


Three Perspectives of Sociology

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Why more than one perspective?

- ✓ Sociology is a “multi-paradigm science”
- ✓ Different perspectives attempt to answer different questions
- ✓ Different perspectives provide different ways of looking at and trying to make sense of society
 - Perspectives as lenses, toolkits, tour guides

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Structural-functionalist perspective

- ✓ Emphasizes how society is structured to maintain stability
- ✓ Society compared to organism
- ✓ Emphasizes society’s effect on individuals
- ✓ Early study: Emile Durkheim’s *Suicide*

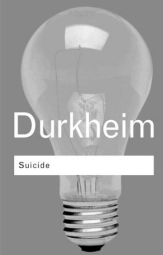


Emile Durkheim

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Durkheim’s *Suicide* (1897)


- ✓ Most studies of suicide focus on individual characteristics
- ✓ Durkheim studied connections between individuals and society
- ✓ Findings:
 - Higher rates for widowed, single and divorced than married
 - Higher rates for people without children than with children
 - Higher among Protestants than Catholics
- ✓ Conclusion: suicide may be caused by weak social ties
 - He called this egoistic suicide
- ✓ Why? Society gives meaning to life so detachment from society (weak social ties) results in low value given to human existence
- ✓ But too strong social ties can also result in altruistic suicide
- ✓ Durkheim also argued that suicide can result from lack of regulation in a capitalist society
 - He called this anomic suicide



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Robert Merton’s functions

- ✓ Parts of society exist because they have functions
- ✓ Robert Merton’s three types of functions:
 - Manifest functions: intended, obvious consequences of activities designed to help some part of the social system (p. 46)
 - Latent functions: unintended, unrecognized consequences of activities that help some part of the social system (p. 46)
 - Dysfunctions: consequences of activities that are harmful to some part of the social system
- ✓ A major task of sociology is to discover latent functions
- ✓ Latent functions may become manifest functions as they are brought to our attention
 - E.g., Thorstein Veblen’s concept of “conspicuous consumption” in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899)




Robert K. Merton

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Latent functions of CPR

1. Takes some suddenness of sudden death away
2. Fosters sense of interpersonal solidarity
3. Opportunity for friends and relatives of deceased person to talk to social worker or chaplain
4. Allows relatives to conclude that everything medically possible has been done to revive their loved one



Stefan Timmermans

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Conflict perspective

- ✓ Emphasizes how social order arises from dominance and coercion
- ✓ Society viewed as struggle between "haves" and "have-nots"
- ✓ Marx focused on economic "haves" and "have-nots" (class struggle)
- ✓ Current conflict theorists also interested in other sources of conflict
 - Feminist perspective focuses on gender as the most important source of conflict and inequality in social life (p. 47)
- ✓ Main focus on how society affects people, especially stratification



Karl Marx

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