



Prifysgol Cymru

Y Drindod Dewi Sant

University of Wales

Trinity Saint David

Trawsnewid Addysg, Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education, Transforming Lives

ECAY5005:
Health and Social Care: Disability and Wellbeing
Sociological Perspectives of Health and Disability
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QR Code to Module evaluation and feedback



The 'big 5' Sociological Perspectives

Functionalism

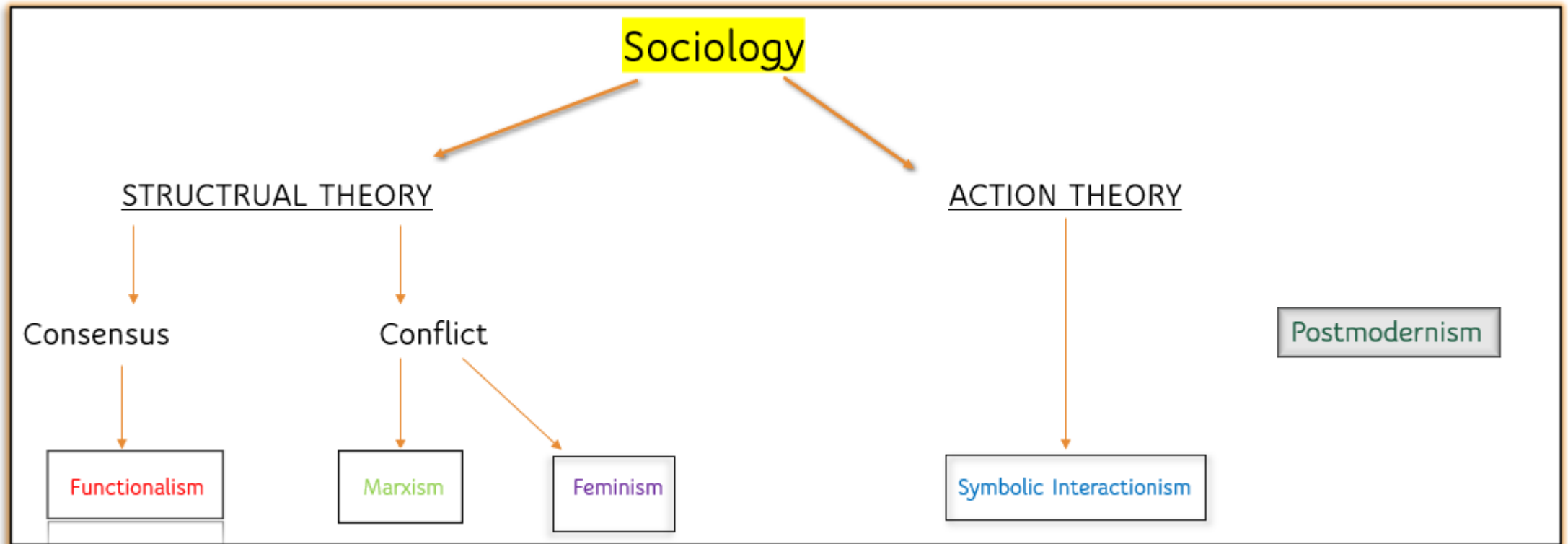
Conflict Theory

Symbolic Interaction

Feminism

Postmodernism

Sociological Perspectives



Structural vs. Action

(Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p. 953)

Structural Theory

- Macro perspective
- How society works as a whole
- Functionalism: how society helps meet our needs
- Conflict Theory: how society rests on economic foundations with a bigger structure above. Can lead to social class conflict.

Action Theory

- Micro perspective
- Does not deny social structure but emphasises the importance of human behaviour
- Society is a product of human behaviour, not the other way around.
- Symbolic interactionism: examines the ways people interpret the actions of others, develop self-image and act in terms of meanings.

Theoretical Lens

- Theory can help us 'see' society in a particular way. Different theories can help us view society in different ways. We call this the 'theoretical lens'.
- E.g., if your sociological perspective is Feminism, your theoretical lens could be gender socialisation.

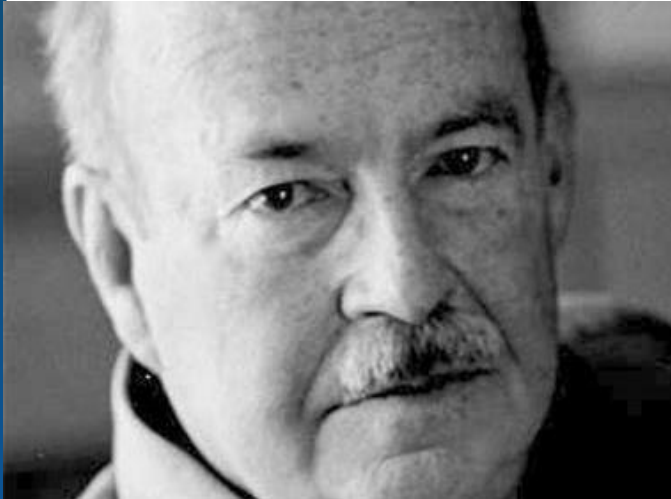
Sociological definitions of 'health'

- Sociologists distinguish between disease and illness
 - Disease: biological or clinically defined abnormality
 - Illness: a person's subjective experience of being unwell
 - Sickness: the social and functional consequences which follow disease or illness (Miles, 1991, p. 3).
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- However, this definition may overemphasise the biological over the socio-political (Thompson, 2011, p. 123).

