

# Social viewpoints

Sociology



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## Social Viewpoints

Sociological viewpoints can be broken into three broad categories which include the structural functionalist view, the conflict perspective and the symbolic interaction perspective. An understanding of these viewpoints is important for any student of history, economics and sociology in particular since they show us how we are supposed to apply the various theories to the situations that can arise within a given society. Of these views the simplest to understand is the structural functionalism approach which is applied to the example of divorce towards the conclusion of this paper.

Structural functionalism is based on the idea that society is composed of structures which perform a certain function. The social structure can be anything from the government of the country to the religion followed by the majority and even the family unit as it is traditionally seen in that particular culture. For example, if monogamy is widely practiced and polygamy is outlawed in a country then the structure of a family unit would be monogamous while the function of the family unit could remain the same as it does in a culture where polygamy is practiced by the people.

The conflict perspective considers sociology to be the study of class struggle between the haves and the have-nots in society. The perspective takes its cues largely from the works of Karl Marx and many of his followers who considered social issues in the context of a conflict between the upper and lower classes of society. In broader terms, this conflict can also be between men and women since women could be seen as the oppressed class in a given social order while men control the means of production.

The symbolic interactionism perspective takes society to be a created

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illusion with which we interact as a symbol. In this instance, the individual is more important than the collective since without the interaction and acceptance of the role played by society, society would cease to exist for that individual. Therefore, the various social relationships that bind us to each other will cause us to become more connected with society at large and also make us dependant on social order.

On the topic of divorce, structural functionalism would see it as a dysfunction of a social structure and such a situation would be viewed negatively. In the conflict perspective, the economics of the divorce proceedings as well as the manner in which the assets are distributed would be important in figuring out who becomes the ruling class and who becomes the working class.

Finally, with the symbolic interactionism perspective, a sociologist could say that two individuals are now interactive with the symbol of divorce which could affect their lives and their connections with society in very different ways depending on what they take from their interactions.

#### Works Cited

McClelland, K. 2000, ' Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology', Grinnell University, [Online] Available at: <http://web.grinnell.edu/courses/soc/s00/soc111-01/IntroTheories/IntroTheoriesIndex.html>