The Sociological Quest Essay, Research Paper

THE SOCIOLOGICAL QUEST – SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 3 & 4.

The term ’sociology’ is an amalgam of the Latin and Greek word meaning reasoning about the social’. Sociologists attempt to find the quest for sociological understanding through explanation and reasoning. Whilst studying different societal groups, four aspects are addressed, their purpose to raise arguments and issues. These involve historical, cultural, structural and critical components, which indicate styles of analysis and social phenomena.

Sociologists use historical evidence to explain the current shape of society, which enables them to prove certain ideologies as incorrect. The view that ‘marriage is going out of fashion’ is one example, which is viewed in an ‘a-historical’ context. The Australian Census in 1986 showed that the percentage of people married had increased from 45% in 1981 to 57.8%, showing that ‘marriage’ was not suffering.

Sociologists use historical evidence to theorise, in doing so they develop different terminology. In the case of increasing marital failure during the early 1980’s, a ?negative sanction’ result occurred. Sociologists theorised that the increase in failed marriages was because of society’s attitude. Marital break-ups were now more socially acceptable.

Sociologists have classed their historical reasoning into two categories, 1 necessary and sufficient conditions’. A necessary condition, in a case where “the age to which women give birth to first born babies is increasing’, refers to contraception, which is the requirement for delaying pregnancy. Whereas,’ the sufficient condition refers to factors such as career, education and housing, being the external influencing factors to the problem.

A cultural understanding allows sociologists to challenge the notion of ethnocentrism, in which one culture will “somehow feel more superior to those of other cultures”. Ethnocentrism, an aspect of cultural understanding is evident

in the scenario of human responses to hot temperatures. Australian’s tend to wear light, brief clothing, whereas Arabian cultures try to cover up. What seems normal within one culture is an accepted practice in another.

Cultural differences are observed at intersociety levels, between different societies. “Burping a baby” is one example. Mothers in Great Britain and the U.S.A believe the act to be universal, instead it has been socially constructed. Women in countries such as Czechoslovakia do not practice this. Cultural differences are also observed at an intrasocietal level, within a society. Beach behaviour displays this, where “different characters” (of different social class) are found at particular beaches. Areas such as Elwood attract a lower class compared with the area of Lorne.

Social structure aids a sociological understanding, by acting as a “heuristic device”. When addressing the question “What would have happened if Adolf Hitler had not been born?”, the distinction between agency and structure must be defined. People who believe the agency end of the continuum (in this case the individual-Hitler) would say that results were a direct result of him. However a structural understanding, would see individuals believing that if it were not for Adolf, another individual would have played the historical role that Hitler did.

Structural analysis likes to compare societies. Through the study of epidemiology, the AIDS epidemic indicates that it is more widespread in Africa than in other parts of the world. In particular, organisation of African societies must be studied to complete a structural explanation.

Ideology of victim blaming is another form of structural analysis. In the incidence of rape women are sometimes blamed, this may have been because of the suggestive clothing she was wearing at the time. However the conclusion pays inadequate attention to the structural context, such as women having a right to “wear what men having a right to “wear what they want”.

Critical analysis allows sociologists to be reflective or sceptical about the social world”. A critical sensibility requires evidence to back up any argument. It also attempts to define the ‘extent to which sociology can and should emulate the natural and physical sciences”.

Being critical means trying to “uncover and expose as many of the ambiguities, misrepresentations, distortions and falsehoods” of society. One such case is the thought that rich people believe that they are being overtaxed, and that poverty no longer exists. In fact Phillip Raskall exposed that the rich people in fact paid a lower proportion of income tax, and total wealth owned in the country by the top few percent was actually increasing.

Critical components allow sociologists to extrapolate and argue a particular sociological view. Having a structural and critical sensibility aids in the analysis of society, whereas historical and cultural perspective permits an understanding of the unique organisation in or between the social world.