

Outline and explain two reasons why conflict theories are more suitable than consensus theories for studying society today (10)

One reason why conflict theories are more suitable for studying society today than consensus theories is due to the fragmented nature of society today. Conflict theories, such as Marxism and Feminism both suggest that there are differences between individuals based upon their social characteristics. For Marxists, they suggest that the lower social classes are exploited by the elites in society through employment and through having the dominant ideology or hegemony, forced upon them through different social institutions. This is evidenced in contemporary society through income inequality in the UK. Recent research has suggested that 50% of the land in the UK is owned by just 1% of the population, whilst globally it is suggested by Oxfam that the world's wealthiest 1% control 50% of the planet's resources. This level of inequality creates problems that conflict theorists are best placed to examine, such as exploitation, alienation and false consciousness. In contrast, consensus theories focus on the functioning of social institutions to reinforce ideologies such as meritocracy and social solidarity, rather than challenging or exploring the inequality in society. This makes conflict theories more useful in studying society today.

A second reason conflict theories are more suited to study of society today is due to the rapid social changes that have led to society becoming more fragmented. Feminism, a conflict theory whose core concept is to challenge the inequality in society caused by patriarchal oppression, has evolved over time to become able to address the wide range of issues that face women. Intersectional feminists suggest that women face a range of different challenges based upon their social characteristics and that the duty of feminism as a movement is to represent these groups. Women are exploited not only by their gender, but also by their social class, their sexuality, ethnicity, age and physical abilities. In contemporary society, this allows Feminism to investigate issues such as domestic violence, female poverty, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment and the gender socialisation of girls. In contrast, consensus theories such as Functionalism, fail to recognise the dysfunction in society as they have an overly positive view of a harmonious society.

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