Creating Sociological Theory

- Everyone creates theories to help them make sense of what they experience.
  - Common-sense theories
  - Tend to be less systematic
- Sociological theories: specifically and systematically developed
  - Typically built on the theories and ideas of previous sociologists.
  - Built on scientific research (desire to share--publish-ongoing dialogue)
  - Focused on structural relationships (individual in society, human being as social being), rather than "personal experiences."
  - Personal concerns directed toward understanding social issues.
Sociological theory is defined...as a set of interrelated ideas that allow for the systematization of knowledge of the social world. This knowledge is then used to explain the social world and make predictions about the future of the social world."

Not all theories necessarily conform to this definition.

Knowledge versus prediction

Not only sociologists create sociological (social) theory.

Test of time and applicability
Social conflict is the struggle between segments of society over valued resources. Due to social conflict, it turned a small population into capitalists in the nineteenth century. Capitalists are people who own and operate factories and other businesses in pursuit of profits. However, capitalism turned most people into industrial workers, whom Marx called proletarians. Proletarians are people who sell their labor for wages. Conflict theories draw attention to power differentials, such as class, gender and race conflict, and contrast historically dominant ideologies. It is therefore a macro level analysis of society that sees society as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and social change.
Karl Marx is the father of the social conflict theory, which is a component of the four major paradigms of sociology. Other important sociologists associated with this theory include Harriet Martineau, Jane Addams and W.E.B. Du Bois. This sociological approach doesn't look at how social structures help society to operate, but instead looks at how "social patterns" can cause some people in society to be dominant, and others to be oppressed. However, some criticisms to this theory are that it disregards how shared values and the way in which people rely on each other help to unify the society.
FUNCTIONALISM

Structural functionalism or Functionalism is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. This approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structures that shapes society as a whole. This approach looks at both social structure and social functions. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions.
FUNCTIONALISM

Important sociologists associated with this approach include Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parsons, and Robert K. Merton. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of society as "organs" that work toward the proper functioning of the "body" as a whole. A criticism for this approach is that it disregards any inequalities that exists within a society, which in turn causes tension and conflict and the approach ends up being politically conservative. So in order to focus on this topic, the social conflict theory was made.
Symbolic interaction; also known as Interactionism, is a sociological theory that places emphasis on micro-scale social interaction to provide subjective meaning in human behavior, the social process and pragmatism. The approach focuses on creating a framework for building a theory that sees society as the product of the everyday interactions of individuals. Society is nothing more than the shared reality that people construct as they interact with one another.
INTERACTIONISM

- This approach sees people interacting in countless settings using symbolic communications. Therefore, society is a complex, ever-changing mosaic of subjective meanings. However, some criticisms to this approach are that it only looks at what is happening in one particular social situation, and disregards the effects that culture, race or gender may have on the people in that situation. Some important sociologists associated with this approach include Max Weber, George Herbert Mead, Erving Goffman, George Homans and Peter Blau.
Ethnomethodology examines how people make sense out of their social lives in the process of living, as if each individual were a researcher engaged in inquiry. It is the study of how people attempt to make sense of their everyday surroundings. Harold Garfinkel (1967) is the one who devised this approach. It begins by pointing out that everyday behavior rests on a number of assumptions. Those assumptions are usually predictable due to the reaction of people or their behavior in everyday reality.
Social Exchange Theory says that the interaction that occurs between people can be partly based on what someone may "gain and lose" by being with others. For example, when people think about who they may date, they'll look to see if they other person will offer just as much (or perhaps more) than they do. This can include judging an individual's looks and appearance, or their social status.
Rational choice theory models social behavior as the interaction of utility maximizing individuals. "Rational" implies cost-effectiveness is balanced against cost to accomplish a utility maximizing interaction. Costs are extrinsic, meaning intrinsic values such as feelings of guilt will not be accounted for in the cost to commit a crime.
The Dramaturgical Perspective is a specialized symbolic interactionism paradigm developed by Erving Goffman, seeing life as a performance. As "actors," we have a status, which is the part that we play, where we are given various roles. These roles serve as a script, supplying dialogue and action for the characters (the people in reality). They also involve props and certain settings.
For instance, a doctor (the role), uses instruments like a heart monitor (the prop), all the while using medical terms (the script), while in his doctor's office (the setting). In addition, our performance is the "presentation of self," which is how people perceive us, based on the ways in which we portray ourselves. This process, sometimes called impression management, begins with the idea of personal performance.
Feminism is a collection of movements aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights for women. The theory focuses on how gender inequality shapes social life. This approach shows how sexuality both reflects patterns of social inequality and helps to perpetuate them. Feminism, from a social conflict perspective, focuses on gender inequality and links sexuality to the domination of women by men.
SOCIAL SCIENCES

- Sociology
- Psychology
- Anthropology
- Communication Studies
- Economics
- Linguistics
- Political Science