

Major Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

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- ◇ Theory
 - From the Greek therein, "to see." A conceptual overview of the way something works
 - A set of logically interrelated statements that attempts to describe, explain, and predict events (textbook)
 - Social theorizing: the task of weaving isolated observations or facts into an understanding
- ◇ Theoretical perspective
 - An overall approach or viewpoint toward some subject a basic image of society that guides research
 - Each perspective directs our attention to
 - What to study (...)

Major classical paradigms or perspectives in sociology

- ◇ **Functionalist perspective**
 - Stresses that our lives are guided by social structures
 - Society as a system made up of interrelated parts, each of which performs one or more functions or meets vital social needs
 - Parts/subsystems: social institutions: economy, family, education, religion, government, etc.
 - Institutions provide the rules governing behaviours, and a set of common values that guide them
 - (ex.) What would happen to society if all education systems were halted for 55 years? How would it be affected?
 - What's the function of religion? Provide moral framework, system of belief, to maintain order
 - Function of science? Provide certified knowledge, validate
 - Assumed that society is organized, stable, well integrated system, they all work together. However, conflict may arise in the system, but its considered temporary
 - Social disruption/social change? Social order rules this out (parents, teachers, police, etc.)
 - Talcott Parsons (1902-1979)
 - Sociology as a science
 - Robert Merton (1910-2003)
 - Expanded our understanding of the concept of social function
 - Manifest functions: recognized and intended consequences of any social action

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Sociology as a science
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 - Expanded our understanding of the concept of social function
 - Manifest functions: recognized and intended consequences of any social pattern
 - Latent functions: consequences that are largely unrecognized and unintended (ex. Education system, teach literacy, essential for society to survive, latent functions: gives a break to parents, allows them to go to work, daycare system, not intended before because women were expected to stay home, keeping millions of young people out of labor market, keeping you occupied and out of trouble)
 - Dysfunctions: undesirable consequences of any social pattern for the operation of society
- Brief critical evaluation
 - How can we assume that society has a "natural" order when social patterns differ from place to place and change over time?
 - By emphasizing social integration, tends to gloss over inequality based on social class, race, ethnicity, and gender - divisions that may generate considerable tension and conflict

◇ **Conflict perspective**

- Based on the 4 C's, conflict, class, contestation, and change
- Society is an arena of inequality generating conflict and change, and of continuous power struggle among competing groups
- Social class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc, are linked to unequal distribution of money, power, education, and social prestige; the social system typically benefits some people while depriving others
- Rich vs poor, men vs women, those on top want to maintain position of power, attempt to gain more resources for themselves
- Assumes that society either will or should be changed; commitment to fight against social inequalities (we want to change, we want to fight)
- Inscription on Marx's monument "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it"
- Brief critical evaluation
 - By highlighting inequality and division, glosses over how shared values or interdependence generates unity among

shared values or interdependence generates unity among members of a society

- By pursuing political goals, relinquishes any claim to scientific objectivity
- Functionalist and conflict perspectives envision society in very broad and abstract terms: large-scale social structures and social systems

◇ ***Symbolic interactionist perspective***

- Micro-level focus: social interactions in specific situations (face to face, reciprocal exchanges)
- Macro- Examines whole society
- Symbolic because looks at the meaning of the interaction
 - Plans, intentions, motivations, and self-reflexivity of actors; through speech, written language, intonations, sign, gestures, body language, gift giving, etc.
- Envisions society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals, as a shared reality created by the interactions of its member
- **Brief critical evaluation**
- Max Webber
 - By focusing on day to day and face to face interactions, ignores the larger social institutions in which behaviour takes place
 - Downplays the global and historical aspects of culture, and the effects of socially imposed definitions of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and age on people's lives

◇ ***Feminist perspective***

- Focuses on significance of gender in understanding and explaining inequalities between men and women in all areas of social life
- Encompasses both the micro and the macro levels of analysis
 - Construction and re-production of gender
 - Series of constraints and forms of resistance in women's lives
- Dorothy Smith (1926-)
- **Brief critical evaluation**
 - Woman-centered
 - Explicitly ideological

- Sociology is the systematic study of human society and social interactions

