

Origins, Major Theorists & Paradigms

Lecture #2

The Development and Origins of Sociology

- Sociology is a very new discipline.
- It emerged during the nineteenth century.
- It grew out of upheaval during the Industrial Revolution.
- The American and French Revolutions encouraged new thought.
- Scientists began applying the scientific method to real world problems.

Comte - "The Father of Sociology"

- Comte coined the term "sociology."
- He argued that reliance on superstition and speculation was inadequate in understanding society.
- He envisioned a science of society.
- Comte believed that sociology would guide society in a peaceful, orderly "evolution."

Sociological Theory

- Theory: a statement of how and why facts are related
 - Explains social behavior to the real world
- Theoretical paradigm: a set of fundamental assumptions that guides thinking
 - Three major approaches
 - Structural-functional
 - Social-conflict
 - Symbolic-interaction

FUNCTIONALISM

Functionalist Perspective

- Society is made up of interdependent parts that perform functions for society as a whole.
- Society is held together by social consensus—the majority agree on what would be good for everybody.
- Social change is seen as harmful or “dysfunctional.”

Functionalism

- **Function:** social arrangements exist because they benefit society
- **Equilibrium:** stability based on balance among parts and consensus
- **Dysfunctions:** problems that occur
- **Development:** progress through differentiation to develop new forms and their integration

Structural –Functional Paradigm

- The basics
 - A macro-level orientation, concerned with broad patterns that shape society as a whole
 - Views society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability
- Key elements:
 - **Social structure** refers to any relatively stable patterns of social behavior found in social institutions
 - **Social function** refers to the consequences for the operation of society as a whole

The Structural–Functional Paradigm

- The **structural-functional paradigm** sees society as a complex system whose parts work together.
- It asserts that our lives are guided by **social structures**.
- Each social structure has **social functions**.
- The influence of this paradigm has declined in recent decades.
 - It focuses on stability, thereby ignoring inequalities of social class, race, and gender.

Who's Who in Structural-Functional Paradigm

- Auguste Comte
 - Importance of social integration during times of rapid change
- Emile Durkheim*
 - Helped establish sociology as a university discipline
- Herbert Spencer
 - Compared society to the human body, organic approach
- Talcott parsons
 - Sought to identify tasks that every society must perform
- Robert K. Merton
 - Manifest functions are recognized and have intended consequences
 - Latent functions are unrecognized and have unintended consequences
 - Social dysfunctions are undesirable consequences

Émile Durkheim



1858-1917

Emile Durkheim

- Pioneered the systematic application of scientific principles to sociology.
- First to use statistical methods to test hypotheses.
- Studied suicide.
- Found that a social force which impacted suicide was social integration—the degree to which people are tied to a group.

Durkheim's Explanation of Suicide

- Others were too focused on the individual
 - Social factors (**social facts**) such as gender, ethnicity, and marital status explain suicide
 - Found the following (in 1897) more likely to commit suicide:
 - Men, Protestants, older, and unmarried
 - All were less integrated into groups
 - Called these suicides **egoistic**
- (cont'd)

Durkheim's Explanation of Suicide (Cont'd)

- **Egoistic**: lack of social ties—individualism
- **Altruistic**: excessively strong ties, e.g., cult members
- **Anomic**: feeling loss of limits or “normlessness”, e.g., during rapid social change
- **Fatalistic**: feeling trapped by rules
- Social conditions affect suicide, but other factors are also important

Durkheim's *SUICIDE* (cont'd)

- Types of suicide classified by two broad concepts: **Integration** and **Regulation**
- Social Integration**: strength of attachment to society;
 - Low→ Egoistic Suicide*
 - High→ Altruistic Suicide
- Social Regulation**: degree of external constraint on individuals in society
 - Low→ Anomic Suicide*
 - High→ Fatalistic

Suicide (cont'd)

- Durkheim believed that modern society experienced pathological rates of egoistic and anomic suicides—we lack integration and regulation
- He believed that developing a sense of social solidarity was required to cure this problem; this could be done through instilling a “collective” sense of morality in individuals

Solidarity and Morality

TYPES OF SOLIDARITY	MORALITY
Traditional: MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY→ <i>collective conscience</i> maintained because of similarities between individuals and the functions they served	Adults vs. Children → guilds and education
Modern: ORGANIC SOLIDARITY→ could be superior, but much more complex; <i>collective conscience</i> could be strengthened and maintained because of interdependence	Discipline, Attachment and Autonomy → combine to create a collective morality
	Role of Punishment in society → increases social cohesion

SOCIAL CONFLICT

Conflict Perspective

- Portrays society as always changing and marked by conflict.
- Emphasizes that different groups compete with each other for scarce resources.
 - e.g.: men and women; one religious group or another.

Conflict Theory

- **Power** holds society together
- **Conflict** is society's natural state
 - Bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) dominate
 - Proletariat (workers)
- Revolution was the means of change →
"Workers of the world, unite!" from *CAPITAL*

Social-Conflict Paradigm

- The basics:
 - A macro-oriented paradigm
 - Views society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and social change
- Key elements:
 - Society is structured in ways to benefit a few at the expense of the majority
 - Factors such as race, sex, class, and age are linked to social inequality
 - Dominant group vs. Minority group relations
 - Incompatible interests and major differences

The Social–Conflict Paradigm

- The **social-conflict paradigm** sees society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and change.
- This paradigm has developed rapidly in recent years but has several weaknesses:
 - It ignores social unity.
 - Like the structural-functional paradigm, it envisions society in terms of broad abstractions.

