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ECISO4001: Understanding Society

Structural Functionalism

2023

Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives

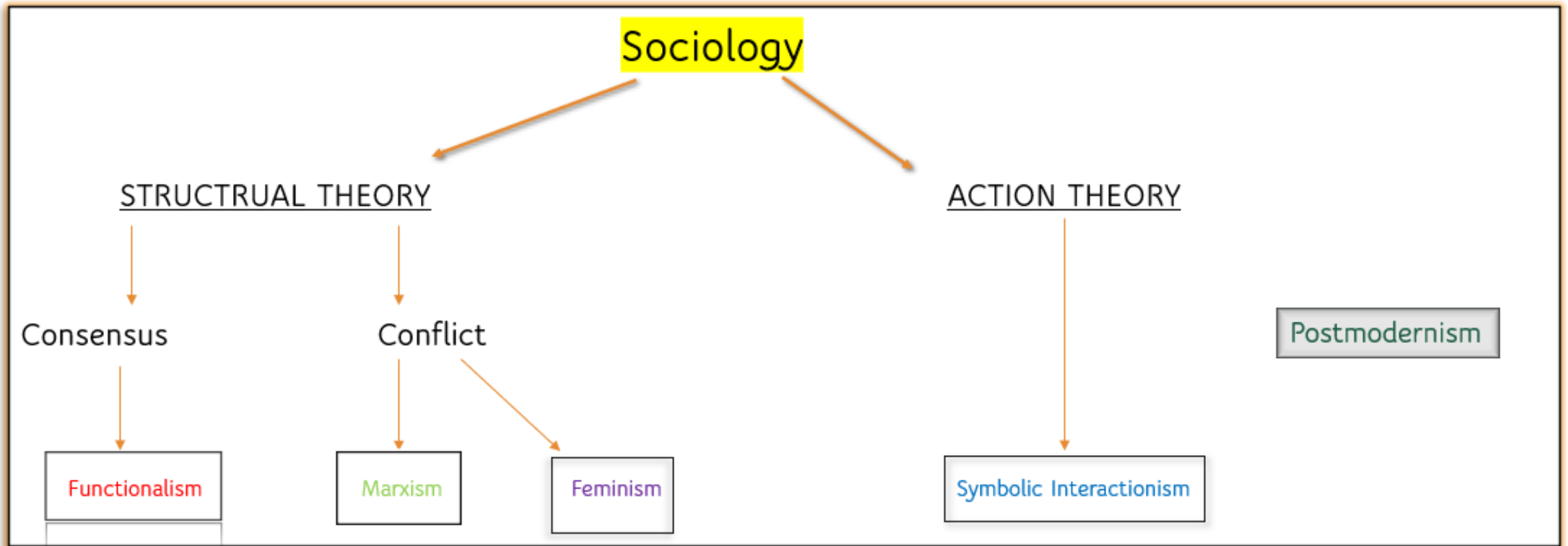


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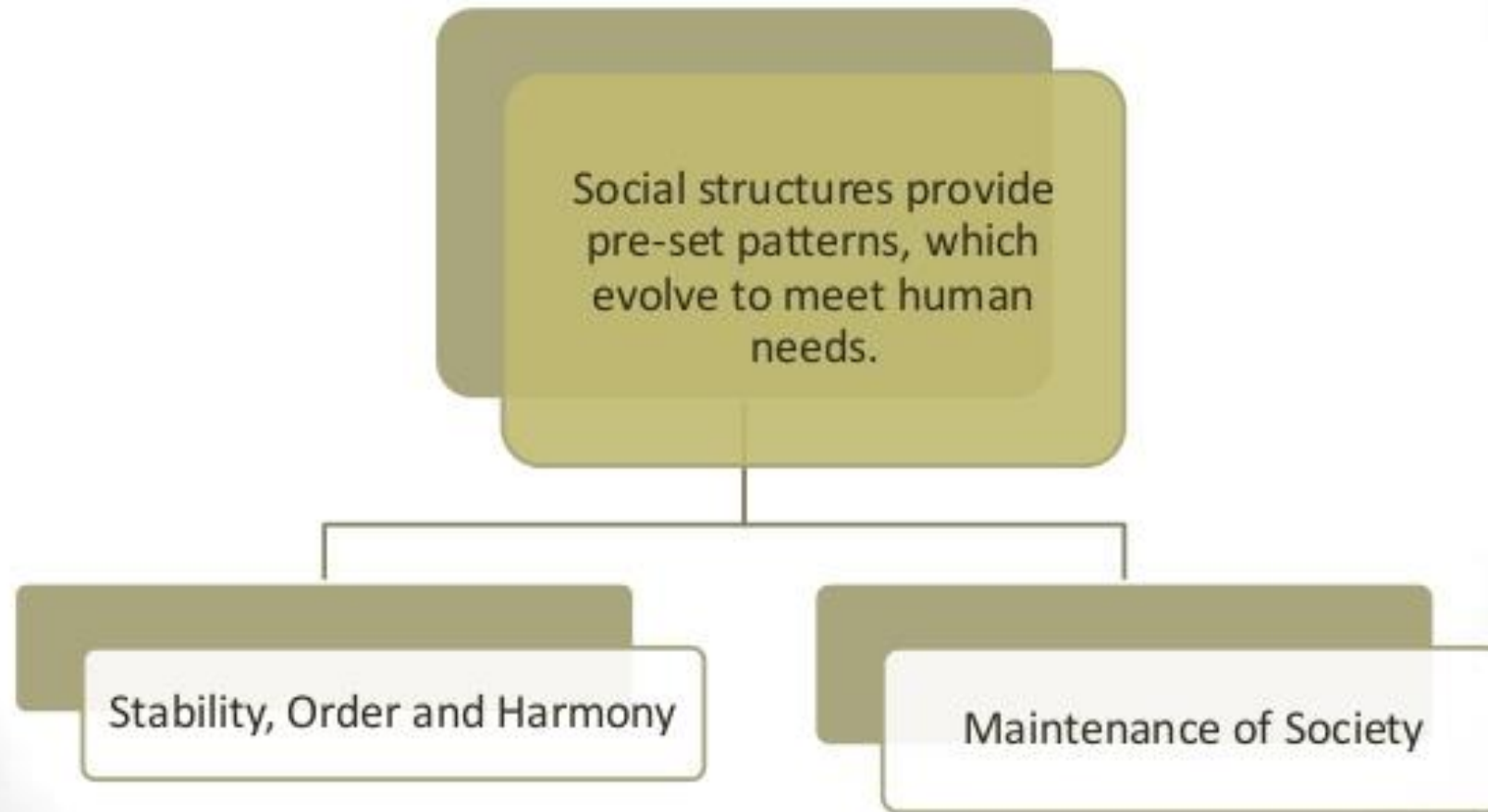
Recap...

- As a group, discuss the key terms that we used in our last session
 - Micro, Meso, Macro
