are in a strategic position to relate the surface manifestations of a social problem (such as poverty) to deeper social causes (such as the control of a country's resources by the wealthy and powerful). They say that sociologists should do their research objectively-and always side with those who are being hurt and exploited. Those on the extreme end of this side of this debate also say that sociologists have a moral obligation to make the oppressed aware of their condition and to organize them to do battle against those who oppress them. (Henslin, 2011)

6. Four major sociological theories.

1. INTRODUCING FUNCTIONALISM A major theory that sociologists use to interpret social problems is functionalism (or functional analysis).

Functionalists compare society to a self-adjusting machine. Each part of the machine has a function. When a part is working properly, it fulfills that function, and the machine hums along. Functionalists also use the analogy of the human body. A human has many organs, and when an organ is working properly, it contributes to the well-being of the person. Like a machine or human, society is also composed of many parts. Each of society's parts also has a function. When a part is working properly, it contributes to the well-being (stability or equilibrium) of society. As you know, the parts of society don't always work properly. Functionalists call these failures dysfunctions. Dysfunctions can be minor, and soon resolved. But if dysfunctions linger, they can create problems for other parts of society. And this is what a social problem is from the functionalist perspective—the failure of some part of society, which then interferes with society's smooth functioning.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUNCTIONALISM

Auguste Comte: Organs Working Together. Functionalism has its roots in the origins of sociology (Turner 1978). Auguste Comte (1798—1857), who is called the founder of sociology because he coined the term, regarded society as being similar to an animal: Just as an animal has tissues and organs that are interrelated and function together, so does society. For a society to function smoothly, its parts must be in balance.

Emile Durkheim: Normal and Abnormal States. Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858—1917) built on this idea that a society is composed of parts that perform functions. When society's parts perform the functions they are supposed to, he said, a society is in a "normal" state. When society's parts fail to perform their functions, society is in an "abnormal" or "pathological" state. To understand society, Durkheim stressed that we

need to look at both structure—how the parts of a society are related to one another—and function—how each part contributes to society. Robert Merton: Functions and Dysfunctions. In the 20th century, sociologist Robert Merton (1910—2003) dropped the idea that society is like an animal but refined functionalism's concepts. He defined functions as the beneficial consequences of people's actions. Functions can be either manifest or latent. A manifest function is an action that is intended to help some part of the system. As Merton emphasized, our actions can also have latent functions, consequences that help some part of the social system but were not intended for that purpose. Merton (1968) stressed that human actions also have dysfunctions. These are consequences that disrupt a system's stability, making it more difficult to survive. (Henslin, 2011) 2. INTRODUCING CONFLICT THEORY " We couldn't disagree more, " reply conflict theorists to the functionalist position. The parts of society do not work together harmoniously. If you look below the surface, you will see that society's parts are competing with one another for limited resources. There are only so many resources to go around, and the competition for them is so severe that conflict is barely kept in check. The guiding principle of social life is disequilibrium and conflict, not equilibrium and harmony, as the functionalists say. From the conflict perspective, social problems are the natural and inevitable outcome of social struggle. No matter what a social problem may look like on its surface, at its essence lies conflict over limited resources between the more and less powerful. As the more powerful exploit society's resources and oppress the less powerful, they create such social problems as poverty, discrimination, and war. As those who are exploited

react to their oppression, still other social problems emerge: street crime, escapist drug abuse, suicide, homicide, riots, revolution, and terrorism. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONFLICT THEORY Karl Marx: Capitalism and Conflict. Karl Marx (1818—1883), the founder of conflict theory, witnessed the Industrial Revolution that transformed Europe. Cities grew as farmers and laborers left rural areas to seek work in factories. The new factory owners put these migrants to work at near-starvation wages. As poverty and exploitation grew, political unrest followed, and upheaval swept across Europe. Shocked by the suffering and inhumanity that he saw, Marx concluded that the hallmark of history is a struggle for power. Conflict theorists remind us that the workers who enjoy such benefits today have them not because of the generous hearts of the rich but because workers at an earlier period fought for them—sometimes to the death. Georg Simmel: Subordinates and Superordinates. Some sociologists have extended conflict theory well beyond the relations between workers and capitalists. Sociologist Georg Simmel (1858—1918), for example, compared the relationships of people who occupy higher positions (superordinates) with those who are in lower positions (subordinates). Simmel noted that a main concern of superordinates is to protect their positions of privilege. Because subordinates possess some power, however, the more powerful must take them into consideration as they make their decisions (Coser 1977). Consequently, superordinate—subordinate relationships are marked not by one-way naked power but by exchange. Simmel argued that conflict also has benefits. Lewis Coser (1913—2003) analyzed why conflict is especially likely to develop among people who have close relationships with one another. He pointed out that whether we refer to

husbands and wives or to bosses and workers, each is part of a system in which the parties have worked out expectations about their relative power, responsibilities, and rewards. These expectations, however, are easily upset. Actions by either party, such as making decisions to adjust to changing times, can offend the other and lead to conflict. (Henslin, 2011) 3.

