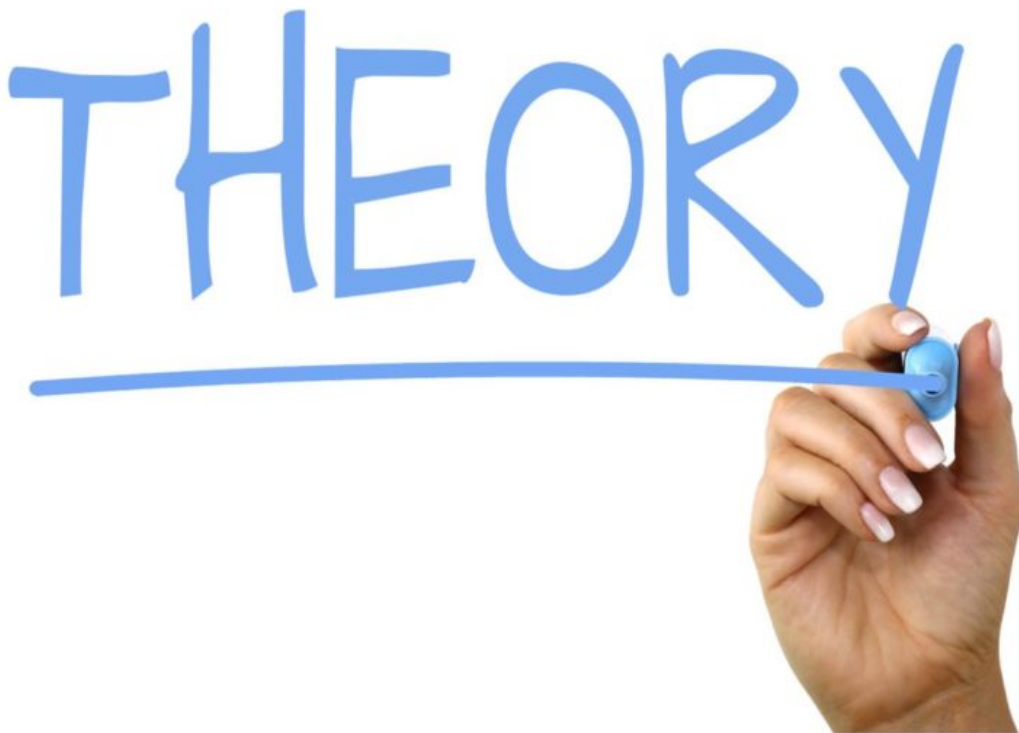


Theoretical Approaches of Social Structure

[See online here](#)

The social structure is the organization among individuals of a society or a group and it is determined by certain theories of coexistence that allow society to be a stable and functional figure. Theories explain the interaction between groups (macrosociology and microsociology). They also explain the activities that allow the balance within society (functionalism) and the differences that could generate conflicts (conflict theory). Other theories are: social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, rational choice theory and the social exchange theory.



Microsociology

Micro-sociology refers to everyday interactions among people who are face to face this is on a small scale. **“The Cab Driver and his Fare”** is one of the most famous study on microsociology, which was published in 1959 by Fred Davis. He spent six months working as a cab driver and noted down the interaction between him and the passengers travelling in his taxi. He observed that the interaction was really unique and short and every time it was different and repetition was rare.

He suggested that most of the interaction time was based on developing trust between the driver and his passenger, whether the driver will take the passenger to exact destination and whether the passenger will pay and tip according to the ride or not. Interpretive analysis forms the basis on microsociology, this is contrary to the

statistical or empirical observations.

Macrosociology

Macrosociology refers to interaction on a large scale and at the level of the social structure. It also focuses on smaller groups such as families but in relation to the whole society or population in which they are living.

Microsociology vs Macrosociology

- Microsociology deals at small scale while macrosociology deals with larger groups.
- Symbolic interpretation is used in microsociology while statistical and empirical analysis is used in macrosociology.

Functionalism

In order to have a strong society, we need to have social equilibrium. Every aspect of the society is related to each other. Different social institutions perform different functions and every institution is inter related. **Slow social change is acceptable but large change can destroy the social stability.** According to this perspective, a social role bears more considerable importance to the society, the role automatically qualifies for a more significant reward.