Structural Functionalism



Structural Functionalism and Health



- Functionalists believe that society needs to work cohesively (value consensus)
- Sickness can disrupt that cohesion
- Talcott Parson's 'Sick Role' is the central theory to Functionalism's understanding of health
- The 'Sick Role': an unwell person must understand that their sickness is undesirable and do everything they can to get better (e.g., seek medical advice/treatment)
- Parsons (1951) saw illness as a form deviance
- It stops society functioning as it should, like crime
- Therefore, illness needs to be controlled in some way

“Therefore, like crime and any other form of deviance, illness needed to be controlled in some way, and the deviant helped or forced into performing their social role once again”

(Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p. 303)

Value Consensus

- This concept underpins Structural Functionalism
- This means individuals within a society share a set of values, norms and beliefs
- What do you think society's 'value consensus' about health and disability is?

Conflict Theory (Marxism)



Conflict Theory and Health



- Medicine is used to ‘define normality, punish deviance and maintain social order’ (Haralombos and Holborn, 2013, p. 305)
- Navarro (1986) believes capitalism benefits from medicine in 3 ways:
 1. Medicine keeps people healthy to contribute to the economy. Definitions of health are linked to the ability to produce goods. Healthy = productive, unhealthy = unable to produce wealth
 2. Masks structural influences on health (social class/gender/ethnicity). Illness seen as bad luck/blamed on the individual
 3. Medicine emphasises biomedical reasons for illness and use drugs treatments which is profitable

