Theoretical Perspectives—Conflict Theory

***What is it?***

Conflict theory is an interdisciplinary sociological and political theory.

***What does it attempt to explain?*** Conflict theory attempts to explain inequalities, while setting out to criticize society.

***What are some of the main areas of focus?***

* Conflict theory is a macro theory that explains inequalities in money, gender, class, and age in today’s society
* Conflict theory is used to criticize society, and the way it continues on
* It describes society as unstable and disagreeable, with frequent inconsistent changes
* We study the exploitation by individuals with greater power, over individuals with lesser power
* Functional for those who have higher status, wealth, and overall dominance over others
* Looks at the exploitation and oppression within familial bonds and ties. For example, it targets power and authority and the affect it can have on marriage, child rearing, role of the breadwinner, and overall socialization with others
* Main area of focus for Conflict theory is: one greater force of power taking control over the weaker force of power in any circumstance.

***Basic Concepts or Principles?***

* Functionalism may work for society, however it usually only benefits the higher-ranking individuals of that society and exploits everybody else.
* It is believed that society is divided into groups, in order to split people up according to their power and social status.
* Karl Marx, spoke of two different groups in which society is split into. The “Bourgeoisie”, and the “Proletariats”.
* Many people believed that his grouping of society was a natural way of life, however he disagreed and argued for the elimination of the inequalities. This then led into communism

***5 Key Terms for Conflict Theory:***

1. Power- The possession of control or command over others. This applies to conflict theory because conflict theory is based on an imbalance of power between groups in society. Those without power are oppressed and exploited by those with power.
2. Inequality- Lack of equality, as of opportunity, treatment or status. Inequality is a key term in the Conflict theory because it explains how the structure of society is different for everyone. Some have advantages when others do o
3. Bourgeoisie- A name Karl Marx created in the nineteenth century for those who controlled the means of production. The bourgeoisie were a small group in society that had tremendous power
4. Proletariat- The working people, the majority of the population. Their livelihood was controlled by the Bourgeoisie.
5. Oppression- The exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel or unjust manner. Some argue that the oppression of women was linked to capitalism- women staying at home being the ones to look after the children. Since they are not the ones working and making money, they are therefore less powerful than the men, creating an imbalance in the family.

***The History of the Family:***

* In a typical family in the past, women would stay at home and take care of the children and house while the men would go out into the workforce to provide money
* Men were the authoritative figures in the family and made almost all – if not all – of the decisions
* Women were hardly recognized for the hard work they had to complete at home because they completed it without pay
* Today, women and men are almost completely equal. Women are accepted in the workforce and obtain a status in society
* Men now share a role in taking care of the house and children
* The division of home and out-of-home work has very much been equaled out between both spouses, although there is still a sense of male dominance.
* Women continue to be stereotyped as housewives and cleaning machines.
* Conflict theory still continues to hold a grasp on male and female roles

***Child Abuse***

* A conflict theorist might perceive child abuse as the result of social inequality and social structures
* Society is structured in a way that one group would benefit more than another—can be seen in relation to child abuse as children are seen as below the parents, and are therefore exploited by those with power, (the parents)
* Inequality in the family, like the dominance of a father or mother would increase the probability of violence in the family
* The dominant partner may use violence to maintain their position, or the subordinate partner may use violence to try to achieve a more balanced relationship.

***The Role of Women in the Family***

* In the past, women would stay at home and be the perfect “housewife”, while the man went out into the world and made the money
* Women—who maintained the house, and raised and took care of the children—were expected to provide their daily labor for free
* Conflict theory argues that women had once been oppressed so that men can benefit from their positions of wealth, power, and status
* In the past, women had no choice but to marry, have children, and provide the unpaid labor it took to maintain a family
* Now, women are almost with equal status as men.

***Adolescent Behavior***

* In our society, there are 3 stages of life known as Childhood, Adolescence, and Adulthood
* Long ago there were simply two stages. In the eyes of our ancestors the idea of adolescence, did not exist
* In today’s society, teenagers find themselves constantly having to prove their worthiness, and themselves in general, to adults in order to gain trust and respect
* Adults are ranked higher up than adolescents= social inequality.
* Being treated and perceived in a negative way by society leads to negative adolescent behavior.