STUDY GUIDE

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Unit 1-18

Code 4682 & 4687

Department of Sociology, Social Work and Population Studies

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Publisher  Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad.
Chairman Course Team: Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Saif

Writer: Dr. Rukhsana Masood

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Saif

Course Committee:
1. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Anwar
   Punjab University, Lahore.
2. Prof. Dr. Karam Ellahi
   Peshawar University
   Peshawar
3. Prof. Ishfaq Hussain Mirza,
   Arid Agricultural University,
   Rawalpindi.
4. Dr. Muhammad Latif Virk,
   UGC, Islamabad.

Course Development Coordinator: Dr. Rukhsana Masood

Course Editor:- Umar Siddique Khattak

Course Coordinator: Nasim Khan Mahsud
Syed Imran Haider
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PART ONE

ORGANISATION OF THE COURSE

I STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

The course has been structured to make it as easy as possible for you to complete the required course work. This course consists of eighteen units. Each unit consists of a study material of one week, if you study 12-16 hours in a week. This will include studying the prescribed reading material and carrying out the various self-learning assessments.

We have organized this course to enable you to acquire the skill of self-learning. You will find a course introduction at the end of this part, which will provide you an overall view of the course. This study guide has been written to enhance the foundation of sociological ideas and issues, which are presented in the textbooks. For each unit, out line provides a basis for organizing segments of information. Specific learning objectives are given which identify the basic knowledge; explanation, comparison and understanding, a student should have after studying the unit. A section unit preview consists of a brief preview of the unit in paragraph form.

For each unit prescribed reading material has been classified as compulsory and suggested readings. Studying all this material is compulsory for successful completion of the course. This study guide is based on prescribed reading. After listing required reading, we have given you a few self-assessment questions and activities. These questions are meant to facilitate you in understanding and self-assessment that how much you have learned.

For this course, ‘Fortnightly Tutorials’ are arranged in university’s Regional Study Centers. These titorials are not formal lectures given in any formal university, rather these are meant for group and individual discussion with the course tutor to facilitate you. So before going to attend a tutorial, prepare yourself to discuss course material with your tutor.

After completing the study of first 4 units ‘Assignment No. 1 is due. Second, third and fourth assignments are due after the completion of every
next four units. Last 2 units will be covered in the final examination along
with first 16 units.

II HOW TO USE READING MATERIAL

As this is a 'distance Education' course, we have organized the
required course work in the following manner to help you in evolving a self-
learning process in absence of formal classroom teaching.

i A detail course description

ii Objectives of the Unit

iii The major theme of the unit is divided into sub-themes. They are
listed in the beginning of every unit. A brief and simplified
introduction of major topic is given in the study guide so that you can
get acquainted with the material.

iv Required reading for each unit is listed as compulsory and suggested
reading.

v At the end of every unit we have given you few self-assessment
questions for each topic or theme. These questions are not only meant
to facilitate you in understanding the required reading but also to
provide you an opportunity to assess yourself how far you have
learned.

Although you choose your own way of studying the required reading
material, you are advised to follow the steps, which are given in the study
chart.

III STUDY CHART

Step 1. For clear identification of your reading material, thoroughly read
description of the course.

Step 2. Read carefully the way the reading material is to be used.
Step 3. Complete the first quick reading of your required study materials.

Step 4. Carefully make the second reading and note down some of the points you were not able to fully understand.

Step 5. Carry out the self-assessment question with the help of your study material.

Step 6. Revise your notes. It is quite possible that many of those points which you did not understand previously become clearer to you during the process of carrying out self-assessment questions.

Step 7. Prepare yourself for the tutorial meeting, i.e. note down the points for discussion with other members of your group and with your course tutor.

Step 8. Make a third and final reading of your study material. At this stage, students are also advised to keep in view the homework assignments. These assignments are compulsory for the successful completion of the course.

IV HOW TO ATTEND A TUTORIAL

Before attending the tutorial you are required to prepare yourself in the following manner to get maximum benefit. The first tutorial is an 'introductory tutorial' for which you are required to do the following work:

Step 1. Go through first part of the study guide, which includes:

i Organization of the course.

ii Structure of the program.

iii How to use the reading material and

iv Assessment

Step 2. Read carefully course introduction 2-3 times to have a better understanding of the course. It will give you an overview of the whole
course. Make notes of those points which you could not fully understand or wish to discuss with your course tutor. In tutorials 2-9 you will complete course work containing 18 study units. The way we have arranged these tutorials, it will give you an opportunity to discuss two units in one tutorial. Please see schedule of the semester.

