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Chapter 1 What Is Sociology? ...(Part 2).

Textbook: Anthony Giddens, Mitchell Duneier, Richard P. Appelbaum, and Deborah Carr. Introduction to Sociology. Seagull 12th Edition.

Learning Objectives (2 of 2)

- Be able to identify some of the leading theorists and the concepts they contributed to sociology.
- Learn the different theoretical approaches modern sociologists bring to the field.
- Understand how adopting a sociological perspective allows us to develop a richer understanding of ourselves and the world.

Today's Class

- Understanding the Modern World: The Sociological Debate
- Modern Theoretical Approach
 - Symbolic Interactionism
 - Functionalism
 - Conflict Theories
 - a) Marxism*
 - b) Feminism and Feminist Theory*
 - Rational Choice Theory
 - Postmodern Theory

Today's Class

Theoretical Thinking in Sociology

- Levels of Analysis: Microsociology and Macrosociology

4. How Can Sociology Help Us?

Seeing the social world from many perspectives

Assessing the results of public policy initiatives

Increasing self-understanding

Developing sociological perspectives and research skills, which opens the door to career opportunities

Understanding the Modern World: The Sociological Debate

- Marx's ideas about capitalism continue to influence the economics of modern societies.
- For every sociologist that has refined Marx's ideas, there have been others, such as Max Weber, who offer alternative analyses.
- **Rationalization:** A concept used by Weber to refer to the process by which modes of precise calculation and organization, involving abstract rules and procedures, increasingly come to dominate the social world.

Understanding the Modern World: The Sociological Debate

- Marxist sociologists argue that capitalist motivations (i.e., cheap labor and raw materials) explain the rapid expansion of Western industrialization.
- Critics (Weber and others) have looked to Puritanism & religious values as the driver of a capitalist outlook. Weber also argued that science and bureaucracy have played key roles in capitalist expansion.
- Weber contended that rationalization, where social process is driven by efficiency derived from bureaucracy, science, and technology, was a stronger explanation for the evolution of the modern world than purely economic factors.

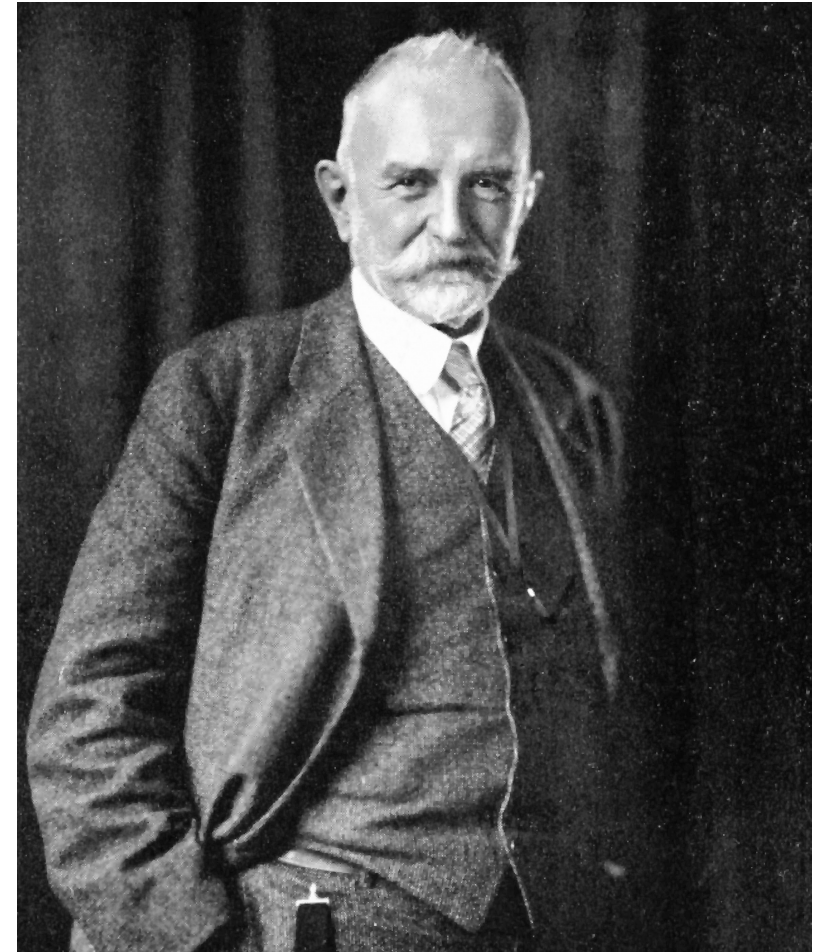
Modern Theoretical Approaches

Introduction to Sociological Perspectives

- Sociologists use theoretical approaches to understand the social world
- A **theoretical approach** provides a broad viewpoint, perspective, or lens that permit social scientists to have a wide range of tools to describe society
- These can also be considered guiding principles or belief systems
- A sociological **theory** seeks to explain social phenomena and could be used to create a testable proposition about society

Symbolic Interactionism

- **Symbolic interactionism:** A theoretical approach developed by George Herbert Mead that emphasizes the role of symbols and language as core elements of all human interaction.
- **Symbol:** One item used to stand for or represent another.



