

# Comparing perspectives in sociology

[Sociology](#)



Sociologists analyse social phenomena from a series of different perspectives, there are four main sociological perspectives that all differ from each other in one way or another, these are; feminism, Marxism, interactionism and functionalism. The main difference between these perspectives are that there are structuralist theories (Marxism, feminism, functionalism) and action theories (symbolic interactionists.)

Structuralist theories believe that there is a set structure in society and the individual's life is predetermined, meaning that society shapes the individual and their way of life, whereas action theories believe that the individuals shape society and they have free will to do what they want with their lives, the only perspective for this argument are symbolic interactionists who look at the symbols and meanings behind the actions of the individuals of society. Structuralist theories would criticise interactionists by arguing that they are not deterministic enough.

The structuralist theories all have one thing in common, they believe that there is a structure to society, however the three theories are categorised into conflict theories and consensus theories which all disagree on the way society functions and where conflict is seen. Functionalists believe that each aspect of society has a role to play in making society function as a whole, Durkheim one of the founders of functionalism sees society as a functioning body, each aspect has a role to make it function, this is called organic analogy.

A different analogy (created by Goffman) is dramaturgical analogy which originates from the ideas of symbolic interactionism. Goffman uses a theatrical metaphor of stage, actors and audience to observe and analyze

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social interaction. Conflict theories criticise functionalism for being too naive and not doing anything about the conflict in society, they disagree that there is consensus (a general agreement) in the way that society functions. Marxists and feminists see there is and always has been conflict in society with different social groups but they criticise each other by thinking the other is ignoring the other conflicts within society.

Marxists see conflict between the classes, the bourgeoisie (the rich, business owning capitalists) and the proletariat (the working class/people who aren't the bourgeoisie) There is conflict between these two social groups because Karl Marx and Marxists believe that the bourgeoisie are exploiting and tricking the proletariat into false class consciousness, which is the idea of the proletariat believing that society is meritocratic. The proletariat are exploited by the bourgeoisie making them believe that they have total control, they are paid little money for their labour and the bourgeoisie take the surplus value as profit.

Karl Marx believed that the proletariat would gain class consciousness and overthrow the bourgeoisie to create a communist society where everyone was equal. Similarly to feminism where the conflict is seen between men and women and men exploit women through things such as pornography and prostitution. Feminism differentiates from Marxism because women have eventually realised that there is injustice between the two genders and are therefore trying to gain equal rights. Another disagreeing view point between the conflict theories and functionalism is that they have different views on social control.

There are different types of social control, for example there is formal control e. g. the police, and informal control e. g. family. Functionalists would see formal types of social control as a good thing for the whole of society, arresting people that deserve to be arrested no matter what class, age, gender, ethnicity or disability. However Marxists argue that types of formal control only work for the interest of the bourgeoisie, they ignore the crimes of the bourgeoisie and focus on the crimes of the proletariat.

The same as feminists who would see that formal types of control only work for the interest of men, as well as informal control. Other forms of social control such a religion has a very important role in the lives of the people in society, the majority of people will follow a specific religion which gives them a guidance as to how they should behave and live their lives. Marxists believe that religion acts as a mechanism of social control for the proletariat in the interest of the bourgeoisie because it stops them from questioning their status.

For example if Christian proletariats began to question their status in society it would seem that they were questioning God, and therefore would be punished after death by not being allowed into heaven, this leads them to think that they should accept their role in society as God intended them to. This is why it can be said that religion acts as the opium of the people. However in reality this would have been taught to them in the interest of the bourgeoisie so that they learn to accept their role and not overthrow the bourgeoisie.

All the social institutions teach the individual values and norms, how to socialise and grow up in the society they live in. The institutions support the

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values and reflect the economic base; the superstructure is the economic base, which would be the social group that was the most powerful according to what perspective is looking at it. The different perspectives take what these social institutions teach the individual differently according to who was in power; this would be the infrastructure.

For example feminists believe that we live in a patriarchal society and everything is ruled by men, during primary socialisation the individual's family would teach them values and norms according to the patriarchal society, the individual would then grow with the taught norms and values that were only taught in the interest of men, so there are only male values in society. Similarly to Marxists views that the norms and values taught would only be in the interest of the bourgeoisie, so there are only bourgeoisie values in society.

Functionalists however have a different view to the conflict theories concerning socialisation, functionalists believe that norms and values are taught to the individual for the interest of all of society. In conclusion the four main sociological perspectives all differ from each other in one way or another to create an understanding of what each of the sociological perspectives are trying to convey and teach others as to what they believe society is like, and how it affects us as members of the society.