SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Sociological depend on the theories to help then explain the social worlds and organize their ideas about how it operates. A theory is the analysis and statement of how and why a set of facts relates to each other. In sociology, theories help us understand how social phenomena relate to each other.

Theories help sociologists explain why and how society works. Through the use of theory, they work to answer such questions as: "why things are as they are, what conditions produce them, and what conditions change them into something else? If we have such a theory, we will at last be in a position to know what we really can do about the shape of our society" (Collins 19888, 119). By understanding the real causes of how and why things operate as they do, we can find ways to address the things that need improvement.

Sociologist use scientific research methods to test these theories. Theories can then be refined or rejected after they are evaluated.

SOCIOLOGICAL PARADGM

Like scientists explains, sociologists develop theories based on paradigms, broad assumptions about how the world works. These paradigms guide the way social scientists develop theories, conduct research, and evaluate evidence. An important work in understanding paradigm is Thomas Kuhn's book The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1970). Kuhn was able to show that scientific assumptions come in and out of favor at different times. Since these paradigms encompass assumptions about how various parts of the world are connected, they guide responses to perceived situations and solutions to any problems that are identified.

An example from the field of medicine illustrates this concept (Weiss and Lonnguist 1994, 19-40). Very early theories of diseases causation were based on the supernatural. Ancient peoples believed diseases were caused by deities or magic. Based on this theory, their treatments often involved rituals designed to remove the evil spirits from the body such as bloodletting (draining blood from the body) or a procedure called trephination in which hopeless were n=made in the skull using sharp stones.

Hippocrates (460-377 B.C) popularized the theoretical paradigm that disease was a natural process. He developed a humeral theory of disease that explained illness as an imbalance of four humors (hot, cold, dry, and wet) within the body. Based on his theory, treatments were designed to rebalance these humors (e.g., cool someone with a heat-related illness). This remained the dominant theory for centuries.

The germ theory of disease that guide today's medical paradigm was not developed until French chemist Louis Pasteur (1822-95) turned his attention to human diseases in the late 1800s. After his research, treatment began to focus on fighting bacteria. Sometimes all of these treatments worked, regardless of whether evil spirits were actually released humors were rebalanced, germs were killed, or some other mechanism was the actual cause of the recovery. Results, however. Tend to be interpreted according to the prevailing paradigm of the time.

In sociology, theoretical paradigms differ in how much of the society or what aspects of the society they focus on at one time. In other words, they differ on how "big" their look at society is. Macro perspectives are "big" perspectives that look at social processes throughout society. Social theorists who take macro perspectives examine the interrelationships of large-scale social structures and interrelationships (e.g., the economy, the government, and the health-care system). They look at how these facets of society fit together and any troubles or stress within these interrelationships. They are also interested in why and how society changes as a result of these relationships.

Conversely, micro perspectives focus on pattern of individual interactions. Social theorists who take a macro perspective focus on the daily interaction we have on an individual level. They are interested in why and how individuals relate to each other, how our day-to-day interactions with each other are shaped by larger society, and how these day-to-day interactions can, in turn, shape larger society.

MAJOR SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

There is no clearly identifiable date when sociological theory began. However, the mid—to-late 1800s marks the period when social1 thought turned to what we today sociology (Ritzer 1988, 4).

There are currently three major theoretical paradigms in sociology: The structural-functionalist paradigm, the social-conflict paradigm, and the symbolic-interactionist paradigm (Babbie 1994). No one of these three perspectives is singularly "right" or "wrong." Each provides a different way to view and analyze society they can reveal different issues and suggest different answers to tackling any problems they identify. Two of the major paradigms, the structural functionalist and the social-conflict perspective, take a macro perspective on society. The third perspective, symbolic-interactionism, takes a micro perspective.

STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALISM

Structural-functionalism is the earliest sociological paradigm. It is rooted in the scientific advances of the physical sciences occurring in the nineteenth century. Based on these advances, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) approached the study of social structures through an "organic analogy" that emphasized evolutionary laws (Spencer 1898). In this model, Spencer viewed society as being similar to a body. In the most simplistic terms, just as the various organs in the body work together to keep the entire system functioning and regulate, the various parts of society (the economy, the polity, health care, education, etc.) work together to keep the entire society functioning and regulated. Spencer also saw similarities in the way physical bodies and societies evolve. Spencer actually coined the term survival of the fittest, which is often incorrectly attributed to evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin.

Spencer influenced early French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858- 1917), who is profiles in chapter 10. Durkheim took this organic analogy and refined it into a perspective that would become **structural-functionalism**. The perspective is also called **functionalism**, or the functionalist paradigm. This paradigm views society as a complex system of interrelated parts working together to maintain stability (Parsions 1951; Turner and Maryanski 1979). According to this perspective; (1) a social system's parts are interdependent; (2) the system has a "normal" healthy state of equilibrium, analogous to a healthy body; and (3) when disturbed, the system parts recognize and readjust to bring the system back to a state of equilibrium (Wallance ans Wolf 1999, 18). Any changes in Society occur in structured, evolutionary` ways.

