Sociology:

* Systematic study of society and social interaction
  + Relationship between individuals and society

Sociological Perspective

* Sociological Imagination
* From which one sees and understands the connections between indivudals and the broader social contexts in which they live

Why?

* Develop theories about:
  + How group life shapes individual behavior and beliefs
  + How individuals affect group life
* Can help to:
  + Understand ourselves and social world
  + Understand how society shapes our behavior
  + Promote understanding and tolerance
  + Overcome biases

Crime most likely to occur when:

* Motivated offender
* Suitable target
* Lack of formal and informal social control

Sociology v Psychology

* Sociology focuses on influences of social forces on human life
* Psychology studies individuals and focuses on similarities and differences between individuals

Sociological Imagination

* Ability to
  + See relationship between individual experiences and larger society
  + Discover the general in the specific
  + Make personal troubles public issues

Social Institution

* Complex group of interdependent positions that, together, perform a social role and reproduce themselves over time
  + Economy, family, media, education, government, healthcare
* An organization that works to shape behavior of groups or people within it
  + University, company
* In short:
  + Establishes societal patterns of behavior organized around particular purposes / functions
  + General patterns of behavior that emerge out of specific societal conditions
    - Change over time as conditions change, but are enduring and persistent
  + Networks of structures in society that work to socialize the groups of people within them
* Institutionalization
  + Process by which certain social relationships and actions gradually come to be taken for granted and are embedded in social organizations or systems as established norms and customs
  + Institutions such as the family are built upon shared cognitions that define “what has meaning and what actions are possible”
* Individual agency, manifested as choices and preferences, must be considered in cultural and historical contexts
* Do not just constrain options, they establish criteria by which people discover preferences
  + People choose actions because they offer socially constructed and legitimate paths for solving social and individual needs
  + Ex: Why do western cultures such as US practice monogamy and see polygamy weird or immoral
* Historical, cultural, and social conditions of society shape organization of institions
* Changes in social conditions thus lead to changes in institutions

Social Theory

* Set of principles and propositions that explain relationships among social phenomena
* Evolve and sometimes rejected, leading most useful to survive
* Multiple often give us more complete picture than any single one
* Micro sociology
  + Addresses interactions among individuals and small groups
  + Ex: Symbolic interactionism
* Macro sociology
  + Addresses comparisons among larger groups such as nation states
  + Ex: Functionalism and conflict theory

Structural-Functionalism

* Composed of interrelated parts that work together to maintain stability
* Macro level
* Society set of interrelated parts
  + Cultural consensus exists and leads to social order
  + Natural state of society = balance and harmony
  + Society like an organism, when one part breaks down, other parts do, threatens whole operation
* Social problems disruptions of societal system
  + Problems of social institutions produce patterns of deviance
  + Institutions must address such patterns through strategic social change
* Individuals are socialized by society’s institutions
  + Socialization is process by which social control is exerted
  + People need society and its institutions
* Robert Merton (1910-2003) – Functional Analysis
  + Manifest Functions: Recognized and intended consequences of any social pattern
  + Latent functions: Unrecognized and unintended consequences of any social pattern
  + Social dysfunction: Any social pattern that may disrupt the operation of society

Social-Conflict Theory

* Macro level
* Rejects the structural-functional notion that social structure promotes the operation of society
* Instead, social structure benefits those at the top, while hurting those at the bottom
  + Exploitive vs Exploited
* Marked by power struggles over scarce resources
  + Inequities result in conflict → social change inevitable
  + Natural state of society is imbalance
* Defines social problems as conditions that do not conform to dominant ideology
  + Behavior or values of powerless are more likely to be labeled and treated as deviant
  + Behavior or values of the powerful more likely to be labeled and treated as normal
* People are inherently good but are corrupted by society and its economic structure
  + Institutions are controlled by groups with power; order is part of the illusion

Structural Functions and Social-conflict Theory

* While structural functionalism and social conflict theory seem to be in opposition, we can also look at these two perspectives as examining different sides of the same coin

Symbolic-Interactionist Theory

* Micro level
* States that:
  + Human beings live in a world of symbols, to which we attach meanings
  + These meanings arise out of social interaction
  + Meanings are defined and redfined through the course of interaction
* Focuses on how individuals act in relation to one another in everyday life
* Focuses on how individuals in social interaction:
  + Shape organization
  + Share view of the world
  + Influence one another
  + Are socialized
* Society is a network of interlocking statuses / roles / culturally defined expectations
  + Social order constructed through interaction as individuals, through shared meaning, make sense out of their social world
* Holds that definitions of deviance or social problems are subjective
  + Separated deviant and non-deviant people not by what they do but by how society reacts to what they do
* Humans are interpretative and interactive
  + They are constantly changing as their “social beings” emerge and are molded by changing circumstances

Common Ground

* Structure: Recurring patterns of behavior and social relations in a group or society
* Power: Ability to bring about an intended outcome, even when opposed by others
* Culture: Collection of values, beliefs, knowledge, norms, language, behaviors, and material objects shared by a people and socially transmitted from generation to generation



