

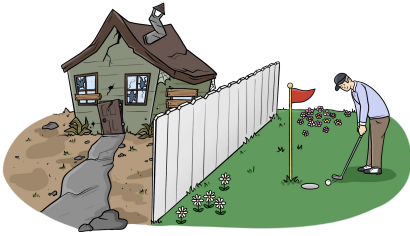
TOPIC: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIOLOGY

Introduction to Theoretical Perspectives

◆ **Theoretical Approach:** General idea about society that guides thinking and _____.

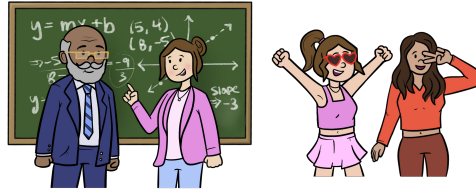
Macro-Level Theories (Macrosociology)

Examine trends and patterns among and between _____ groups and societies.



Micro-Level Theories (Microsociology)

Examine _____ groups and individual interactions.



◆ There are _____ overarching theoretical approaches in sociology:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1 The Functionalist Approach (Structural-Functional Theory) | } Macro-Level |
| 2 The Social Conflict Approach (Conflict Theory) | |
| 3 The Symbolic Interactionist Approach | } Micro-Level |

EXAMPLE

For each research question below, write a capital “M” if it applies to a macro-level of analysis and write a lower case “m” if it applies to a micro-level of analysis.

How do couples with newborns use language differently from couples without children?	
How do policies around public transit influence employment levels in different inner-city populations?	
How do students create and reinforce the authority of a teacher in a classroom setting?	
How do emerging economies change following foreign investment?	

PRACTICE

Which of the following is NOT a major theoretical approach in sociology?

- a) Social conflict approach.
- b) Developmentalist approach.
- c) Symbolic interactionist approach.
- d) Functionalist approach.

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The Functionalist Approach

- ◆ **Functionalism:** Views society as a complex system made up of interrelated parts that each serve a _____.

Overarching Viewpoint

Society is _____ and orderly.

Influential Founders

Auguste Comte
Émile Durkheim
Herbert Spencer

Important Concepts/Terms

Social Structures

Stable, organized patterns of behavior or institutions that make up a _____.

Social Function

The consequence of any social pattern (for society, and/or the individuals within it).

Manifest Functions

The recognized and _____ consequences of a social pattern.

Latent Functions

The _____intended consequences of a social pattern.

Dysfunctions

Social processes that have undesirable or _____ consequences.



Example: Application to the US Education System

Social Structure: Education System

Latent Function: Formation of friendships

Manifest Function: Education

Dysfunction: Student burnout

Example Research Questions

What are the major _____ of society? How are they linked?

_____ does each part help society function?

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EXAMPLE

For the following social structures, fill in the table to provide an example of a manifest and latent function.

Social Structure	Manifest Function	Latent Function
Weekly religious services		
Students living in dorms at college		
A hospital		

PRACTICE

A functionalist sociologist would likely agree with which of the following statements?

- a) All social structures are necessarily beneficial to society.
- b) Social structures contribute to the order and stability of society.
- c) By looking at individual interactions we can extrapolate patterns of society.
- d) Latent functions are the only consequences of a social structure.

PRACTICE

Which of the following intellectuals is associated with functionalism?

- a) Karl Marx.
- b) George Herbert Mead.
- c) Émile Durkheim.
- d) Harriet Martineau.

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The Social Conflict Approach

- ◆ **Conflict Theory:** View of society that focuses on how inequality and social conflict can generate social _____.

Overarching Viewpoint

Society is structured to benefit some groups at the _____ of others.

Influential Founders

Karl Marx
Max Weber

Harriet Martineau
W.E.B. Du Bois

Important Concepts/Terms

Social Inequality

The uneven and/or _____ distribution of resources among members of a society.

Gender-Conflict (Feminist) Theory

Study of society that focuses on inequality between _____ and men.

Race-Conflict Theory

Study of society that focuses on inequality between people of different _____/ethnic groups.

Example: Application to the US Education System



How does allocation of funding perpetuate socioeconomic inequality across generations?