Durkheim realized that society influences our human action but that society is also something that exists beyond individuals. He felt that society must be studied and understood in terms of what he called social facts. The social facts include laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs`, fashions, rituals, and the myriad cultural and social rules governing social life. Durkheim (1964b) saw this system of social facts as making up the structure of society.

He was interested in how these social facts are related to each other. He was also interested in the function each of the parts of the social fulfills as well as how societies manage to remain stable or change. In other words, how do social facts fit together? What needs to the various parts of society serve? What part does each segment of society play in keeping the system operating and balanced? How and why do systems change?

Functionalism has been very influential in sociology. It was especially popular in the United stated when championed by Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902-79) during 1940s and 1950s. Parsons, profiled below, is known as his grand theory,

an abstract level of theorizing that to explain the entire social structure at once and was difficult, if not impossible to test through research.

Roberty K. Merton (1910-2003), Parson's student, who is also profiled below, turned away from these grand theories in favor of what he called theories of the middle-range. These **middle-range theories** that are more limited and can be tested through research. They explain, for example, deviant behaviour (further discussed in chapter six 6), public, or how power is transmitted between generations.

He also showed that social patterns are complex, with that various parts of society fulfilling different types of functions. Some functions, which Merton called **manifest functions**, are obvious and intended. Other function, called **latent functions** are less recognized and unintended. These functions may be either beneficial or neutral. However some functions may be undesirable, these are called social dysfunctions.

A simple illustration of these concept is the widespread use of cars in America and many other countries (Macionis 1995). Cars provide transportation and status. Both are manifest functions. Cars also provide personal automy, allowing drivers to come and go as they please, on their own schedules. This is a latent function of the vehicular transportation system as it currently exists. However, cars also pollute the environment. Thus, relying on cars as a major means of transportation is also dysfunctional in that regard. Structural-functionalists also recognize that as one part of the system changed, other part of the system to readjust to accommodate the change that has taken place elsewhere. A change in one part of the system may have manifest, latent, and dysfunctional consequences. An example of change that had a number of consequences in the addition of lighting at Chicago's historic Wrigley Field. Built in 1914, Wrigley Field is the home stadium of the Chicago Cubs professional baseball team. All games are Wrigley Field traditionally had to be played during daylight hours because the fields did not have lighting for nighttime games. In 1988, light were added to the field as a result of a lengthy in the immediate area of the field.

Examining the lake View neighborhood round Field as social system allows application of a functionalist perspective to this situation.. Nighttime games can now be played at the field. This one change resulted in a number of other complicated neighborhood effects (Spirou and Bennett 2002). The Cubs have a more flexible schedule and can take economic advantage of televised evening programming, thus achieving that manifest function of lighting the field. As a number of the other manifest and latent functions can also be noted. For example, the

nighttime games have resulted in needed new investments in the surrounding area, population growth, and an acceleration of residential investments by affluent buyer. Sports-oriented business catering to a younger crowd, such as sports bars, have flourished. However, dysfunction have also occurred. Some smaller businesses not catering to the baseball trade have suffered. For example, pharmacies, bookstores, dry cleaners, and restaurant have seen business decline as bar business increased. Automobile traffic around that ballpark has also increased, and area residents and business have been face with more elaborate parking restrictions.

According to its critics, the functionalist focus on social order cannot adequately explain social change. They also argue that this focus on order discount the conflicts and tensions that exist within society and down plays the impact of factors such as race, class, and gender that impact our lives and social positions. Some critics feel that the perspective also ignores the importance of small-scale, micro-level interactions. Structural-functionalism is also criticized as being **tautological**, meaning that it makes circular arguments. This criticism says functionalist argue that, because something exists, it serves a function for the system, and thus it exists. Such a view fails to satisfactorily explain how social structures arise in the first place.

Functionalism lost favor in American sociology during the social upheavals of the 1960s. During the mid-1980s, there was resurgence in interest in Parson's work. Theorists, including Jeffrey C. Alexander (1998) and Neil Smelser (e.g., 1985) (profiled in chapter 9) in the United States and Niklas Lumann (1992) in Germany, who is profiled below, revisited Parson's perspectives on social systems. Their work becomes classified as Neo-Functionalism. This new twist on the old theory became classified as Neo-Functionalism. This new twist on the old theory draws on Parson's basic premises. Neo-functionalism expands the perspective by trying to respond to critics in such ways as incorporating some of the conflicts argued that by rethinking some of the basics of functionalism and focusing on how it links with micro perspectives, much of this criticism can be overcome (e.g., Turner 2001). Structural-functionalism is also still widely used in sociological studies of the family (Mann et al 1997, 340)

Conflict Theory

The other major macro-sociological theoretical framework in sociological theory is the social-conflict paradigm, also referred to as the conflict perspective. Social-Conflict theory focuses on competition between groups. Whereas functionalists focuses on balance and stability within a social system,

conflict theorist view society as comprised of social relations characterized by inequality and change.

