***Compare 3 Sociology Theoretical Perspectives Worksheet***

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| *Using lecture, video, textbook and readings,*  *Compare the 3 major*  *Soc. perspectives* | **Structural-Functional**  **“Functionalists”**  (Usually considered a more conservative approach) | **Social Conflict**  **“Conflict Theorists”**  (Usually considered a more liberal approach) | **Symbolic Interaction**  **“Symbolic Interactionists”**  (Usually considered a more independent approach) |
| **Framework**  **(Definition/Description)**  **\*How does this theory view society?** | Views society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity, stability, and growth.  When parts of society function well together, society is stable & evolves  \*Keeps Status Quo (works for ppl in power) | Views society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict & change.  The battle between the Haves & Have- nots leads to social conflict & change | Views society as an ongoing process and as a product of everyday human interactions. |
| **Level of Analysis/**  **Orientation** | Macro-level theory  Focus is on society where all parts are interconnected. Members generally agree about what is morally right and morally wrong. | Macro level theory & Middle  Focus is on society as a whole & also compares different groups | Micro-level theory Explains the individual in society and their impact on others and their experiences. |
| **Key Concepts /**  **Elements** | Every structure in society works together to play a vital function to maintain stability and the well-being of its members -norms/customs/traditions | Tension between classes. Those with power have more wealth/prestige and can exploit those with less. Humans are self-interested. | The individual  Symbols  Constructed meaning  Interaction  Non-verbal Communication |
| **What questions does this theory ask?** | How is society held together?  What are the major parts of society?  What does each part do in society? | How does society divide a population?  How do advantaged people protect their privileges?  How do disadvantaged people challenge the system seeking change? | How do people experience society?  How do people shape the reality they experience?  How do behavior and meaning change from person to person and from one situation to another? |
| **Strengths** | Acknowledges that everything is connected to everything else | Good job of modeling drastic changes that can occur in a society | Considers the individual’s role in creating and experiencing society |
| **Weaknesses/Critiques** | The theory is unable to explain social change because it focuses on social order and equilibrium, not allowing institutions to change/disappear, and allow others to come into being. | Doesn’t explain the stability a society can experience.  Doesn’t explain how a society is held together or the “status quo” | Fails to take into account the influence of the culture and larger society on the individual |
| **Major Theorists /**  **Key Figures (People)** | Emile Durkheim | Karl Marx  W.E.B. Du Bois – Race  Feminists Theorists  Race Theorists | George Herbert Mead  Herbert Blumer |

**Applying 3 Sociology Theoretical Perspectives to Social / Work Problems**

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***Instructions: Using the 3 major sociological theories examine a major social problem. The textbook gives examples to follow and use the Comparison- Summary sheet to guide you.***

**Social / Work Problem: Growing student debt**

**STRUCTURAL- FUNCTIONALIST**

How might this theory view / explain the problem?

* This perspective might analyze how student loans and debt contribute to the overall functioning of the education system. It could be seen as serving a functional role that allows individuals to access higher education, which in turn leads to a more educated and skilled workforce.

Level of Analysis

What questions would this theory ask?

Would students who would not otherwise have the means to attend college now be able to by taking on a large debt?

How would this theory address this problem?

It would approach the problem by examining how it serves a functional role in the broader functioning of society. They might argue that student debt serves as an investment in human capital development. Higher education is associated with increased earning potential and access to higher-skilled job opportunities.

They could argue that the debts students take also allow them to be more socially mobile and individuals who wouldn’t have been able to move up before now can.

It supports education institutions as they are generating a lot of revenue.

**SOCIAL CONFLICT**

How might this theory view/ explain the problem?

They would focus on the impact of debt on different social groups, and the broader economic and political dynamics. It could be seen as a mechanism that reinforces social inequality due to the financial burden of student debt. It could have the potential to contribute to further class divisions and you could argue that the profit motive of lending institutions worsens the class divide.

Level of Analysis

What questions would this theory ask?

How does student debt exaggerate the difference between the haves and the have nots?

How would this theory address this problem?

It would highlight how student debt might contribute to unequal access to higher education. The burden of debt encourages those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds from pursuing higher education.

Scrutinize the lending institutions that are profit motivated and benefit from the financial struggles of students.

Student debt can create a cycle of debt that reproduces social inequality across generations.

The burden of debt could lead to delayed milestones like homeownership, marriage, and starting a family.

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST**

How might this theory view/ explain the problem?

How people perceive and experience debt on a personal level within social interactions. Student debt could impact career choices. The burden of debt would lead to individuals making choices based on financial consideration rather than their true passions.

Level of Analysis

What questions would this theory ask?

What are the individual-level interactions and meanings that shape how people experience and make sense of student debt?

What kind of support is in place for individuals for handling the debt?

How would this theory address this problem?

How do students and graduates perceive their debt? Is it an investment in their future, a burden, a symbol of achievement, or a source of stress?

Student debt has a large impact on career choice.

Large student debts may contribute to social interactions with a certain stigma attached. Possible shame or judgement from peers, or colleagues.