High-income districts → Increased funding → Better education
→ Better colleges/jobs → More wealth

Example Research Questions

_____ benefits from how society is structured? How do those people protect their privilege?
How do disadvantaged people _____ the system and seek change?

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EXAMPLE

For each of the following research questions, write the aspect of conflict theory it is studying, or the subtype of conflict theory that is being studied.

a. How does the experience of a particular race impact high school graduation rates?

b. How does being born into a family with high economic resources influence career readiness?

c. How does gender presentation shape perceived competence at work?

PRACTICE

Which of the following statements about conflict theory is **true**?

- I. Conflict theory is a macro level approach to sociology.
- II. Karl Marx and W.E.B. Du Bois were prominent figures in the foundation of conflict theory.
- III. Conflict theory focuses on the manifest functions of different social structures.

a) I & II. b) I & III. c) II & III. d) I, II, & III.

PRACTICE

Which statement demonstrates a conflict theory approach to sociology?

- a) Individuals shape society through how they experience and make meaning from it.
- b) Families have the manifest function of rearing offspring and the latent function of preserving traditions.
- c) Events like the Olympics facilitate a sense of national pride and create unity.
- d) High-income individuals have access to better medical care in the United States, which preserves a power dynamic between social classes.

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The Symbolic Interactionist Approach

◆ **Symbolic Interactionism:** Views society as the product of the everyday _____ of individuals.

Overarching Viewpoint

People _____ society through their interpretations of it.

Influential Founders

George Herbert Mead
Herbert Blumer
Erving Goffman



Example: Application to the US Education System

How do students pick up on unspoken norms and expectations?
How do students know a “good” student from a “bad” student? How does this impact their own identity?

Example Research Questions

How do people actually _____ society?
How do behavior and meaning _____ from person to person, and/or across situations?

EXAMPLE

A few different methods of sociological research are listed below. Put an X next to the ones that seem well suited for studying society through the symbolic interactionist approach.

Using pre-existing census data	
Conducting interviews with community members	
Statistically examining employment data	
Observing the experiences of a local population and taking detailed field notes	

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PRACTICE

Symbolic interactionism focuses mainly on the interactions between:

- a) Individuals.
- b) Government organizations.
- c) Public and private entities.
- d) Social structures.

PRACTICE

Which of the following statements about symbolic interactionism are true?

- I. Symbolic interactionism is a macro-level approach.
 - II. Erving Goffman and George Herbert Mead were pioneers in this field.
 - III. Symbolic interactionists believe that individual experiences create society's meaning.
-

- | | | | |
|------------|-------------|--------------|------------------|
| a) I & II. | b) I & III. | c) II & III. | d) I, II, & III. |
|------------|-------------|--------------|------------------|

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Summary

	Functionalism	Conflict Theory	Symbolic Interactionism
Level of Analysis	Macro-level		Micro-level
Viewpoint	Society is stable and orderly; each part serves a function.	Society is structured to benefit some groups at others' expense.	People create society through their interpretations of it.
Strengths	Useful as a _____ point for understanding a society.	Highlights _____ dynamics within society and explains social change.	Insight into how individuals _____ society.
Limitations	Can be used to _____ social inequality. Fails to explain social conflict and change.	Ignores parts of society are orderly and _____. Fails to account for shared behavior and cooperation between different groups.	Sometimes fails to consider the widespread influence of culture and factors like class or race.
Influential Researchers	Auguste Comte Émile Durkheim Herbert Spencer	Karl Marx Max Weber Harriet Martineau W.E.B. Du Bois	George Herbert Mead Herbert Blumer Erving Goffman
Example Research Questions	What are the major parts of society? How does each part function?	Who benefits from how society is structured? How do disadvantaged people challenge the system and seek change?	How do people experience society? How do behavior and meaning change from person to person?

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EXAMPLE

How do functionalism and conflict theory differ in their view of society?

PRACTICE

Which sociological approach focuses on the individual experiences of people within a society?

- a) Functionalism.
- b) Conflict theory.
- c) Symbolic interactionism.

PRACTICE

W.E.B. Du Bois made fundamental contributions to the field of sociology through his work studying the experiences and challenges of African Americans in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Based on his work, which sociological approach did Du Bois take?

- a) Functionalism.
- b) Conflict theory.
- c) Symbolic interactionism.