According to conflict theorist, groups are constantly competing for an equally distr5ibuted resources, such as wealth and power, with each group seeking to benefit their own interest. In this scenario, one or few groups control these resources at the expense of others. Thus, these theorist look at social structures and ask, "who benefits?' this constant conflict between groups also results in social change.

Conflict theory did not arise with sociology. As Randall Collins points out, much of the history of the worlds is a history of conflict. This perspective has appeared repeatedly when social thinkers have written about what happened in society and the "why" behind those events (Collins 1994, 48 – 49). In this tradition, conflict sociologists look at the historical material and patterns of long- term change. They also now look at the world globally, for example, through the world-systems perspective discussed in chapter 7 on stratification.

The works of Kari Marx (1818 – 83) are often credited with providing the sociological roots of the conflict perspective. Marx (profiled below) Prussia, now Germany, during the stormy period in which Western Europe was transitioning from Feudalism to capitalism. The industrial Revolution was in full swing, and Marx observed inequality throughout the growing capitalist society. The economics of capitalism, he felt, resulted in social classes that were constantly in competition for a society's limited resources. Marx saw rich factory owners who obtained their wealth from the labor of factory workers who were paid little, often toiled long hours in dangerous conditions, and frequently lived in crowded and unhealthy spaces. Society, as Max saw it, was an ongoing struggle between the classes: the "haves" (illustrated by the factory owners) and the "have notes" (illustrated by the workers). The result was social conflict and change as those without resources challenged those holding the resources for a piece of the proverbial pie..

Later conflict theorists have extended and adapted this idea of continuous tension between groups. They have moved well beyond Marx's emphasis on class and economics, focusing on other areas such as in equality between races or sexes. This wider look at social inequalities has provided the basis for feminist theory. To be a feminist theory, "a theory must recognize gender as a system of inequality, assume that it is a must be able rather than constant or necessary feature of human societies and [support] a commitment to a gender equitable system" (Chafetz 2001, 613). In other words, feminist theories argue that social systems oppress women and that this oppression can and should be eliminated.

Feminist, however, differ greatly in their views on why inequality occurs and how to overcome it (Andersen 1993). Drawing from Marx's emphasis on economic, Marxist feminism argues that capitalist economic structures favor men – for example, with higher paying jobs. Solution relies on eliminating capitalism as the source of the problem. Liberal feminism argues that inequality lies in a lack of opportunity and education for women as well as traditional vies of gender that limit women's roles. Liberal feminist feel that if women are allowed to compete equally with men in all areas of society, they will do successfully (Lober 1998). Radical feminism argues that, regardless of economic system and other inequalities women face in their lives (e.g., racism), male domination is the most fundamental and violence is one key method of controlling women. Solutions lie in eliminating all forms of sexual violence and enhancing women's culture and lives.

In the United States, feminism evolved as women sought the right to education and joined the abolitionist movements of the 1800. Many early female sociologists, including Jane Addams (profiled in chapter 11), Harriet Martineau (profiled in chapter 1), and Ida Wells-Barnett (also profiled in chapter 1) participated in this "first wave" of the women's movement, as did some male sociologist. The second wave of feminism was established amid the social movements of the 1960s, when conflict t theory overall was gaining popularity. Many changes were occurring in women's lives (e.g., increasing women's labor-force participation, the development of the birth-control pill) during that decade with sociologist such as Jessie Bernard (profiles below) embracing the movement.

An additional dimension has also been added to feminist perspectives. Many feminists from writings have expanded to encompass women of diverse backgrounds (E.G., Collins 2000) as well as the concerns of globalization and the circumstances of women in less developed countries. A multicultural global feminism has developed that recognize the need to include the diversity of women's voices by other characteristics such as race ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, and able-bodiendness. Sociologists such as Patricia Hill Collins (profiles below) and Dorothy Smith (profiled in chapter 10) focus on what feminism brings to sociological theory and our understanding of society.

Critics have charged that the conflict perspective has become too politicized by its association with Marx and by its widespread use by advocates in numerous cause and movements. The women's movement and feminist theory provides one example of its co-optation for political use. Critics also argue that the conflict perspective down plays the unity that exist in society and takes a negative view of society by overemphasizing conflict, tensions, and coercion.