Who's Who in Social-Conflict Paradigm

- Karl Marx*
 - The importance of social class in creating and maintaining inequality and social conflict
- W.E.B. DuBois
 - Race as the major problem facing the United States in the twentieth century

Karl Marx



1818-1883

Karl Marx

- Marx stated that all human history is marked by class conflict.
- Marx believed that economic systems determine beliefs and values.
- Marx urged people not to let society evolve but to change it.
- The struggle between the classes would end in revolution.

Marx's Conflict Perspective (cont'd)

Who's in Power?

The capitalists—bourgeoisies

Over Whom?

The workers—proletariats

Conflict & Competition

Between those with power and those without

Power is evident in the exploitation and repression of the less powerful

Those in control dominate the expression of social values and norms in politics, religion, and other institutions

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

- People assign meanings to each other's words and actions.
- Our response to a person's actions is determined by our subjective interpretation of that action.
- Behavior is fluid and always changing.

The Symbolic-Interaction Paradigm

- The **symbolic-interaction paradigm** sees society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals.
- Symbolic-interactionism has a **micro-level orientation**.
- It focuses on patterns of social interaction in specific settings.

Symbolic Interactionism

- Emphasizes subjective over objective
- **Agents:** individuals have goals and the ability to pursue them
- Behaviour and attitudes depend on how people **construct** their social world

Symbolic Interactionism (cont'd)

- people act toward things on the basis of **meanings** those things have for them
- **Learning Theory:** people learn by association or reward and punishment
- **Imitation or social learning:** people learn to be something
 - e.g. a criminal, from other criminals
- **Weber:** people must learn to **empathize**, to put oneself in the place of another

Symbolic Interaction Paradigm

- The basics:
 - A micro-level orientation, a close-up focus on social interactions in specific situations
 - Views society as the product of everyday interactions of individuals
- Key elements:
 - Society is nothing more than the shared reality that people construct as they interact with one another
 - Society is a complex, ever-changing mosaic of subjective meanings

The Symbolic-Interaction Paradigm

- Symbolic Interactionism attempts to explain more clearly how individuals actually experience society.
- It has two main weaknesses:
 - Its micro-orientation sometimes results in the error of ignoring the influence of larger social structures.
 - By emphasizing what is unique, it risks overlooking the effects of culture, class, gender, and race.

Who's Who in the Symbolic-Interaction Paradigm

- Max Weber*
 - Understanding a setting from the people in it
- George Herbert Mead
 - How we build personalities from social experience
- Erving Goffman
 - Dramaturgical analysis

Max Weber



1864-1920

Some of Weber's Key Contributions

One of the most influential sociological theorists → contributed to functionalism, conflict, and symbolic interactionism

Unlike Marx and Durkheim, Weber tended to de-emphasize methodological issues

Marx and Durkheim focused on the systematic study of social reality with the hopes of creating some empirical "laws" for social life

Some of Weber's Key Contributions (cont'd)

Weber claimed, "The reduction of empirical reality...to 'laws' is meaningless" (1903-17/1949:80)

Verstehen → to understand in an insightful and intuitive way

Weber was concerned about meaning and the way in which it is formed

THERE'S MORE...
Contemporary Perspectives

- Feminist Theory
- Postmodernism
- Queer Theory
- Critical Race Theory

Feminist Theories

- Marxist Feminist Theories
 - Class & economic position
- Liberal Feminist Theories
 - Legal restraints & customs
- Radical Feminist Theories
 - Patriarchy

Levels of Analysis

- Macro-Level Analysis
 - Conflict theory
 - Functionalist theory
- Micro-Level Analysis
 - Symbolic interactionism
 - Queer theory
- Macro- & Micro-Level analyses
 - Feminist theory
 - Postmodernism

TABLE 1.1 THE MAIN SOCIOLOGICAL PARADIGMS

PARADIGM	MAIN LEVEL OF ANALYSIS	MAIN FOCUS	MAIN QUESTION	IMAGE OF IDEAL SOCIETY
functionalism	macro	values	How do the institutions of society contribute to social stability?	A state of equilibrium
symbolic interactionism	micro	meaning	How do individuals communicate so as to make their social settings meaningful?	Respect for the validity of minority views
conflict theory	macro	class inequality	How do privileged groups seek to maintain their advantages and subordinate groups seek to increase theirs, often causing social change in the process?	The elimination of privilege, especially class privilege
feminism	micro and macro	patriarchy	What social structures and interaction processes maintain male dominance and female subordination?	The elimination of gender inequality

Let's consider an example...

How can each of the main theoretical paradigms help us to understand prostitution?

Functionalism
Conflict
Symbolic Interactionism
Feminism

“Which one is right?”

- Contrary to what many believe, these perspectives are not incompatible.
- They each offer a different view of society that when brought together, enrich our sociological knowledge of the world.
- Together, they offer a more balanced view of sociology.
