

# Sociological Theory

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## SOC - Lecture 3

### **Diff. kinds of sociology :**

- Macro sociology: “big picture” of society + its institutions (e.g.. conflict theory, feminist theory, postmodern theory)
- Micro sociology: plans, motivations, + actions of indiv. + small groups
- sociology didn't develop uniformly but diversified into diff. school
  - e.g: conflict theory, structural functionalism, etc.

### **Karl Marx's Conflict Theory**

- an optimist that we can create a society where everyone can live in equality and dignity
- his observations on inequality + conflict tried to understand social dynamics that result from the capitalist Econ system
- stages society goes through based on their mode of production
- capitalist system's fault (social dynamics that resulted from that economic system)
- saw industrial revolution as a capitalist revolution (technological change, resulted in ppl being exploited for labour work)

### 5 modes of production:

- primitive communism
- ancient societies
- feudalism
- capitalism
- advanced communism
- Capitalist Mode of Production
  - conflict between bourgeoisie (capitalists) + proletariat (workers)

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- bourgeoisie's power comes from its ownership of means of prod.
- conflict between classes initiates a socialist revolution that produces an egalitarian society
  - conflict between 2 classes : "motor of social change" (capitalist destruction)
- believed ppl needed the freedom of the way they want to work
- factory workers were alienated (excluded) built things they couldn't afford (paid low wages)
- what remains true about Marx's theory today? We're still somewhat in a capitalist society (some groups have power over us) oppression of some classes. There is still a hierarchy (gender, age, ability, race, religion, sexuality)
- each group's position in hierarchy is determined by the group's role in prod.
- Class divisions = main source of conflict in large societies + motor of major socio-historical change
- conflict theory still remains connected to sociology, is because ppl still have access to more power than others

### **Weber & Conflict theory**

- witnessed advanced capitalism + argued w/the ghost of Marx
- didn't think class consciousness + revolution were unavoidable
- multiple ways ppl are unequal other than class
  - we're class members but mostly "status groups"
  - race, gender, sexuality, ability
- conflict theory found new apps in feminist socio, queer theory, anti-colonialism, + other critical socio approaches
- society is organized according to hierarchy

### **Conflict Theory**

- Steckley: conflict theory based on 4 C's

- 1. Conflict: exists in large societies
- 2. Class: existed in every society
- 3. Contestation: functions contested by asking “who does this function best serve?”
  - looks nothing like marxism
- 4. Change: society will or should be changed

### **Structural Functionalism**

- Representatives: Durkheim, Merton, Parsons
- uses organic/biological analogy for society
  - identifies various structures of society (family, education, law, religion) + describes functions structure performs to keep entire social system + produce social cohesion
  - society that doesn't function properly is unstable : crimes, suicide, etc.
- focus to explain social stability over conflict + social change
- this approach fell out of favour for most sociologists
- what religion does for society (how does it contribute + function?)
  - bounds community together, improves social solidarity
- Durkheim's function's of religion:
  - Social control, cohesion, vitalizing, purpose

### **Merton's Manifest + Latent Functions**

- enhanced functionalist perspective by noting 3 diff. types of functions that any structure can produce:
  - Manifest functions: intended + easily recognized (religion fulfills spiritual + emotional needs)
  - Latent functions: unintended + unrecognized (religion creates a social support network, weekly rituals)
  - Latent dysfunctions: unintended + produce negative social consequences

## **Symbolic Interactionism**

- symbolic interaction approach looks at meaning (symbol part) of daily social interactions of indiv.
- focus on indiv. + small groups + their everyday practices & interactions
- ex.: men are more likely to laugh when it's a male speaker & vice-versa
- Mead:
  - examined socialization, dvlpt of self, social roles in human interaction
- Blumer:
  - coined "symbolic interaction"
  - indiv. + groups create + maintain social systems through interaction
- Goffman:
  - coined "total institution" (prisons)
  
- society is objectively real (ind. impact on our behaviour)
- our behaviour is the product of the way we interpret our social world, created and recreated everyday of our lives (develop norms to make sense of a complicated world)
- base interactions on symbols, we act based on symbols
  - language, a sign, race/gender (what does skin color symbolize? we develop a stereotype w/ the skin color), cigarettes (objectively know it'll kill us, so why still choose to smoke?)
  - these symbols are prejudice of discrimination
- society + all of its features only exist in so much as ppl perpetually create, construct, negotiate their circumstances by drawing on symbols
- we act + interact based on meaning we attach to symbols

## Social Construction of Reality

- stemming from idea that our interactions create + recreate society is basic assertion that society is "socially constructed"

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- as social beings aren't simply responding to society, not living within constraints of existing social structure that shapes their behaviour + experiences, we're also creating it
- society isn't something 'out there' — we create + recreate it everyday as we interact w/ppl
- saying something is socially constructed doesn't mean it isn't real in its consequences
- race + gender - both social constructs, but real in their consequences
- Gender (graph): men do more paid work whereas women do more housework (unpaid work)
  - but the difference between the amount of housework men and women do is decreasing over time (boomers to gen. Y)
- Thomas Theorem "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences"
  - if we comprehend (gender, race, sexuality, class, nationality etc) categories as meaningful + act as though they're real
- indiv can resist symbols + challenge them (race =>> stereotypes)
- Shakespeare "All the world's a stage + all the men + women merely players"
- dramaturgy = Goffman's theory of interaction + the presentation of self
  - social interaction is a performance we engage in "impression management"
  - we play roles on the front stage (e.g. waitress follow rules "script" so controls emotions, anger, etc) vs. backstage (act like ourselves)
- symbolic interaction + emotion
  - influence macro level phenomenons such as race/gender
  - Hochschild: when we're moving between backstage + front stage, we're managing our emotions, so we're engaging in 'emotional labour'
    - airline attendants, waitresses, nurses

## **Postmodernism**

- postmodernism is an intellectual movement in humanities + social sciences

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- postmodernists seek to include diversity of voices, esp. those often drowned out by powerful voices of dominant groups (white, hetero, middle/upper-class men)
- rejects single reality +rejects “grand theory”
- in sociology, postmodernism takes the form of “post-structuralism”
- Foucault : everyday actions guided by discourses
  - discourses : ways of speaking about some element of reality
    - ways that we talk about certain features of social life and who’s allowed to speak about it, reflects the way ppl talk about mental illnesses)
  - archeology of knowledge = process of examining how indiv. discourses developed
  - all knowledge constructed + thus must ask : “how do we know what we know?”