At this writing, conflict theory is widely used in American sociology. It began to unseat functionalism as the dominant sociological paradigm with challenges C. Wright Mills (profiled in chapter 1) and others made contributions to Parson's theory in the late 1950s, and grew in popularity during the social turmoil of the 1960s. The social-conflict perspective is sometimes combined with elements of micro-level theories to offer a more robust view of social life.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism in the prevailing micro-theoretical framework in sociological theory. As a micro-level perspective, symbolic interactionism focuses on patterns of individual interactions. Although sociologist working in this tradition recognize that larger social structures exist and are important in shaping our lives, they point out that society is actually created by people interacting together on a daily basis. It is these smaller interaction that actually make up the larger social structures that are of the focus of functionalists and conflict theorists.

According to this perspective, society and these larger social structures must be understood through studying social interactions that are based on shared understandings, languages, and symbols. A symbol is something that stands for, represented, of signifies something else in a particular culture. Symbols can be anything – gestures, words, objects, or events – and they can represent any number of others things, ideas, events, or emotions. Symbolic interactionist argue that we are able to interact with others because we create⅕ symbols and learn to interpret what those symbols mean in our interactions. Thus, symbolic interactionism is sometimes referred to as interpretive theory. Social change occurs as people develop a shared understanding that a change needs to take place and interact to make that change happen.

Symbolic interactionism is based partly on the writings of Germany sociologist Max Weber (1864 – 1920), profiled below. Unlike other sociologists who had focused only on large structural relationships, Weber was also interested in how individuals interact. The aspect of his work that influenced the symbolic-interactionist perspective was his focus on how we interpret and understand the situations we encounter and the interactions in which we participate. To Weber, the concept of verstehen, or subjective understanding, was central to explaining human behavior. Weber felt that we have to be able to take someone else's position mentality. To stand in their shoes, so to speak, to understand their actions. From our own perspective, we may not understand why a person acts in a certain way, what that behavior mean to them, or the purposes it serve for them. For example, we may only be able to explain why an

abused wife stays with her violent husband by understanding the totality of her situation from her perspective – her emotional attachment to him, her economic situation, her religious views, and so on.

Although it has German, roots, symbolic interaction is a "distinctively American tradition [and America's] most original contribution to sociological thought" (Collins 1994, 242). The perspective was developed during the 1920s by George Herbert Mead (1863 - 1931). Mead (profiled in chapter 5) was a philosopher and social psychologist who was interested in how our personalities are formed through social interaction. The term symbolic internationalism was however, not actually coined until a decade later. Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), a student of Mead profiled in chapter 9; expanded on Mead's concepts and introduced the term in 1937. More contemporary theorists expanded symbolic internationalism in new directions. For example, labeling theory (discussed in chapter 6) analyzes how we define deviance. Other perspectives that incorporate interpretative approaches to understanding social behaviors include the concept of the social construction of reality. Erving Goffman's (1922-82) concept of dramaturgy, and Harold Garfinkel's (1917) work in ethnomethodology.

Sociologists have drawn from interpretative and even other disciplines to develop more complex theories. From example, rational-choice theories examine how people make choices purposely, based on their preferences and evaluation of options and opportunities (Voss and Abraham 2000). In simple terms, of all the options or courses of action a person sees as being available, they act based on a calculation of pros and cons. Related to rational choice theories, exchange theories assume that people interact and trade the resources (money, affections, etc.) that they bring to interactions in ways that maximize benefits and reduce costs to themselves (Homans 1974; Blau 1964; Cook 1987, Coleman and Fararo 1992). These theories can become complex as they examine hoe people weigh such factors as perceived costs and benefits, the personal resources they can rely on (money, prestige, personal connections, etc) and other factors in making decisions and determining courses of action.

Critics of symbolic interactionism often argue that the perspective focuses on specific, small-scale situation while overlooking the effective larger society (e.g., the impact of class, racial or gender discrimination). The result, they say is a disregard for the larger social forces at work shaping our lives. Critics also argue that symbolic interactionism focuses on rational and conscious interactions at the expense of considering irrational or unconscious behavior.

In American sociology, symbolic interactionism was popular in the early part of the twentieth century. It was widely developed

and utilized by sociologist at the University of Chicago, the first American University to have a graduate department sociology. Functionalism eclipsed the popularity of symbolic interactionism during the 1940s and 1950s. However, symbolic interactionism has continued to evolve and remain an important and vibrant sociological paradigm.

APPLYING THE PARADIGM

Sociologists use these theoretical perspectives as the basic tools for analyzing social issues. The sociologist's perspective shows their assumptions about how the world works and how change occurs. It will guide the questions the researcher asks and, in many, solutions to any problems that are identified.

Drawing on the example of changing medical paradigm noted early in the chapter, a look at how sociologists apply their perspectives to medicine illustrates the different questions and criticism each of these three paradigms raises. Looking at how these perspectives apply to medicine also demonstrate the complexity of the social issues that sociologists address.