

GNED 1407 - Week 2 Slide Notes

Key Terms

- Function
- Status quo
- Values
- Social institutions
- Dysfunction
- Manifest function
- Latent function

Objectives

- Define the functionalist theory
- Summarize the important historical developments that shaped the theory
- Name key theorists and their social contributions
- Apply functionalist theory to modern social problems and perspectives

Slide 3

Connection Activity

- **Song:** Little Boxes by Walk Off the Earth
- **Consider:** What is the message of this song, how do the lyrics or melody relate to your current ideas about the world, social groups, society, opportunity, etc.

Amy: It seems to me that the message of this song is that there is an inevitable yet melancholy reality that there are elements of our lives that are structural. That there are institutions that shape us, and that the result is, in the song's perspective, the sturdy but predictable "box" shape. My opinion is that I agree, we are shaped by the institutions, but that there are countless variations of shapes that we can become. And, that we can't put all the onus on the institutions; I believe we ourselves have a hand in defining the shape we feel we need to become in order to fit a role in the structure of society.

Slide 4

Functionalists believe that every phenomenon in society has a purpose - even the bad ones.

- **Consider:** Can you think of any benefits of seemingly negative social issues?
- Do social problems stand to serve any purpose for us?

Reflect independently or share your thoughts in the lesson lounge discussion board.

Amy: I believe that negative social issues offer the opportunity for society to manifest a positive outcome, to act accordingly in order to realize the aspiration of a truly Just society. Negative social issues could also be seen in light of a worse alternative, for example our healthcare system is not perfect and contains lots of negative social issues, but it is largely considered better than alternative systems like the for-profit systems of the U.S.A.

Slide 5 - Functionalist Theory

- **Main Focus:** Social Institutions
- **Level of Analysis:** Macro
- **Core Questions:**
 - What keeps society functioning smoothly?
 - What is the standard, tradition, or status-quo?
 - What are the parts of society, and how do they relate?
 - What are the intended / unintended outcomes of an event?

Slide 6 - Definition of Functionalism

- Sees people and the world in large-scale (Macro) and "As it should be"
- Encourages the "status-quo", that is, how things have always been done.
- Attempts to highlight commonalities and squash dissent or rebellion
- Attempts to see the function of everything - even bad stuff, like deviance.

Slide 7 - Social institutions

- **Definition:** Mechanisms or patterns of social order focused on meeting social needs, such as government, economy, education, family, healthcare, and religion.
- Relatively stable patterns of social relations
- Based on shared values or preferences
- They maintain stability and solve problems
- Often expressed as conclusions, trends, or results based on social groups
- Examples: Family, marriage, culture, media, work and labour, religion, education, the economy.

Slide 8 - What is the function of education in society?

- Transmit knowledge in order to become productive citizens
- Teaches cultural values like manners and citizenship
- Takes care of children while parents work
- Reinforces class differences (private schools)
- Labels children into different "types" that impact future paths
- These functions relate to other institutions than just the education system. **The functions of the institution are not always manifest (obvious) but also latent (implied)**

Slide 9 - Function & Dysfunction

Functionalists emphasize stability; when one part of society changes there must be adjustments in the others - otherwise, we may encounter dysfunction.

Functions:

- Manifest - Obvious and intended effects of social structures
- Latent - Non-obvious and unintended effects of social structures

What are the MANIFEST functions of the social institution of marriage?

- Companionship
- Reproduction
- Security
- Justice

LATENT

- Tax breaks
- Pooling resources
- Social status
- Divorce rate

Slide 10 - More key terms about Functionalism

- Stability
- Function
- Dysfunction
- Predictability
- Order
- Values
- Norms
- Equilibrium
- Status quo
- Tradition
- Manifest (intended)
- Latent (unintended)

Slide 12 - Functionalism: Give it a try

Sports: In what ways do they contribute to the social order, function, and stability of society? What are their large-scale benefits?

Do any specific examples come to mind? Make a list and share on the Lesson Lounge discussion board.

- Sports socialize young people into values (competition, patriotism)
- Brings together the community to support local athletes or the nation
- Promotes an overall feeling of unity and social solidarity

Lesson Lounge:

Amy: Sports are a function of society in that they provide a framework for expressing competitive spirit, something that offers challenges of merit, and rites of passage. It provides society with halls of glory that are entertaining feats of physical skills, a positive outlet for those human compulsions to compete, an alternative for warfare. For example the hockey hall of fame, the stats and analysts. Another way it contributes to the social order is that it can also be gambled upon, so sports are a part of the betting / gambling industry / economy. Also, those members of society involved in a sport, or media around a sport,

rely on it for stability of their careers and livelihoods. So sports are a big part of the media ecosystem and entertainment / broadcast industries as well.

Slide 13 - Functionalism today

- While Sociology today focuses more on social change rather than the status quo, functionalism still has its place.
- Healthy and predictable routines are great for families according to recent research (Cumming, 2020)

Slide 14: Functionalism's weaknesses

- Ignores inequality of social class, race, and gender; focuses on stability at the expense of conflict
- Encourages the status quo - what if it doesn't benefit everyone?
- What about social change? Not really accounted for.
- What else?

Slide 15: Weekly Activity

- If you could change one thing about society, what would it be? Then describe the manifest and latent functions of this change.

Amy: I would improve access to quality education for everyone. If learning opportunities were more equitable, then manifestly, there would be more upward socioeconomic mobility. If all people had equal access for the tools to develop skills, gain knowledge, and pursue their potential, it would be good overall for society.

Some latent functions of this change would be economic and social. More people being educated would improve the efficacy of the workforce as a whole, which would grow the economy. And when more people have access to education, there would be more understanding of diverse perspectives and critical thinking. This would hopefully reduce prejudice and nurture empathy across society.

The impact of increased access to education on families would also be manifest. Family members would have access to resources that support the function of their family both within the family unit and outside it. There would also be latent effects of that increased access to education on the family structure. For example, women and those with intersectional identities would have more autonomy, more power, and better decision-making abilities beyond what their socialized functions within a more traditional family unit had previously allowed.

Slide 16 - Review of functionalism

Functionalism's image of an ideal society is: **A state of equilibrium.**

Slide 17 - FAKE NEWS: Evaluating sources

- Practicing for Assignment #1
 - How do I know a source is good or bad?
 - **Whether a source is "good" or "bad" depends on how you're going to use the information.**
 - Casual use? Academic use?

- **Casual:** Newspapers, blogs, organization websites, social media, wikipedia
- **Academic:** Library database, google scholar, academic journals, peer-reviewed articles

Slide 19 - FAKE NEWS: Practice

- [Dynamics of forest fires in the southwestern Amazon](#)
- [Why is Brazil's Amazon Forest burning up?](#)

What are the similarities and differences? Describe why you think so -- Chat with the prof on Teams, connect with a peer, or post on the Lesson Lounge discussion board.

Amy: I think that the first link is more credible because it is peer reviewed. The second source is not, so that is a difference. However, they are similar in that they both reference reliable data sources (NASA for the second source, and peer-reviewed papers for the first source). We should also look at the note at the bottom of the first source, where they acknowledge that they have received financing from three institutions. It is good to disclose the funding sources so that the readers can search for bias towards their financiers interests. The second source does not disclose this kind of information, and doesn't have an "about us" section on their website, which further devalues its credibility as a source for academic use.