

Social Action Theory

Ruth's Sociology Resources

Social Action Theory

- Also known as Interactionist theory
- Rejects structuralist assumptions about behaviour
 - Instead sees people as having an active role in shaping society
- Society as product of groups of people
- Micro-approach/micro-narrative

- Considers how people see themselves & society
 - Notions of social identity
- Some versions
 - See reality as subjective & relative
 - People's perception of reality will affect their actions

Interpretations & Meanings

- People bring their own interpretations & meanings into situations
 - Use these to make sense of situations
- Shared meanings & interpretations lead to consistent “appropriate” behaviour
 - We all follow the “rules” that we believe exist

Socialisation

- Learning of shared interpretations and meanings of social interactions
 - Understanding how social groups work and how to fit in
- Acquisition of *identity*
 - we see ourselves in relation to others – how we are the same or the ways in which we are different

Social Action theories

Labelling

- People are “labelled” (classified) through interactions with others
 - Eg teachers may label students as “good” or “bad”
 - This leads to a **Self-fulfilling prophecy** – people live up to their label
- Becker (1963) – idea of “Master status”
- Troyna – anti-school subcultures

Weber & Culture

- Weber (1905)
 - Interplay betw. Economic forces & religion
 - Cultural ideas are forces for social change
 - Values and norms are not just the results of capitalism or capitalist ideology
 - Eg. Protestant work ethic

Symbolic Interactionism

- Emphasis on fluidity of society – constantly changing
- Culture is the result of social interaction
 - Exchange of meanings & interpretations
- Need to understand meanings & interpretations of individual actions to understand society

Mead – the “I” & the “me”

- social interaction is important to identity

Further Reading

- Sociology in Perspective, pp.34-36
- Sociology for AS Level, Moore et al (2002) pp.14-16
- Introducing Sociology for AS Level, Browne, K. (2002) pp.16-17
- Sociology in Focus, Taylor et al (1995) pp.16-18