 - Paradigms and Perspectives
 - Structural Functionalism
 - Symbolic Interactionism
 - Social Conflict
 - Sociological Perspectives
 - Theoretical Lens
 - Sociological Imagination

Sociological Perspectives



The Structural Functionalism Model



It is the earliest sociological perspective (19th century Europe)

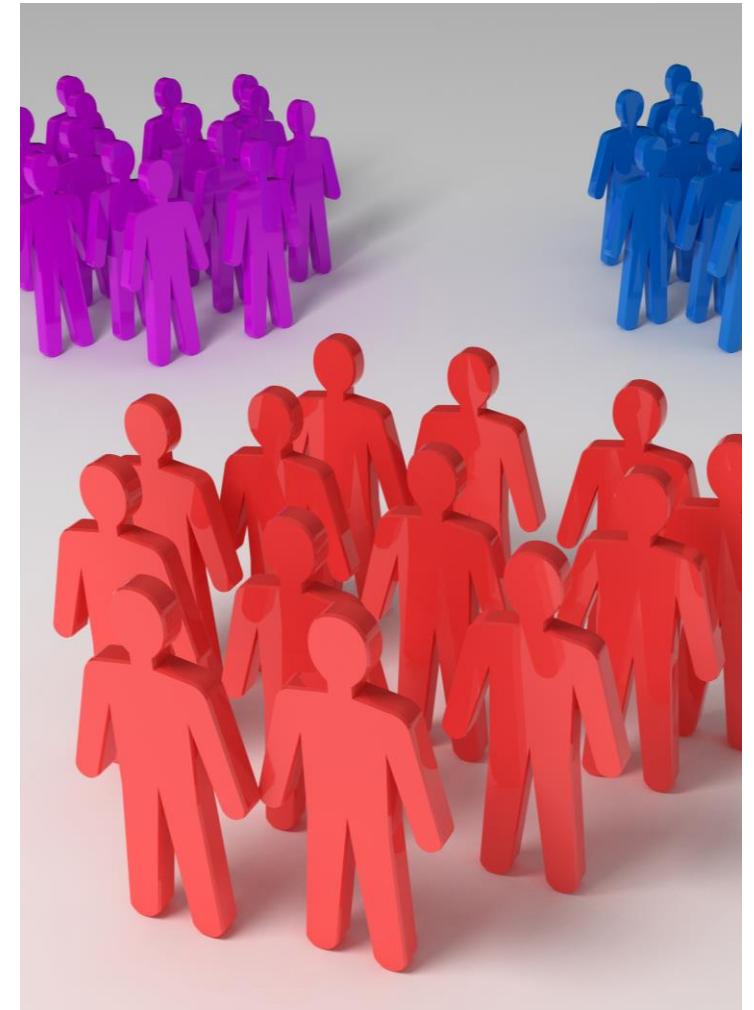
**A theoretical
understanding of
society that**

