

Sociology
UNIT #1 – Study Guide
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Study Guide 1: Foundations

Essays:

1. What is the detailed division of labor? What functions does it serve? What dysfunctions?

Harry Braverman addresses issues relating to the industrial working class in his book, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. Braverman defines the *detailed division of labor* as breaking down the manufacturing of a product into simple discrete steps. Each task is then assigned to an individual workman. The *detailed division of labor* is also referred to as the *manufacturing division of labor*.

The very earliest innovative principle of the capitalist mode of production was the manufacturing division of labor. In one form or another, the division of labor has remained the fundamental principle of industrial organization. A capitalistic society systematically subdivides the work of each productive specialty into limited operations. There has always been some division of labor based on age and sex roles within societies. Karl Marx calls this form of division the *social division of labor*. The *social division of labor* divides society among occupations, each associated with a branch of production.

Against this social division of labor is the *detailed* or *manufacturing division of labor*. This process breaks down the production of products into separate operations which are then performed by different workers. The detailed division of labor is a special product of a capitalist society. While individual workmen often subdivide a task into discreet steps—for example in making 10 picture frames, the workman may first measure all of the wood he will use, he may then cut each piece, assemble the 10 frames, and then paint them. But without the inducement of capitalism, rarely will the workman confine himself to one of these tasks for the duration of his work life. The *detailed division of labor* destroys skilled occupations and renders the worker unable to carry through the complete production process. While the *social division of labor* subdivides society, the *detailed division of labor* subdivides humans.

This subdivision of the humans is carried on without regard for human capabilities and needs; Braverman calls it a crime against the person and a crime against humanity. It is significant that the workers do not voluntarily convert themselves into detail workers. The detail division of labor dismembers workers. It destroys skills that were once highly valued (and paid). It destroys occupations that were in the worker's control. It takes away any special knowledge and training workers may have acquired in order to perform their jobs and reduces the work to specific steps that unskilled labor can perform. And being unskilled, this labor is a good deal cheaper for the capitalist to purchase.

The *detailed division of labor* is imposed by planning and control. In a capitalistic society, the products of the *division of labor* are exchanged as commodities. The *detailed division of labor* is a product of the analysis of the production process and the separation of operations among various workers which results in cost savings. Each of the steps represents a savings in labor time. The workman saves time by performing a simple task, over and over again. Savings are realized in productivity and management control. This, combined with the lower costs of unskilled labor makes for increased profit for the capitalist.

2. What is the commodification of social life? How is this related to monopoly capitalism?

Commodification is the exchange of goods and services through the market economy that were once given through primary group ties. A *primary group structure* is a term used in social science to refer to structural groups in which members tend to interact on an intimate basis. They perform many functions that may include regulating production, reproduction, socialization, education, and enforcing social discipline. Examples of primary groups are family, community, voluntary organizations, and friendship networks. *Structure* is a sociological term that refers to all human institutions, groups, and organizations. *Secondary group structure* is a term used in social science to refer to structural groups in which members tend to interact without any emotional commitment to one another. These organizations are coordinated through bureaucracies. They perform many functions such as regulating production, reproduction, socialization, education, and enforcing social discipline. Examples of *secondary groups* include governments, parties, military, corporations, educational institutions, media, service and welfare organizations, and professional and labor organizations.

Since the birth of capitalism, the state has provided social and legal structure that allows private capitalists to operate most effectively. *Monopoly capitalism* is when the state is captured by capital interests, and intervenes in the economy in order to favor entrenched corporate interests through economic policy. In monopoly capitalism, the corporation produces all the goods and services—they are converted into commodities—and new products and services are developed and marketed that become indispensable. The conditions of modern life eliminate any alternatives to these goods. Those who live in monopoly capitalist societies are bound to the goods and services produced. The only way to avoid these goods and services is total abstention from the social life that includes them. The individuals become totally dependent on the market.

With more women in the work force and the existence of more two income families where both parents are employed, there is a very high value placed on “free” time that families have to enjoy their time together. Today’s families enjoy going to movies, eating out, attending sporting events, participating in recreational activities, traveling, as well as other forms of entertainment. Previous generations entertained themselves at home, could not afford to participate in these types of activities, and, for the most part, these types of activities were not available. Today’s population no longer relies on the social organization in the form of family, friends, neighbors, the community, elders, or children for these activities. The population must go to market and only to market for food, clothing, shelter, recreation, amusement, security, care of the young, care of the old, care of the sick, care of the handicapped, as well as other services. In today’s world, not only are the material and service needs but through the market, but even the emotional patterns of life are channeled through the market. The universal market is created by the conquest of all goods produced by the commodity form, the conquest of an increasing range of services and their conversion to commodities, and the invention of new products and services. The residents of the capitalist society become dependent on these goods and services which is a function of monopoly capitalism.

Short Answers:

1. What is “the problem of management”?

The problem of management is that it must coordinate, supervise, and control free labor. It is in the interest of the manager to get the maximum amount of work from each of its employees; it is in the interest of the worker to conserve her energy. Management must also take into consideration technology as well as the social aspects involving workers. How well management is able to mesh these together determines the success or failure of any enterprise.

2. Describe scientific management? Is it in widespread practice in corporate America?

Scientific management, also known as Taylorism, is a set of ideas developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Scientific management attempts to apply the methods of science to the complex problems of controlling labor in capitalist enterprises. It requires simplifying, rationalizing, standardizing, and coordinating the actions of the work force in order to maximize efficiency. It is the adaption of labor to the needs of capital. The drive to increase production in capitalist firms is ongoing and never ending. There is no level of productivity that is ever regarded as sufficient. Technological advances and shifts to new industries encourages refinement so the pressure upon workers is unending.

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Study Guide 2: Sociocultural Systems

Essays:

1. How does rationalization promote the growth of bureaucracy?

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