This supports social stratification through the unequal value of the various roles within the community; the notion that certain tasks or roles in society are of more value than others is created. Individuals that take up these roles, as well as positions, tend to be highly rewarded than others.

A Structural-Functionalist Understanding of Deviance.

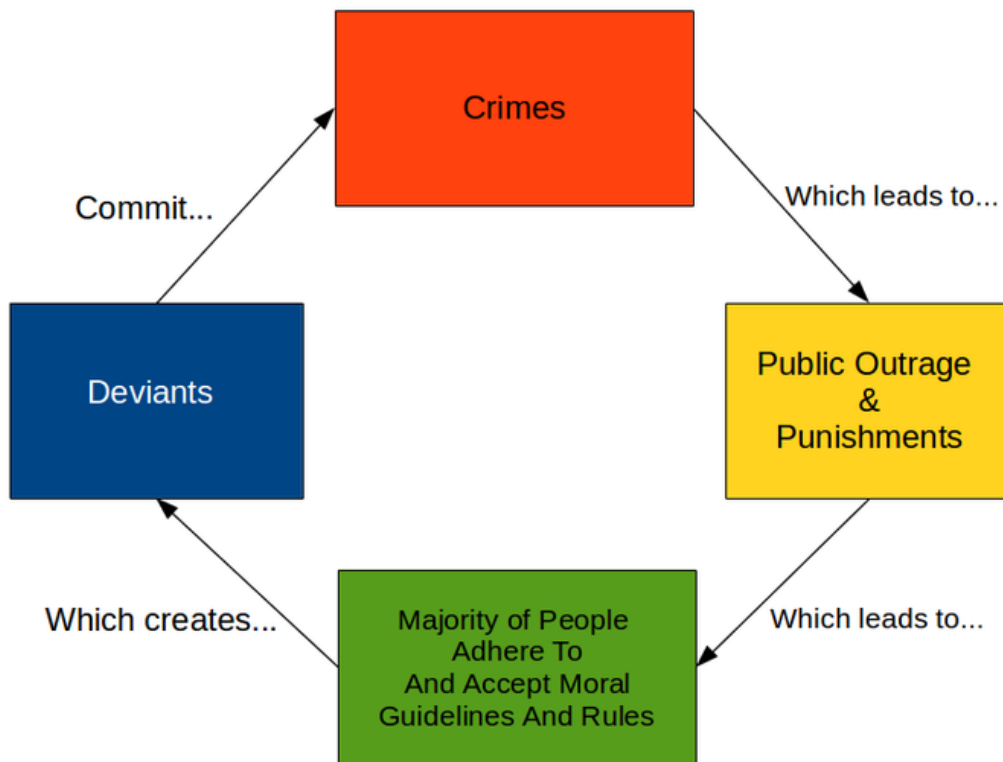


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Conflict Theory

The conflict theory was proposed by Karl Marx. **It proposes that society is based on status and power differences and the amount of resources are not equal** and are distributed according to power and status **thus creating a conflict in society.**

The theorists tend to create awareness of the inequalities through arguments such as asking how a rich neighborhood can have so many poor members. According to Marx, social division is because of people's relationship to production activities, that it is either an individual owned the factories or worked in one of them. Modern conflict theorists believe that the stratification creates class conflict.

Major criticism of conflict theory includes:

- Focuses on conflicts and not on stability that is expressed in society
- Ignores non-forceful ways agreements can be reached
- Focuses on economic drivers as main conflict within society

There is recent advancement in this theory which states that:

- Societies have inequality and this can be changed by transforming existing relations and forming new ones.
- The disadvantaged group has interests which once fulfilled will lead to social change.

By oppression and exploitation of the disadvantaged group, their creativity and abilities

are suppressed, which are necessary in any society where there is unequal distribution of labor.