- considers that social systems are collective means to fill social needs

**For social life to
survive and
develop in society:**

- a number of activities that need to be carried out to ensure that certain needs are fulfilled (Brinkerhoff, Ortega & Weitz, 2013, p. 54)

- Individuals produce necessary goods and services
 - in various institutions and roles
 - that correlate with the norms of the society
- Society is made-up of groups or institutions which are
 - Cohesive
 - Share common norms
 - Have a definitive culture



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(Cargun and Cargun, 2008, p. 28)

Value consensus



Underpinning Structural Functionalism is the idea of 'value consensus'.

This means individuals within a society share a set of values, norms and beliefs.

“If members of a society are committed to the same values, they tend to share a common identity, which provides a basis for unity and cooperation. From shared values derives common goals”

(Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p.956)

Society as Constantly Striving for Equilibrium

- Suggests that there is an inherent drive within human societies
 - to cohere and stick together
- This is known as the cohesion issue
 - Societies strive toward equilibrium
 - NOT through dictatorial mandate by the leaders of society
 - but rather because the social structure of societies encourages equilibrium

(Stolley, 2005, p. 23)

Groups and Institutions

- Is about the more static or concrete aspects of society; institutions like
 - Government
 - Religions
- Any group large enough to be a social institution can be included in Structural Functionalist thinking
 - Religious denominations to sports clubs and everything in between
- Structural Functionalism
 - The way society is organized is the most natural and efficient way for it to be organised

(Merton, 1938)

Key theorists & concepts



Social Facts

Émile Durkheim
(1858-1917)

- He believed society has its own reality
- Members of society are constrained by social facts
- These are the norms, values, beliefs, laws and morals passed on and shared through the generations
- Social facts can shape our views of 'other' groups and cultures.
- They make us collectively behave in certain ways
- Social facts have coercive power.



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Social Facts

- Value: Love
- Behaviours: Marriage / monogamy
- Norms: Monogamous marriage
- Value consensus: Monogamous marriage is good / behaviour that challenges that is 'bad'.



Social Facts

'it is not the consciousness of the individual that shapes human behaviour, but common beliefs and sentiments that transcend the individual and shape his or her consciousness'

(Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p. 955)

Anomie

- The breakdown of social bonds
- The breakdown of value consensus
- Occur when traditional norms and values are disrupted which causes uncertainty
- Causes negative emotions (worthlessness/frustration/despair)
- Durkheim (1897) studied suicide rates in different European countries and found that social facts were factors in those suicides
- Industrialisation / economic growth / economic depression
- Has been criticised for placing macro data onto individual experiences

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979)

- The Organic Analogy:
- He saw society like the body, as each organ works to keep the body functioning, each part of society (e.g., law, education, politics, the economy etc.) works together to keep society functioning.



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Functional Prerequisites

- Society needs certain factors to survive
- These factors rely on one another
- Parsons believed these 'functional prerequisites' can help us understand society

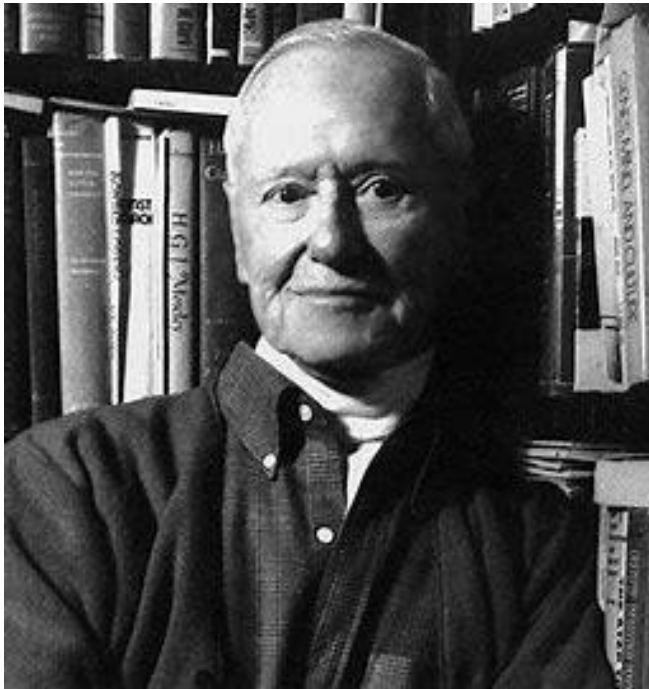
Functional Prerequisite	Description	Social system
Adaptation	Social systems need to control their environment to survive	Economy
Goal Attainment	Society sets goals that it works together to achieve	Government (sets the goals and provides the resources to achieve them)
Integration	Need to reduce conflict in society	Law Judicial systems settle conflicts
Pattern maintenance	Maintains the norms and values of society	Family Religion Education

