

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES TABLE

variable	Functionalist Perspective	Conflict Perspective	Interactionist Perspective
other labels	structural-functionalism social systems theory equilibrium theory	feminism	symbolic interaction
level of analysis	macro-level analysis of large-scale patterns	macro-level analysis of large-scale patterns	micro-level analysis as way of understanding larger phenomena
focus of analysis	relationships among parts of society, how parts are functional (positive) or dysfunctional (negative)	the struggle for scarce resources by groups in a society, how the elites use power to control weaker groups	face-to-face interaction, how people use symbols to create social life
key concepts	structure manifest functions latent functions dysfunction equilibrium	inequality stratification social class power conflict exploitation	symbols interaction social construct definition of the situation nonverbal communication face-to-face
view of society	stable & well-integrated, consists of interdependent parts, each fulfilling certain functions	characterized by tension & struggle between diverse groups competing for valuable resources	active in influencing & affecting daily social interaction, which is negotiated using symbols, gestures, and verbal & nonverbal communication
view of individual	people are socialized to perform societal functions	people shaped by power, coercion & authority	people manipulate symbols & create their social worlds through interaction
view of social order	maintained through cooperation & consensus	maintained through force & coercion	maintained by a shared understanding of everyday behavior
view of social change	predictable reinforcing	change takes place constantly, may have positive consequences	reflected in people's social positions & communications with others
example	public punishment reinforces social order	laws reinforce positions of those in power	people respect laws or disobey laws based on past experience
theorists	Durkheim Parsons Merton Weber	Marx Mills Du Bois Wells-Barnett	Mead Cooley Goffman
core questions	How is society held together? What are the major parts of society? How are these parts linked? What does each part do to help society work?	How does society divide population according to class, gender, race & age? How do advantaged people protect their privileges? How do disadvantaged people challenge the system to change?	How do people experience society? How do people shape the reality they experience? How do behavior & meaning change from person to person & from one situation to another?
% of sociologists (all others 37%)	20%	25%	18%
pros	examines structures in society	examines stratification & inequality	examines day-to-day interactions between people
cons	ignores interactions between individuals	ignores competition in society	ignores large-scale structures

Illustrating the Three Sociological Perspectives: College Education

Functionalist: manifest function of a college – to educate people and teach them job skills
latent function of a college – to be a place to make friends and find dates
dysfunction of colleges – expensive and that you might graduate without learning useful skills

Conflict: A college education is expensive and access is difficult or impossible for poorer individuals. Schools in wealthy communities do a better job preparing students for admission to prestigious colleges. Graduation from a prestigious private college opens up prestigious and well-paying career paths, unlike graduation from many public colleges and two-year schools.

Interactionist: A professor's teaching style may determine the likelihood of a successful classroom discussion. A professor frequently serves as a role model for students. Student diversity in a classroom may have repercussions for classroom interaction. How do students let a teacher know not to call on them when he/she asks a question?