INTRODUCING FEMINIST THEORY In the 1970s, sociologists started to apply the conflict perspective to the relationships of women and men. From their analyses came feminist theory, which examines male—female relationships from the perspective of the powerful oppressing the powerless and the reactions to that oppression. Feminists go beyond studying these relationships: They also want to change them and, in so doing, to transform society. In this application of conflict theory, women must become aware of how their oppression is rooted in their relationships with men. As they view female—male relationships in history, they place their analytical lens on patriarchy, the dominance of men-as-a-group over women-as-a-group. They stress that throughout history men have had greater power than women in both public and private spheres and that men have exercised this power to control women. As feminist theorists apply this perspective to current relationships of women and men, they analyze how men maintain and create boundaries and obstacles to prevent women from gaining or exercising power.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST THEORY In the 1970s, feminist theory was the umbrella term used to describe the application of conflict theory to the relationships of women and men, with an emphasis on the oppression of women and the need to bring about fundamental change. In the 1980s and in later years, feminist theorists split into several branches. *

Radical feminism: The central thesis of radical feminists is that we must dismantle society in order to get rid of patriarchy. The goal of radical feminists is to free both men and women of rigid gender roles by waging war against patriarchy. This type of feminism attracts much negative publicity, and many people assume that this is what feminism is. * Liberal feminism: The central argument of liberal feminists is that all people are created equal and deserve access to equal rights. Liberal feminists argue that patriarchy and oppression exist because our institutions socialize men and women into believing oppressive ideology. * Socialist feminism: Socialist feminists, the closest kin to Marx, stress that there is a direct link between capitalism and the oppression of women. The main rewards go to those who perform in the workplace, not in the home. Women's traditional work in the home is not respected because it often produces nothing tangible. * Cultural feminism: Cultural feminists stress that we need to appreciate the biological differences between men and women. They claim that women are inherently kinder and gentler than men. If women ruled the world, patriarchy, oppression, and capitalism would not exist, and the world would be a better place. * Ecofeminism: Ecofeminists stress that patriarchy is oppressive not only for women but also for the environment. They point out that men want to dominate both women and nature. Women need to free themselves from the dominance of men and take the lead in protecting the natural environment. Regardless of the particular branching, the central point that unites them is the unequal power relations between men and women. (Henslin, 2011) 4.

INTRODUCING SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM The sociological theory that focuses on how we make sense out of life is called symbolic interactionism.

The essence of this perspective is that we see the world through symbols, things to which we attach meaning and that we use to communicate with one another. Symbolic interactionists study how symbols, such as the terms we use to classify people, give us our view of the world. As we use the symbols that our culture provides to communicate with one another, we share and reinforce the ways we look at life. The images on television, movies, and videos, the printed and spoken word, our body language, our gestures, our tone of voice, our clothing, even our hairstyles—all are symbols by which we communicate views of life. And our views of life include what we consider to be social problems. Changing Symbols Change Perception. We tend to lump them together, and we consider social action (laws and policies) to be appropriate for solving their problems. A major transition had occurred, and what was once a personal problem had become a social problem. Because the term social problem is also a symbol, what people consider to be a social problem also changes from one historical period to another.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM Symbols are so essential for what we are and for what we become that they could be the element that separates us from the rest of life on this planet. Symbols allow us to think about other people and objects, even when they are not present. We also symbolize our own self (that is, we think about our self in a certain way, such as young, attractive, and personable). George Herbert Mead (1863—1931) taught at the University of Chicago, where symbolic interactionism flourished. At one point, from the 1920s to 1940s, this department of sociology and this perspective were so intertwined that the term Chicago School of Sociology was used to refer to both. Mead focused on the role of

symbols in social life. Symbols are so important, he said, that without them we couldn't even have social life, for it is symbols that allow us to have goals, to plan, to evaluate, even to know what love is. Mead concluded that even our self-concept, which evolves during childhood, is based on symbols. One of the major means by which we develop our self-concept is learning to take the role of the other. That is, as children we gradually become capable of putting ourselves in someone else's shoes, able to empathize with how that person feels and thinks and to anticipate how he or she will act. After learning to empathize with a few individuals, we learn to take the role of people in general—which Mead called the generalized other. Charles Horton Cooley (1864—1929), who taught at the University of Michigan, analyzed how the self develops through interaction with others. He said that people come to view themselves as they think others perceive them. He summarized this principle in the following couplet: " Each to each a looking-glass/Reflects the other that doth pass. " Cooley said that our interactions with others create a looking-glass self. By this, he meant that our self has three elements: (1) how we imagine we appear to others, (2) how we think others feel about what they perceive, and (3) how we feel about this reflected image. According to Cooley, our self-esteem depends on our looking-glass self. It is the same with the elderly. If a society reflects negative images to its old people, the elderly tend to think of themselves negatively. Berger and Luckmann and the Social Construction of Reality. Sociologists Peter Berger (1929—) and Thomas Luckmann (1927—) are key figures in the development of one of symbolic interactionism's major concepts, the social construction of reality. The idea is simple enough.

