

SEVEN THEORY STARTING POINTS

1. Theory simplifies!

A theory tells what to pay attention to and what can be ignored.

2. A theory is a statement of how and why specific facts are related.

Sociological “facts” must be measurable or observable (so the theory can be tested).

3. Everyone has theories about how the world works, but not all of them are sociological theories.

4. Sociology is a “multiple paradigm science.”

Paradigm: model or approach for building theory

5. Sociological theories attempt to explain a wide range of “facts.”

	Focus on actors	Focus on structures
Attempts to explain almost everything	rational choice, evolutionary psychology	functionalism, world- systems theory
Attempts to explain specific phenomena	deprivation- frustration- aggression, differential association	social strain theory, modernization theory

6. Theories are tools. The choice of tool depends upon the problem.

7. Theories are developed to address problems. The dominance of a theory may reflect an era's major problem.

Enlightenment thinkers	Breakdown of divine rights of kings and religious justifications for social order
Classical sociologists (Comte, Marx, Durkheim, Weber)	Capitalism, industrialization, urbanization
Interactionist tradition (Mead)	Connection between self and society
1950s & 1960s functionalism (Parsons)	How do parts of society function together through consensual agreement?
1950s & 1960s conflict theory (Mills)	Inequality
Phenomenological tradition	Shared life-world of commonsense meaning
Feminist sociology	Gender inequality, gendered knowledge
Critical theory	Future viability of democracy
Postmodernism (Foucault)	Connection between power & knowledge; post-industrial society