Symbolic Interactionism

This is a micro-social approach and focuses on individual interactions and how they interpret those interactions. **This explains that people do not merely rely on the roles that society has set for them instead they change them according to the situation present.**

For example, shaking hands is considered as a symbol of friendship and greeting. This simple act of greeting indicates that the person is polite and has good manners. Now suppose if someone refuses to shake hands, this will be considered rude. On the contrary if the person has his right arm broken and does not shake hands than the other person naturally knows that he would be unable to shake hands in this case. As a result, he will make up his mind and will not consider that person being rude. Hence, **an individual shapes his world according to realities rather than rules applied on him by the society.**

Social standing influences how one interacts with others. Individuals are likely to interact with other who share a similar social standing. This tends to explain a society is divided regarding how people live, associate with others, their educational background, and their taste of lifestyle as well as their interest in life.

There are five central ideas behind symbolic interactionism:

1. The human being is a social person. He needs to interact with others and this leads to what he does. **Individual behavior is a result of social interaction.** What we do today is a result of our interaction in the past life and our interaction today.
2. Being human is the superior to all other creations because of the mind given to us. Thinking process and brain activities are happening all the time. **Our attitudes are not only based on the interactions with others but also due to the continuous process of thought going on within us.**
3. Humans sense their environment according to the situation they are in and **it is not the environment or the situation that really matters but it's our own perception of the situation.**
4. **Human action is the result of what is happening in the present rather than our past or the society.** What we apply today is our current experience and knowledge.
5. Human beings are active beings and terms such as conditioning and imprisonment cannot be applied to them in symbolic interaction. **Human beings are actively involved in what they do.**

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism can be defined as ideas that are created by the society based on interactions and are believed by that society as norm or something natural which may or may not be based on reality. Similarly that idea may not be prevalent in some other society and they may not accept it. It mainly focuses on the subject that how the societies construct their own social rules and norms based on reality.

Not necessary true in nature, but is involves both subjective and objective reality. Focuses on the social process rather than the biological process.

Rational Choice Theory

Complete

$$A > B$$

Transitive

$$A > B > C \rightarrow A > C$$

"Rational choice theory" Image created by Lecturio

This theory states that an individual has the right of choice and he can prefer one thing over the other and the individual always chooses the thing that provides him with maximum benefit. It also states that it is not necessary that when the new choice is placed it will lead to change of preference rather its individuals own choice whether he wishes to stay with it or choose the new one.

Transitivity can be explained by the example that if an individual prefers A over B and B over C then he prefers A over C. This preference can be a strict preference, a weak preference or an indifference.

Social Exchange Theory

This theory has roots in the economy and psychology as well. This describes as the social change that occurs between individuals due to social negotiations. This can be summarized in four points:

1. **Success Proposition:** An individual tends to repeat his action if he is rewarded for his actions.
2. **Stimulus Proposition:** It means that if an individual has been previously rewarded for an act, it is more likely that this person will respond to it in the future as well.
3. **Deprivation-Satiation:** The value of the reward becomes less if that person has received that reward more often in the past.
4. **Costs and rewards:** In a relationship both parties in social exchange rely on one another. The cost means the effort or the negative value the person has to put in, in order to maintain a relationship and rewards means the positive values such as companionship and acceptance.

$$\text{Worth/Outcome} = \text{Rewards} - \text{Costs}$$

"Exchange choice theory" Image created by Lecturio

Feminist theory

The feminist theory covers the aspects of gender inequality and gender differences. This theory highlights problems and social aspects according to female point of view which are otherwise overlooked by the dominant male point of view. In the past women were identified as bodies and men were identified by minds due to which women were considered not equal to men, and in routine work men were considered more superior to women. Males were considered active while women were passive individuals.

Gender differences:

- Socially created norms and expectations that are passed down
- The qualities associated with femininity differ than those for masculinity
- Assigned different gender roles

In our societies the gender roles have already been defined and that are passed down as such and due to this women are assigned different duties than men. Due to this gender inequality there is unequal distribution of labor. Dominant themes in this theory include discrimination, sexual objectification, aesthetics as well as contemporary art.

References

Fifty Key Sociologists: the Formative Theorists, John Scott Irving, 2007,

Chodorow, Nancy J.,Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory (Yale University Press: 1989, 1991)

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