Step 3. Read summary of the main themes of the concerned units around which the units are constructed.

Step 4. Study required reading and make notes of those points you are not able to fully understand and wish to discuss with your course tutor.

V METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

For each course the registered student will be assessed as following:

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments are those written exercises which students are required to complete while being at homes or places of work after having studied their required material prescribed in the study guide. They are designed in a way to motivate the students in reading the required readings and enabling them to relate their reading with their own objective. For this course you will receive ‘FOUR’ assignments.

After completion, you will send these assignments to your tutor within a time schedule for assessment and necessary guidance. The tutor is supposed to return the same after making and providing necessary academic guidance and supervision.

The successful completion of assignments will make you eligible to take final examination to be held at the end of the semester.

To qualify each assignment, you have to obtain a minimum 40% marks.
WORKSHOPS

Workshops are compulsory component of the MSc programme. These will be organized by the university near the end of every semester for every course. Detail of these workshops will be sent to you with the course materials.

FINAL ASSESSMENT

Final examination (a three hour written examination will take place at the end of the semester).

These two components contribute 30:70 to the students final course grade.

The conditions to qualify each component are given below:

i A minimum of 40% in each assignment

ii A minimum of 33% of the final written examination

iii An aggregate of 40% of the both components i.e. assignment and final examination

iv To take final examination the student has to pass assignment component

The grade will be determined as follow

40% - 54% C
55% - 69% B
70% - Above A
PART TWO

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Theory is a body of law-like generalizations, logically linked to one another, which can be used to explain empirical phenomena. One can say that a theory is a set of ideas which provides an explanation for something. In the social sciences the term ‘theory’ is used very loosely, and may mean no more than a set of assumptions or concepts, or a relatively abstract inquiry distinguished from empirical research or practical recommendations. A sociological theory is a set of ideas which provides an explanation for human society. The first two units offer an overview of the level, types and importance of sociological theory.

Traditional sociological theory can be characterized as falling into two main categories: Structural and social action perspectives. They differ in the way, they approach the analysis of society. Structural or macro perspectives analysis the way that society as a whole fit together. Thus despite their differences both functionalism and marxism use a model of how society as a whole works. Many functionalists base their model of society around the assumption of basic needs, and go on to explain how different parts of society help to meet those needs. Units 3 and 4 will reveal the work of different sociologists on these aspects.

Marxism, see society as resting upon economic base. They see society as divided into social classes which have the potential to be in conflict with each other. The main differences between the functionalist and marxist perspectives is the way they characterize the social structure. Functionalists stress the extent to which the different elements of the social structure fit together harmoniously. Marxists stress the lack of fitness between the different parts, particularly social classes, and so emphasize the potential for social conflict. Dahrendorf argues that conflicts are no longer based upon the existence of the classes rather is base upon economic division. He sees conflict as being concerned with authority. You will study these views in detail in Unit No.5&6.
Not all sociologists base their analysis upon an examination of the structure of the society. Some focus on individuals and their patterns of action. Rather than seeing human behaviour as being largely determined by society, they see society as being the product of human activity. Max Weber was the first sociologist to advocate a social action approach. You will study the details of his work in unit 7 & 8. Weber related meaningful social action to social institutions. His broadest historical generalization concerned the rise of instrumentally rational action. Rationality can mean many different things in modern social thought. But with the emergence of market democracies towards the end of twentieth century an understanding of human behaviour as motivated by the maximization of individual interests has become relatively common. This assumes that people act in an economically rational manner. Unit No. 9 & 10 will deal with the theory of rational choice. The distinctive feature of this approach is the view that social life is to be explained by means of models of rational individual action.

Symbolic interactionists try to explain human behaviour and human society by examining the way that people interpret the actions of others. They do not deny the existence of some elements of a social structure however, they believe that the social structure is fluid and constantly changing in response to interaction. Unit No. 11 & 12 will deal with these explanations.

Ethnomethodology move even further from a structural approach by denying the existence of social structure. It is concerned with the methods used by the people to achieve the appearance of order. While phenomenologists try to understand the meaning of phenomena or thing, rather than explaining how they came into existence. This approach denies the possibility of explaining social action as such rather it emphasises upon the internal working of the human mind and the way that human classify and make sense of the world around them. Unit No. 13 &14 are all about this.