Symbolic Interactionism

- Mead argued that symbolic thought frees us from being limited in our experience to what we can actually see, hear, or feel.
- In our interactions with others, we constantly look for context clues about appropriate behavior and interpret what others are up to.
- Symbolic interactionism focuses on the detail of interpersonal interaction and how that detail is used to make sense of what others say and do.

Symbolic Interactionism

- Symbolic-interactionists focus on patterns of interactions between individuals
- **Dramaturgical analysis** (Erving Goffman) used theater as an analogy for social interaction and recognized interactions as cultural “scripts”
- Goffman interested in the strategy and tactics of social interaction.
- Using the metaphor of a theatrical performance & deploying dramaturgical concepts for support, Goffman argued ‘when human beings interact, each person desires to manage the impressions that others receive of them; social actors do this by putting on a "show" for others’

Symbolic Interactionism

- Goffman believed social actors particularly motivated to engage in certain social practices to avoid embarrassment, either of themselves or others.
- To carry out impression management, interactants, either by themselves or in groups, give "performances" during which they enact "parts," "roles," or "routines," & they make use of a "setting," "props," and "costumes."
- Goffman's analysis of "front stage" and "back stage" carries this metaphor further, different rules & expected behaviors, or scripts, social actors follow when performing in the front region of a scene versus when they are back stage, hidden from an audience.
- Watch:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIUzLpO1kxI>

Functionalism

- **Functionalism:** A theoretical perspective based on the notion that social events can best be explained in terms of the functions they perform—that is, the contributions they make to the continuity of a society.
- Functionalists regard order and balance as the normal state of society, and this social equilibrium is grounded in a moral consensus of shared values among the members of society.
- Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton brought functionalism to prominence.

Merton's Functions

- **Manifest functions:** The functions of a type of social activity that are known to and intended by the individuals involved in the activity.
- **Latent functions:** Functional consequences that are not intended or recognized by the members of a social system in which they occur.
- Merton thought a major part of sociological explanation consisted in uncovering the latent functions of social activities and institutions.
- He also distinguished between functions and dysfunctions.

Limitations of Functionalism

- Functionalism was a leading theoretical tradition for most of the twentieth century, but its popularity has declined as its limitations became apparent.
- Functionalist thinkers like Talcott Parsons unduly stressed factors leading to social cohesion at the expense of those producing division and conflict.
- Many critics claim that functional analysis attributes to societies certain qualities they do not have.

Conflict Theories

- **Conflict theory:** A sociological perspective that emphasizes the role of political and economic power and oppression as contributing to the existing social order.
- Social order is believed to be maintained by domination, with power in the hands of those who possess the greatest political, economic, and social resources.
- Marxism and feminist theories are typically classified as conflict theories.

Marxism

- **Marxism:** A body of thought deriving its main elements from the ideas of Karl Marx. It differs from non-Marxist traditions of sociology in that its adherents view sociology as a combination of sociological analysis and political reform.
- Marxism is supposed to generate a program of radical political change.
- Marxists lay more emphasis on conflict, class divisions, power, and ideology than many non-Marxist sociologists.

Power

- **Power:** The ability of individuals or the members of a group to achieve aims or further the interests they hold.
- Power is a pervasive element in all human relationships.
- Many conflicts in society are power struggles, because how much power an individual or group is able to achieve governs how far they are able to put their wishes into practice.

Ideologies

- **Ideologies:** Shared ideas or beliefs that serve to justify the interests of dominant groups.
- Ideologies are found in all societies in which there are systematic and ingrained inequalities among groups.
- The concept of ideology connects closely with that of power, since ideological systems serve to legitimize the power that groups hold.

Feminist Theory

- **Feminist theory:** A sociological perspective that emphasizes the centrality of gender in analyzing the social world and particularly the uniqueness of the experience of women.
- There are many strands of feminist theory, but they all share the desire to explain gender inequality in society and to work to overcome it.
- The prominence of feminist theory in contemporary sociology is notable because gender issues were scarcely broached by the major figures who established the discipline.