Things happen to us, and when they do we have to figure out what they mean. For example, if we have an abrupt contact with a stranger, we have to know whether that contact is a " shove" or an " accidental touch. " These two are significantly different, and each requires a different response on our part. As we go through life, then, we continuously make sense out of what happens to us. Another way of saying this is that each of us is involved in the social construction of reality. The concept is simple, but its implications are profound. It means that reality does not come with built-in meanings, but, rather, that we construct our realities as we apply symbols to our experiences. (Henslin, 2011)

THEORIES OF EDUCATION

Historically, American education served both political and economic needs, which dictated the function of education. Today, sociologists and educators debate the function of education. Three main theories represent their views: the functionalist theory, the conflict theory, and the symbolic interactionism theory. The functionalist theory Focuses on the ways that universal education serves the needs of society. Functionalists first see education in its manifest role: conveying basic knowledge and skills to the next generation. Durkheim identified the latent role of education as one of socializing people into society's mainstream. This " moral education, " as he called it, helped form a more-cohesive social structure by bringing together people from diverse backgrounds, which echoes the historical concern of " Americanizing" immigrants. Functionalists point to other latent roles of education such as transmission of core values and social control. The core values in American education reflect those characteristics that support the political and economic systems that originally fueled education. Therefore, children in

America receive rewards for following schedules, following directions, meeting deadlines, and obeying authority. (cliffnotes. com) The conflict theory Conflict theory sees the purpose of education as maintaining social inequality and preserving the power of those who dominate society. Conflict theorists examine the same functions of education as functionalists. Functionalists see education as a beneficial contribution to an ordered society; however, conflict theorists see the educational system as perpetuating the status quo by dulling the lower classes into being obedient workers. Both functionalists and conflict theorists agree that the educational system practices sorting, but they disagree about how it enacts that sorting. Functionalists claim that schools sort based upon merit; conflict theorists argue that schools sort along distinct class and ethnic lines. According to conflict theorists, schools train those in the working classes to accept their position as a lower-class member of society. Conflict theorists call this role of education the " hidden curriculum. " (cliffnotes. com) The feminist theory Many feminists believe that women are being suppressed by a male-dominated society both in education and also in later life. They argue that the curriculum is more based around traditionally male-dominated subjects. Thus it sets up men more than women for further education or more prosperous work opportunities. Feminists argue that this contributes to the suppression put on women by the male-run society. Sociologists Heaton and Lawson (1996) argue that the 'hidden' curriculum is a major source of gender socialization within schools. They believe that schools seemed to show or have: text books with modern family culture and where children are taught from an early age that males are dominant within the family. It could

be seen that the majority of teachers are female, but that the senior management positions are mainly male-dominated, although this is not the case in some schools. The basic assumption shared by feminists is that the gender of divisions in society operates to the disadvantage of women. Feminists have shown that the so called natural differences between men and women are not true. Women are perfectly capable of building a successful career as men are. Feminists have helped transform many of our assumptions on gender. Women no longer feel their only goal in life is marriage and children. (Chris, 2000) The symbolic interactionism theory

Symbolic interactionists limit their analysis of education to what they directly observe happening in the classroom. They focus on how teacher expectations influence student performance, perceptions, and attitudes. Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson conducted the landmark study for this approach in 1968. First, they examined a group of students with standard IQ tests. The researchers then identified a number of students who they said would likely show a sharp increase in abilities over the coming year. They informed the teachers of the results, and asked them to watch and see if this increase did occur. When the researchers repeated the IQ tests at the end of the year, the students identified by the researchers did indeed show higher IQ scores. The significance of this study lies in the fact that the researchers had randomly selected a number of average students. The researchers found that when the teachers expected a particular performance or growth, it occurred. This phenomenon, where a false assumption actually occurs because someone predicted it, is called a self-fulfilling prophesy. Ray Rist conducted research similar to the Rosenthal-Jacobson study in 1970. In a

kindergarten classroom where both students and teacher were African American, the teacher assigned students to tables based on ability; the “better” students sat at a table closer to her, the “average” students sat at the next table, and the “weakest” students sat at the farthest table. Rist discovered that the teacher assigned the students to a table based on the teacher's perception of the students' skill levels on the eighth day of class, without any form of testing to verify the placement. Rist also found that the students the teacher perceived as “better” learners came from higher social classes, while the “weak” students were from lower social classes.

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