Although feminist theory has developed independently of the mainstream of sociological theory, it too has passed through a series of phases. Though every other aspect of society has been theorized at a social level, as the product of social or material structural constraints or of human
construction, this is about the fact of universal gender difference and inequality. Different aspects of feminist theories are discussed in Unit no. 15 & 16. Last two Units will deal with the most important development in the recent sociological theory. The micro-macro and agency structure literature can be seen as synthetic developments and thus part of the broad movement toward theoretical synthesis.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

1. To enable you to discuss social processes involved in making sense of social phenomena.

2. To broaden and deepen your knowledge of a range of sociological theory.

3. To introduce you to recent and contemporary debates in theoretical frameworks for social analysis.
UNIT NO.1 & 2
INTRODUCTION
UNIT NO.1 & 2
INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A number of theories have been developed in many different areas of research in which sociologists work. So a diversity of theoretical approaches is found in sociology, which provides a rich source of ideas. In these units we will study definition of sociological theory, different types of theories and its importance.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying these units you will be able:

1. To define sociological Theory.
2. To explain the criteria of sociological theory.
3. To identify the types of sociological theory.

1.3 SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

A set of propositions concerning a particular field of research which have been or can be put to the test is called a theory. The means or tools of a science are its concepts and a construction of a substantive theory presupposes a language in which it can be formulated. We call this language the conceptual aspect of ‘theory’.

Theory helps us to meaningfully organize and explain the linkages between specific observations we make. A theory is a statement of how and
why specific facts are related. The basis upon which sociologist choose issues to study is called theory building.

Theory is a developing set of arguments and debates which focuses on common questions. Theory sum up what a subject can say to its audience. In Sociology, the word theory is used much as it is used in everyday life. We can take the definition given in the “Macmillan Student Encyclopedia of Sociology” as an indicator of its everyday meaning: “a body of law-like generalizations, logically linked to one another, which can be used to EXPLAIN empirical phenomena”. In sociology the phenomena to be observed, quite obviously, are social phenomena, that is, its theory focuses on the relationships and interaction between human beings.

According to J.H. Turner ‘theory is a mental activity. It is a process of developing ideas that allow scientists to explain why events should occur. Theory is constructed with several basic elements or building blocks i.e. concepts, variables, statements and formats’.

Concept is a notion or idea. Sociologists use concepts to identify elements of society. A concept is a mental construct that represents some part of the world, inevitably in a simplified form. For example, terms like family, society, class, social role and status are concepts, sociologists use to help accustom us to our social world. The term variable refers to the representation of any distinct social characteristic or concept whose value change from case to case. For example, social class varies with people being identified as some of them as upper-class, some middle-class and other as working-class.

Theory in sociology includes any intentionally constructed set of statements which can meet the following criteria:

1. They must be abstract, that is, they must be separated from the social practices, which they address. Theory usually achieves abstraction by the development of technical and classified concepts which are used only within the sociological community.

2. They must be thematized. A specific thematic argument must run through the set of statements giving them coherence and force.
3. They must be logically consistent. The statement must not contradict one another and, if possible, should be deducible from one another.

4. They must be explanatory. Theory must constitute a thesis or argument about social phenomena which can account for their form, or substance, or existence.

5. They must be general. They must in principle, apply to, and be able to account for any and all instances of the phenomena which they seek to explain.

6. They must be independent. They must not be reducible to the explanations participants themselves offer for their own behaviour.

7. They must be substantively valid. They must be consistent with that is known about the social world both by its participants and by sociologists and other social scientists. At a minimum there must be ‘rules of translation’ which can connect the theory with other bodies of knowledge.

1.4 TYPES OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

There are in general, three types of theory: formal, substantive and positivistic. Each theory focuses the researcher’s attention on particular types of question about how society is organized, and each provides a different explanation about why certain patterns are found in society.

Formal theory is the most inclusive. It seeks to produce a scheme of concepts and statements within which society or human interaction in its whole can be explained. Often such theory is paradigmatic in nature, i.e. it seeks to set the entire agenda for future theoretical practice against the claims of opposing paradigms. Such theory is often foundational, in character. It seeks to identify a single set of principles which are ultimate foundation for social life and by which everything can be explained. It includes functionalism, action theory, rational choice theory, structure and system theory.

Substantive theory, by contrast, is much less inclusive. It seeks not to explain all things but either specific, but very generally dividing, events or
specified types of social process. It includes theories of stratification, conflict, religion commitment, deviant behaviour or feminist or gender theory.