Feminism

- **Feminism:** Advocacy of the rights of women to be equal with men in all spheres of life.
- Feminism dates from the late eighteenth century in Europe, and feminist movements exist in most countries today.
- Like Marxism, feminism links sociological theory and political reform.

Feminism

- Feminist sociologists argue that women's lives and experiences are central to the study of society.
- They highlight gender relations and gender inequality as important determinants of social life, and emphasize that gendered patterns and gendered inequalities are not natural but socially constructed.
- Today, feminist sociology focuses on the intersection of gender, race, and class.

Intersectional Feminism

- Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term in 1989 explained **Intersectional Feminism** as, *“a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other”*
- People’s social identity can overlap leading to compounding experiences of discrimination
- What is intersectionality?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1islM0ytkE>

Review: Major Theoretical Approaches

- **Functionalism:** this theoretical orientation views society as a complex interconnected system of parts that work together in harmony.
- **Symbolic – Interaction Approach:** this theoretical orientation is considered a micro-level approach, which is an individual level approach. In symbolic interaction society is viewed as an ongoing, ever changing event or drama.
- **Conflict Approach:** this theoretical orientation is considered a macro-level approach that focuses on inequality. Society is composed of unequal distribution of desired resources that benefit a minority at the expense of the majority. This unequal distribution of desired resources causes conflict within a society

Review: Potential Applications

- Food consumption from a **structural-functional** approach might be interested in the role of the agricultural industry within the economy and how it is changed, different functions that occur in food production, or how food production is related to social solidarity
- A **conflict theorist** might be interested in the power differentials present in food regulation, the power and powerlessness experienced by local farmers vs. conglomerates, or how nutrition varies based on social classes or other groups
- A **symbolic interactionist** would have more interest in topics such as the symbolic use of food in religious rituals, food's role at family dinners, interactions among members identifying with a particular diet, relationships between farm workers and employees, and symbolism related to food consumption

Rational Choice Theory

- **Rational choice approach:** A theory that posits that if you could have only a single variable to explain society, self-interest would be the best one.
- It is derived from Weber's categorization of "instrumental" behavior, which describes behavior oriented toward self-interest.
- Within the field of criminology, rational choice analysis argues that deviant behavior is a rational response to a specific social situation.
- Though this is a useful theoretical approach, it cannot explain everything.

Video

- PHILOSOPHY - Rational Choice Theory: The Prisoner's Dilemma [HD]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGyZX0VoRpI>

Postmodern Theory

- **Postmodernism:** The belief that society is no longer governed by history or progress.
- Postmodern society is highly pluralistic and diverse, with no “grand narrative” guiding its development.
- It is dominated by the new media, which “take us out” of our past, and everything seems constantly in flux.

Jean Baudrillard

- One postmodern theorist, Jean Baudrillard, believed that electronic media created a chaotic, empty world.
- He argued that meaning is created by the flow of images, as in TV programs, and that much of our world is now a make-believe universe in which we respond to media images rather than to real persons or places.

Theoretical Thinking in Sociology

- Theoretical approaches are distinct from theories.
 - Theories are more narrowly focused and represent attempts to explain particular social conditions or types of events.
 - Theories are usually formed during the research process and suggest other problems for subsequent research.

Scales of Theoretical Thinking

- Sociologists do not share a unified position on whether theories should be specific, wide-ranging, or somewhere in between.
 - Merton argued for middle-range theories, which are specific enough to be tested by empirical research, yet general enough to cover a range of phenomena.
 - Other theoretical schemes, like those in the Marxist tradition, are grander in scale.

Diversity in Theoretical Thinking

- Assessing sociological theories and theoretical approaches is challenging.
- Human behavior is complex, and no single theoretical perspective could adequately cover all its aspects.
- Diversity in theoretical thinking provides a rich source of ideas for research and stimulates the imaginative capacities so essential to progress in sociological work.

Levels of Analysis

- **Microsociology:** The study of human behavior in the context of face-to-face interaction.
 - Micro studies are necessary for illuminating broad institutional patterns.
- **Macrosociology:** The study of large-scale groups, organizations, or social systems.
 - Macro analysis is essential for understanding the institutional background of daily life.

1.4 How Can Sociology Help Us?

How Can Sociology Help Us?

1. Sociology allows us to see the social world from many perspectives.
2. Sociology equips us with skills to assess the results of public-policy initiatives.
3. Sociology can provide us with self-enlightenment, or an increased sense of self-understanding.
4. Developing a sociological eye toward social problems and developing rigorous research skills opens many career doors.