

Rise and Fall of Structural-Functionalism

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979)

The Structure of Social Action (1937) introduced Durkheim and Weber (but not Marx) to American sociology

The Social System (1951): major statement of structural-functionalism

Emphasized that social structures are complementary, perform positive functions for each other, and tend toward equilibrium. Society is characterized by consensus (not conflict).

All systems have four functional imperatives (AGIL): adaptation, goal attainment, integration, latency (pattern maintenance)

Parson's Harvard graduate students

Robert Merton (Ph.D. 1936)

Kingsley Davis (Ph.D. 1936)

Wilbert Moore (Ph.D. 1940)

S-F was most dominant in the 1940s and 1950s

Factors leading to the downfall of S-F

1. S-F unable to deal with history, conflict and change
2. S-F's conservative bias (e.g., justifies inequality)
3. Parsons' theory is too abstract (with not enough data) or not really a theory at all—just a set of categories

Robert Merton

Proposed that all functions are not positive or indispensable

Manifest functions: objective consequences for a specified unit (person, subgroup, social or cultural system) which contribute to its adjustment or adaptation and were intended

Latent functions: unintended and unrecognized consequences

Dysfunctions: negative consequences

Nonfunctions: consequences irrelevant to the system under consideration

Deviance as strain (*Social Structure and Anomie*)

Modes of Cultural Adaption	Modes of Individual Adaptation Institutionalized	
	Goals	Means
1. Conformity	+	+
2. Innovation	+	-
3. Ritualism	-	+
4. Retreatism	-	-
5. Rebellion	+/-	+/-

Sociology of Science

Calvinist thought led to science by emphasizing individualism, rationality, utilitarianism and empiricism

Other big ideas

Middle-range theories

Self-fulfilling prophecy

Unanticipated consequences of social action