Positivistic theory seeks to explain empirical relationships between variables by showing that they can be deduced from more abstract theoretical statements. It explains very specific statements indeed. Positivistic theory focused on specific empirical relationships. Positive science rejects supernatural forces and abstract, speculative principles or in other words it reject all tendencies, assumptions and ideas which exceed the limits of scientific technique; it records the objectively given relations between observable phenomena and codifies these in universal and certain laws. This knowledge forms the basis for the prediction and control of natural and social processes. Sociological knowledge is not in principle different from other form of scientific knowledge. According to Comte the three direct methods of sociology are observation, experiment, and comparison which are at power of physical sciences.

1.5 IMPORTANCE OF THEORY

Theory has a great importance in the development of scientific knowledge. Theory helps to organize a set of concepts in a meaningful way by explaining the relationship among them. It helps to generalize the events and predicts the future if the conditions are identical. It gives meanings to facts. Facts are silent. They have no meaning until we give meaning to them, and that meaning is given by theory, so theory makes the facts of social life meaningful and comprehensible. Theory helps the people in their practical life. All scientific inventions are based on theory of how they operate. In social life theories help in practical approaches for example there is a theory that people always rationally choose whether or not to have children when the cost of children is more than their perceived benefit. We can see in western societies where parents are not dependent on their children in their old age and the cost of rearing the children is much higher, people have less children.
1.6 Required Reading


1.7 Self-Assessment Questions

Q.1 What is a theory? What is the importance of concepts in theory? Explain.

Q.2 Theory in sociology includes any intentionally constructed set of statements. Discuss.
UNIT NO.3 & 4
STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE
AND FUNCTIONALISM
UNIT NO.3 & 4

STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE AND FUNCTIONALISM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In these units we will study about structuralism and functionalism. The structural functional concept is a framework for building theory that imagines society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. Structural theory is primarily concerned with how society affects individual and group behaviour, rather than with how individuals and groups create society. Functionalists analysis has focussed on the question of how social systems are maintained. Although the structure and functioning of society can be separated for the purpose of theoretical consideration, in reality they are inseparable. Obviously, a society or organisation has structure before it can do any function. In these units we will study the work of different sociologists about these perspectives. Here is a brief introduction of those topics which you have to study in these units.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying these units you will be able to:

1. Explore elements of societies as systems.
2. Explain how sociologists formulate theories to explain these systems.
3. Answer the fundamental questions about the relation between individual and society, and structure and action.
4. Compare and contrast the work of different sociologists.
1.3 Structural Versus Social action Theory

Keeping in view the characteristics of Sociological Theories they can be divided into two main categories, these are structural and social action theories. The main purpose of both is to analyse the society but they have different approach to do so. Structural or macro perspective analyse the society as a whole. But not all sociological perspectives base their analysis on the examination of the structure of society as a whole. Rather than seeing human behaviour as being largely determined by society, many sociologists see society as being the product of human activity. They stress the meaningfulness of human behaviour, denying that it is primarily determined by the structure of society. These approaches are called social action approaches or micro sociology. Max Weber was the first to advocate a social action approach. We will study about this in unit No. 7&8. In this unit we will study about structural theory.

1.3.1 STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Many sociologists use the term social structure to describe patterns which they discover in their observations. In doing this they are usually implying the following: that the phenomenon under inspection can be analysed as a series of component units of a specified type (e.g. role, classes, value-commitments, genders and societies). This means that relationships between members of society are organized in terms of rules. Values provide general guideline for behaviour and they are translated into more specific directives in term of roles and norms. So the structure of society can be seen as the sum total of normative behaviour. Second, that, these units are related to each other in quite different ways. For example, the family is made up of the interconnected roles of husband, father, wife, mother, son and daughter. Social relationships within the family are structured in terms of a set of related norms which vary from society to society. Third, that the relationships between units are connected together to give the phenomenon under observation a characteristic pattern which need to be understood as a totality. This means that the main parts of society, its institution- such as the family, the economy, the education and the political system- a major aspect of social structure are needed to be observed as a whole. And fourth, that the
pattern of relationships is relatively stable and enduring over time. Change is explained as resulting from a structural transformation, by which one system of relationship is transformed into another.

There are three possible routes by which such a notion of structure may enter into theory. The first, which comes from constructionist sociology, is the notion that structure is a human creation which is either intentional or unintentional. Thinking and acting subjects are understood to create structural arrangements and the constraints which be allied to them. According to Giddens structure does indeed impinge upon and constrain each human individual and has the force of concrete reality, but its source and origin are within the sphere of human action-the whole structure has no greater reality than the sum of its constituent action components. These actions are governed by norms. Moreover, social structure is not fixed and immutable but flexible and susceptible to alternation.

