

Social Conflict in Motion

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Sociology is a significant part of the world around us. It helps create an understanding of why different things occur but also creates a space to further examine and understand the actions of people. This in turn allows for a better understanding of the way the world functions. One of the key concepts that presents itself in multiple places in sociology is social conflict theory. It can be found within contexts of class differences, race differences, and deviance/crime. Its presence in multiple aspects of sociology makes it resonate with the average person's perspective. It not only opens up discussions of how ideas like social conflict theory are significant but also how it takes part in changes in society and how it becomes a tool to deconstruct the world that we live in.

Karl Marx introduced social conflict theory to describe the phenomenon where there is competition in society for limited resources (Conerly 2021). Its initial description was meant to describe the problems between social classes. One example to understand the basics of social conflict theory is through the roles of the tenant and the landlord. Where the tenant relies on the landlord for housing and gives their money to them, the landlord benefits from their role and has power over the tenant. Even though there is no inherent oppression, there is still exploitation to some level as the tenant will never truly own what they are giving their money to and the landlord will always reserve the power to leave them without that resource while taking in their money.

Social conflict theory presents itself in other forms of oppression such as racism and xenophobia. We can view it through the examples given in our textbook regarding different ethnic and racial minorities such as Latinos and Asians. However, the easiest way to understand the weight that race and ethnicity carry and how that connects to social conflict theory is through the ideas of dominant and subordinate groups. These terms refer to the groups that are dominant

in society with all the power and those who are subordinate to them and lack power (Conerly 2021). Simple to understand, the terms connect with the ideas that have been established through social conflict theory. In this situation, the dominant group is higher in position and has plentiful resources while subordinate groups struggle and fight for the same resources. This is visible historically through concepts such as apartheid and segregation where the dominant group restricts and controls the rights of the subordinate group. In cases such as apartheid, such as in South Africa, the dominant group can be the numerical minority (Conerly 2021). This is why being a racial or ethnic minority is not always equivalent to being a subordinate group. By using these alternate terms, we can more accurately describe the situations in which one group controls the well-being of another group through institutionalized means.

It is also possible to view social conflict theory within other places that might not be commonly thought of such as deviance as crime. Though Marx does not explicitly discuss deviance and crime within social conflict theory, it can be connected through observations of the approach of the wealthy in order to keep themselves above those below them (Conerly 2021). Overall, it is best described as being a phenomenon where the wealthy bourgeois centralize their power over the proletariat through laws, government, and other authority (Conerly 2021). When laws benefit the wealthy or are seen as something minor to them, they can get away with much more than the average person would be able to. A \$300 ticket carries more weight for the proletariat than it does for the bourgeois. Anti-homeless laws punish those who have no way to house themselves. Lower-class black and Latino people make up a large portion of those imprisoned. The laws that are in place often punish the poor for being poor while being nothing more than a slap on the wrist at most for those who are wealthy.

By understanding social conflict theory and the presence that it has in multiple sections of sociology, one can better understand the way that the world functions and why. From basic class differences to the oppression of different races and ethnicities. This, in turn, can educate the population on how to identify and work towards bettering these situations. Class consciousness is important, as is anti-racism. Sociology creates a path to both. We can examine institutions to break apart problems like wage inequality, racial profiling within the legal system, and classism. These problems can all be connected back to the idea of social conflict theory that Marx introduced. In all of these situations, there are people in power who have resources and opportunities that the people below them do not have. Thus, social conflict theory is a key component to understand when entering the world of sociology.

In many ways, these ideas overlap. Crime and race are interlinked. Race and class often partner. Class and concepts of deviance in society connect to draw specific results. Social conflict theory plays an active role in various places within conversations about sociology. The educated sociologist needs to understand this and be capable of analyzing and dissecting the institutions in place. Intersectionality is important in any conversation that touches upon the rights of people and those human rights make up a great portion of the discussions within sociological spheres. The criminal justice system often fails black and brown people. Patterns of impoverished areas can often be linked back to racism as well. Laws that are in place can be observed and critiqued for how they uphold class differences. The world around us is full of linking ideas and social conflict theory is present in many of them.

By understanding this, we can also understand how to approach finding equality for all. Progress is a continuous process and there will always be a group of people that we are failing in one form or another. By educating ourselves on sociology and the concepts within it, we can

better catch ourselves on our own biases and deconstruct them to better ally ourselves with those in need of support. Education in sociology also opens our eyes to ways that we might be restricted and create the stepping stones to serving our communities through volunteer work or social activism. The role of the educated sociologist is then to decolonize, deconstruct, and develop ideas and plans to serve the community and beyond the best that we can. There is no perfection and there will always be something new to learn, so a proper sociologist must be aware that they will always be in the process of learning.

Sociology is an important part of understanding how the world works. It pushes us to examine why things function the way that they do and encourages us to think critically about that. Social conflict theory is one of the ways that we can observe this and drive ourselves onto the path of progress. By questioning the institutions that create opportunities for one group to take resources from others, we can better serve those who require support. This is something evident in class differences, crime, deviance, race, and ethnicity. Systems in place benefit one group and often punish the other for existing. In many ways, they overlap and this only further reinforces that we must better understand sociology to critique and engage with the world that exists around us.

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