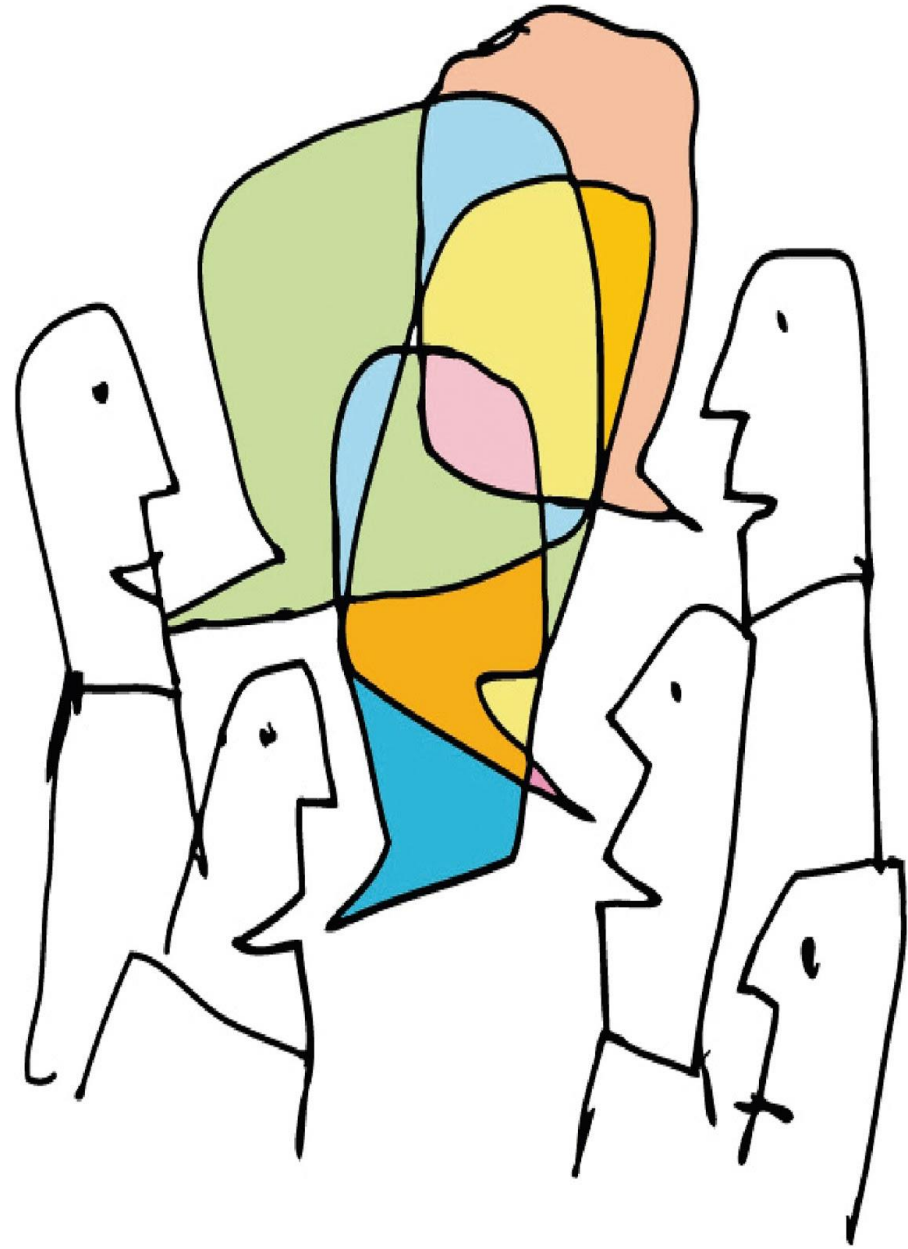
Conflict Theory (Marxism) and Health

- An example of capitalism and healthcare would be the use of breast implants (Annandale 1998)
- US company Dow Corning manufactured implants made of silicone gel from 1963
- By the 1970s surgeons complained the gel was leaking causing health problems
- However, the regulatory body (Food and Drugs Administration) refused to intervene
- By the late 1990s there were multiple cases of ill health linked to the silicone implants
- Dow Corning paid \$4 billion in compensation

Private contracts and the NHS

- In 2019, it was reported that private firms were handed £15bn in NHS contracts over the previous five years (Campbell, 2019)
- The value of contracts given to non-NHS providers increased by 89% since 2015, from £1.9bn to £3.6bn a year (Campbell, 2019)
- During the pandemic, £24.4 billion of private contracts have been awarded by the government
- 60% of this value has been awarded for products and supplies, while 39% was dedicated to procuring services.
 - contracts for personal protective equipment (i.e, PPE)
 - Test and Trace Programme (e.g., coronavirus tests and testing service, NHS COVID-19 app)
 - contracts for hospital supplies (e.g., medicines, hospital beds and ventilators)
- The bulk of contracts were awarded by the Department of Health and Social Care, mostly for PPE and Test and Trace

Symbolic Interactionism



The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Goffman, 1959)

- How we interact with people in different social settings
- Goffman uses the analogy of a theatre – known as “Dramaturgical Theory”
- This looks at how we perform in everyday life (in multiple roles)
- The world / society is like a stage, in our interactions we are like actors, creating society in terms of our response to other actors
- We have a “frontstage” and “backstage” in everyday life
- Frontstage – how we present ourselves in public
- Backstage – how are in private / when we’re relaxing / feeling we don’t have to “perform” / or rehearsing for next frontstage performance

For example...

- Goffman uses the example of waiters at a restaurant
- The waiter who takes your order is performing the “frontstage” self, e.g., being polite, helpful
- The waiter in the kitchen is their “backstage” self, e.g., complaining about the rude customer





**How could we
apply the
'frontstage' and
'backstage' self to
health, wellbeing
and disability?**

Stigma (Goffman, 1963)

- It is the creation of conflict between social groups through interaction
- Stigma occurs when individual is given an attribute which is disliked by society (physical, character, tribal)
- Stigma as something intrinsic but something society has placed on us
- It is not the fault of the individual but certain behaviours are out of place in society
- 'A stigma, then, is really a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype' (Goffman, 1963, p. 4)
- 'By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human' (Goffman, 1963, p. 5)