Socialisation

- Parsons saw socialisation as key to achieving value consensus
- Socialisation = individual internalising society's values
- This shapes the persons behaviour, predictable = maintains social order
- Helps teach people appropriate behaviour associated with different roles (e.g., mother/father/teacher/student etc.)
- Parsons believed family unit provides primary socialisation
- He felt women should take primary responsibility of childcare
- Education provides secondary socialisation where children learn to conform

(Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, pp. 753-754)

Robert Merton (1910–2003)



LATENT FUNCTIONS

VERSUS

MANIFEST FUNCTIONS

LATENT FUNCTIONS

Latent functions are positive effects of an institution or other social phenomena that are unintentional and often unrecognized

Unconscious, unintended and beneficial

Latent functions of a school: teaching students to follow the rules, giving them an opportunity to socialize, participate in events, etc.

MANIFEST FUNCTIONS

Manifest functions are the positive effects of an institution or other social phenomena that are intended and immediately recognized

Conscious, deliberate and beneficial

Manifest function of a school: educating children

Visit www.PEDIAA.com

Examples of latent and manifest functions

University



Social
Media



Police



NHS



Applying Structural Functionalism to society



Structural Functionalism & Gender

- Women being subordinate to men
 - allows the cogs of society to function smoothly
 - everyone in the society knows his or her respective position in the hierarchy
- The implication
 - society is functioning smoothly with gender stratification
 - thus, such stratification is acceptable
 - and efforts should NOT be made to change the arrangement
- This example illustrates that Structural Functionalism is generally seen as being supportive of the status quo

(Mooney *et al*, 2011, p. 312)

Structural Functional & Crime and deviance

- Considers deviance from the societal level
- Believe that social control mechanisms are needed to protect the social order
- BUT Durkheim thought deviance was inevitable and could help society progress
 - William Wilberforce, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela
- Merton (1968) argued:
 - There should be balance between cultural goals and institutionalised means
 - If there is imbalance, anomie occurs, and deviance is encouraged
 - Doesn't account for people who don't become deviant
 - or for middle class crime

(Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, pp. 348-349)

Structural Functionalism & Health

- Parsons (1951) was influential on the Functionalist perspective on health
- Saw illness as a form deviance
- It stops society functioning as it should, like crime
- He called his concept of illness 'The Sick Role'

"Therefore, like crime and any other form of deviance, illness needed to be controlled in some way, and the deviant helped or forced into performing their social role once again"

(Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p. 303)

The Sick Role (Parsons, 1951)

The rights of the sick role

1. The sick person has the right to be sick and exempt from social obligations (work/family). But avoidance depends on how sick they are. A medical expert can be called on to verify how sick a person is.
2. The person must not be blamed for their sickness, have the right to be looked after and be absolved of any blame for their deviance

The obligations of the sick role

1. The sick person must accept that the situation they are in is undesirable and that they should seek to get well as soon as possible
2. The sick person must seek professional help and cooperate to get better.

(Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p. 303)

As a group, critique structural-functionalism

- What are its positives?
- What are its drawbacks?
- Think of modern examples i.e., BLM

Some criticisms of Structural-Functionalism

- Structural Functionalism doesn't explain how and why oppressed people and groups oppose social institutions and social structure
 - (Baert & da Silva, 2010, p.78)
- It supports the status quo and perceives challenge and conflict as harmful to society
 - (Cargun and Cargun, 2006, p. 29)
- People are seen as creations of the social world rather than creating it
 - (Haralambos and Holborn, 2013, p. 960)
- Conflict theory would argue it ignores power relations and inequality
- Postmodernism would argue that society isn't stable or predictable

Overview

- Society affects our behaviour
- Our behaviour is shaped society
- It focuses on the macro-level
- Explains why society maintains the status quo, despite evidence of inequality for individuals, groups and society as a whole

(Baert & da Silva, 2010: 78)

Some of the key terms

- Value consensus
- Social Facts
- Anomie
- Socialisation
- Functional Prerequisites
- Latent and Manifest Functions
- Equilibrium

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