

# Functionalism, emile durkheim 1858-1917



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Emile Durkheim is a founding father of Structural-Consensus Theory known as Functionalism. This theory looks at society as a whole, known in sociology as a Macro theory due to not looking at individuals or individual problems but at society as a group or sub cultures. Durkheim would argue that society was characterised by an existence of order, control and constraint of individuals, if need to reference with the individual being viewed as less important than the entire group as a whole. It is a Logical and Systematic analysis: It treats us all as being the same and offers no explanation for differences. It explains how society has maintained its existence over time and it tries to influence the children of tomorrow by forcing past beliefs and decisions on them.

Durkheim believes socialisation is important to keep society functioning well and that we should pass our rules, norms and values through generations and change nothing to maintain social stability. Durkheim theorises that we all depend on each other and our institutions need each other in order to survive, this is known as Interdependence. Durkheim explains this by his Organic Analogy, for example like the human body if the heart stops working it has a knock on effect onto the lungs, brain and the rest of the organs. This theory can be observed within the recent happenings of the global financial crisis which caused the threat and total collapse of the world's largest financial institutions; so when the major banks actually did collapse it had a negative effect on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and damaged employment, education, housing, borrowing and private business around the world.

Functionalist theory has weaknesses as it assumes everyone has the same choices and decisions to make in life when in actual fact rich people have

more options than poor people: if we consider different nations we observe that poor people in Africa can only afford to eat one bowl of porridge a day whereas rich people in America can eat five times a day whatever they want, also some countries only offer boys education when in other countries education is compulsory for both males and females. It states that we have no free will and that our paths in life are set out for us by our genealogy, meaning the traits and genetics we inherit from our ancestors. Another negative of this theory is it does not explain conflict in our society and does not accept that we are all different and states when people disagree with the consensus they are classed as being “dysfunctional”, this is unfair to those people as they could form a sub group within our society yet are unable to have a voice or share their opinion for example a functionalist would argue that Gay relationships don't fit in with the nuclear family ideal as a functionalist society these people and their beliefs are excluded and their differences ignored.

#### Marxism Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Marxism theory is known in sociology as a Structural Conflict theory like the functionalist theory it looks at society as a whole and the structure of society such as the institutions that keep society stable. However the Marxist theory focuses on the different conflicts that happen within society mainly between the classes. As Marx explains, the predominant class conflict within society occurs between the proletariat (lower class) and the bourgeoisies (upper class).

Marx argues that this is due to the bourgeoisie being the owners of production; they therefore own the means to create work by owning the tools, material, trade and stability for their workers. This creates requirement of the bourgeoisie for the proletariat as they require the trade, work and wages in order to feed their families. However the tension is created due to the proletariat being low paid with usually bad standards of work environment and long hours of work. The workers were made to work hard and meet targets every day in order to turn a profit for the owners of production knowing that if their work wasn't up to scratch or they disobeyed the rules they could lose their jobs, the bourgeoisie knew they could replace a worker quite easily so had the power to make these decisions without thought for the workers. This relationship as Marx describes is reliant on each other and is apparent within all aspects of the economy even today in our present society. Due to such high unemployment and an economy in recession, wages and salaries have been frozen for a few years now and not rising with inflation causing more tension between the lower class and upper classes of society and government.

Marx explains that this relationship was/is oppressive to the working class individuals due to the low wages, the working classes are restricted in their social mobility as well as their ability to move up through the academic or employment ladder. This is almost certainly relevant in today's society for example mortgages are only available to a small margin of those able to pay large deposits to secure loans and in England educational attainment comes at a high price. Marxist sociologists believe that the education system has been designed and constructed as a training ground for the children of the

proletariat. It is dominated by the ruling class to socialize them to accept that individual competition and inevitable inequality is the only system that works. For Marxists this is a powerful form of social control that will legitimise the capitalists economic forms of production and the legitimate political leadership of a capitalist ruling class (hegemony) with this Marxists do not believe that the education system provides equal opportunities for the children, even though it comes across as fair and equal, children are often split into groups based on merit and ability. Marxist sociologists would refer to the learning of rules, norms, routines and regulations as the hidden curriculum, Marxists see this as a way of reinforcing the class system to ensure, that pupils learn the skills more suited to their class background. Marx fully believed that in order for this relationship to change that the masses had to come together to overthrow the bourgeoisie from power and take control to make it a fairer society (socialism).

#### Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim

Within sociology, Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim have played very influential parts when it comes to looking at society and its structure. They both adopted a structural position from which they saw society as a system made up of similar parts and they believe that culture is as crucial to identity as socialisation. Both believed the social structure controlled the individual through socialisation of values, Durkheim thought positive of this situation, whereas Marx felt this was negative.

Karl Marx believed that religious values and beliefs are the basis for the values and beliefs within society. Marx believed that order was achieved

through unequal power relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in which the bourgeoisie control the environment and the conditions (economic determinism) that the proletariat are consigned to earn in order to live. This is referring to a capitalist society, where the working class individuals work to a set of rules and guidelines in return for a wage, however turning a higher profit for the owner than what they earn. Marx argues that these roles between the classes are oppressive, exploited, alienated and constrained by the ruling class and believes that revolutionary change would only be possible and take place when the working classes are fully aware of these conditions in which they live, he also believes that the bourgeoisie are the controllers of culture since the economic forces determine everything else and use the super structure of society for their own purpose including religion, education and rules. Marx refers to this as a movement from a class “ in” itself to a class “ for its self”, however, before the working class can become a class for itself they need the development of a class identity, the realities and the problems of society are largely hidden from them this Marx states is an” illusionary world” in which they live and is referred to as a state of false class consciousness in society.

This is the aim of Marxist sociology; to exploit and show society for what it really is, by doing so would be to create true class consciousness.

For Emile Durkheim, who believed that individual identity was a problem or an issue for society as a whole and if restricted, harmony and social order could continue.