Stigma and mental health

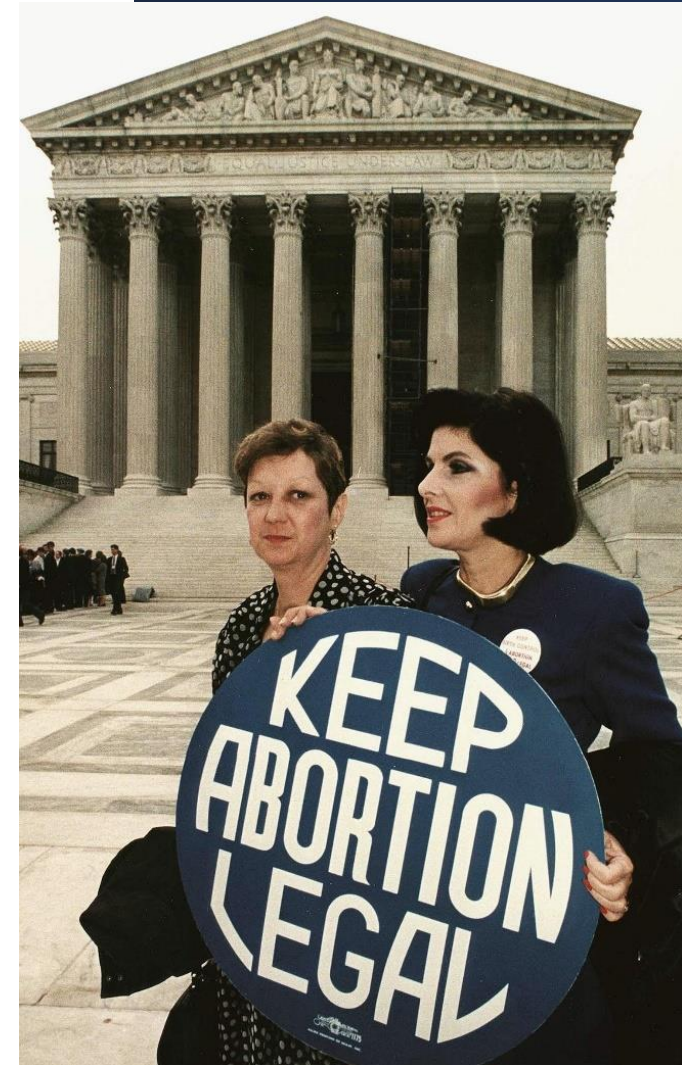
- People with mental health problems are amongst the least likely of any group with a long-term health condition or disability to:
 - find work
 - be in a steady, long-term relationship
 - live in decent housing
 - be socially included in mainstream society.
- Stigma and discrimination can also worsen someone's mental health problems, and delay or impede their getting help and treatment, and their recovery.
- Social isolation, poor housing, unemployment and poverty are all linked to mental ill health.
- So, stigma and discrimination can trap people in a cycle of illness

Feminism



Feminism and Health

- Bodily autonomy was a significant part of the 'second wave' of feminism (1960s-1980s)
- Feminists fought for reproductive rights
- E.g., Roe vs. Wade in America
- Women's emancipation comes from control over their sexuality (including reproductive choice)
- Modern feminists critique the psychiatric diagnosis of 'Borderline Personality Disorder' / 'Emotion Dysregulation'
- This is not a 'new' argument, i.e., Freud and 'hysteria'



“The global status of women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive health and rights is disturbing: 214 million women worldwide want, but lack access to, contraception; more than 800 women die daily from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth; and same-sex relationships between consenting adults are still illegal in 76 countries globally”

The Global Gag Rule



- Introduced by the Reagan government in 1984
- Refers to foreign NGO's who receive US government funding for health being prohibited from giving abortion services/advice/advocating for law reforms
- Every democrat president rescinded it; every Republican reinstated it
- Trump went further – HIV and AIDs, malaria, tuberculosis, family planning and reproductive health programmes
- March 2019 – Prevent NGO's from funding other organisation, even if they use their own money for these things
- President Biden reversed this in January 2021

(Global Fund for Women, 2021b)

WHO IS HURT MOST?



(Global Fund for Women, 2021b)

Period Poverty



Period Poverty in the UK



- One in ten girls (10 per cent) have been unable to afford sanitary wear
- One in seven girls (15 per cent) have struggled to afford sanitary wear
- One in seven girls (14 per cent) have had to ask to borrow sanitary wear from a friend due to affordability issues
- More than one in ten girls (12 per cent) has had to improvise sanitary wear due to affordability issues
- One in five (19%) of girls have changed to a less suitable sanitary product due to cost

Period Poverty in Wales



- The Welsh Government has committed more than £3.3m to tackle period poverty in communities and promoting period dignity in schools and colleges across Wales
- Each local authority will be allocated part of a £220,000 fund to help them provide free period products to women and girls who may otherwise be unable to afford them
- These will be available in community-based locations such as libraries and hubs.

Postmodernism



Postmodernism / Postmodernity

- Modernist concept of “truth” has gone
- Sees the world critically
- Modernism: Same universal goals and same access to justice
- Postmodernism: Multiple pathways and wealth of diversity in society
- There is no one “truth”
- Sceptical of those who say they know one “truth”
- As there are no more “new” ideas, no one “truth”, we put together old ideas into a pastiche
- Challenge authority

Deconstruction (Jacques Derrida)

- Focused on the use of language
- Believed our belief systems were based on binary oppositions
- One is brought forward (superior), the other is suppressed (inferior)
- Therefore, we need to deconstruct these oppositions to challenge the ideology behind them
- Then this will 'undermine the whole idea that binary opposition should form the basis for thinking about the world' (Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p. 123)
- E.g., 'disabled' is usually seen as something that is not 'abled'. We need to deconstruct what 'abled' means to change the meaning of 'disabled'

Binary Oppositions

Good

Evil

Man

Woman

Rich

Poor

Abled

Disabled

Beautiful

Ugly

Strong

Weak



**Any thoughts, questions
or comments?**

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