A second approach to social structure is to regard it not as a real phenomenon which may or may not be structured by human beings but as an observer category, a concept which appears in the mind of the sociologist. Under this regime, structure is a methodological or analytic category which place all regular and predictable aspects of relationship in one side and unpredictable on other side. This approach was recommended by the Radcliff-Brown. A third approach to social structure may be called as realistic approach. In analysing social phenomena as system, structuralists rarely examine surface phenomena but assume that these are generated and explained by the workings of underlying deep or hidden structures. This hidden reality is described as a structure.

1.1 FUNCTIONALISM: CONCEPT

The concept of Function in functionalist analysis refers to the contribution of the parts to the whole. The function of any part of the society is the contribution it makes to meet the functional prerequisites of the social system. Parts of society are functional in so far as they maintain the system and contribute to its survival. Thus a function of the family is to ensure the continuity of society by reproducing and socializing new member. A function of religion is to integrate the social system by reinforcing common values.
1.4.1 SOCIETY AS A SYSTEM

Functionalism views society as a system, that is as a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole. The basic unit of analysis is society, and its various parts are understood primarily in term of their relationship to the whole. The early functionists often drew an analogy between society and an organism such as the human body. They argued that an understanding of any organ in the body, such as the heart of lungs, involves an understanding of its relationship to other organs and in particular of its contribution towards the maintenance of the organism. In the same way, an understanding of any part of the society requires an analysis of its relationship to other parts such as the schools, the family, the state tend to fit together with each element of the society to maintain overall stability.

1.5 INFLUENCES ON FUNCTIONALISM

The emergence of the functionalist perspective began with Comte's work and was carried forward by other thinkers such as Durkheim, Max Weber in the latter half of the 19th century. It was refined by Talcott Parsons. During the 1940s and 1950s functionalism was dominant social theory in American sociology. Since that time it has steadily dropped, partly because of damaging criticism, partly because other approaches are seen to answer certain questions more successfully. Merton criticized some of the more extreme and indefensible aspects of structural functionalism. He gave some equally important new conceptual insights. He seeks to resolve the issue of teleology by making a distinction between manifest functions, those are intended and recognized, and latent functions which are not.

1.6 Required Readings

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<tr>
<td>George Ritzer</td>
<td>“Sociological Theory” p.233-259</td>
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</table>
1.7  Self-Assessment Questions

Q.1  Structural-functionalism was heavily influenced by the organic model. Discuss.

Q.2  Structuralist-functionalist model of the social system tends to make structure of the society and determinate action. What do you think about it? Explain with examples.

Q.3  Explain Talcott Parsons's structural-functional theory. Also discuss his famous AGIL scheme.
UNIT NO. 5 & 6

CONFLICT PERSPECTIVES
UNIT NO. 5 & 6

CONFLICT PERSPECTIVES

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Conflict theory in sociology is a view of society that focuses on social processes of tension, competition and change. In a summary of conflict theory, Ian Craib describes it in the following way: “Society is like a more or less confused battle-ground. If we watch from on high, we can see a variety of groups fighting each other, constantly forming and reforming, making and breaking alliances”. There are many varieties of conflict perspectives within sociology. In these units we will study only the views of Marx and Ralf Dahrendorf.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying these units you will be able to:

1. Define the social processes of tension, competition and change.

2. Identify the basic causes of conflict in a society.

3. Examine how different groups seek and gain power and use their power to shape social structure.

4. Compare and contrast the work of Marx and Ralf Dahrendorf on conflict.
1.3 MARXISM

In Marx's view society is constructed from classes. According to him in all societies there are two major classes. The most powerful class is that which owns the means of production and the least powerful is that which has to sell its labour in order to make a living. Marxists consider that conflict over values and material issues is normal in class divided society. In Marx's view, different groups and classes of people have different needs, which ultimately bring them into conflict. Marx draws certain propositions to explain these relations, which ultimately lead to conflict and structural change.

Carver (1982) presents these propositions as follow:

**Furst proposition,**

social consciousness or opinion, beliefs etc.
\(\downarrow\) corresponds to

legal and political superstructure
\(\downarrow\) arises from

relations of production or job descriptions
\(\downarrow\) corresponds to

material productive forces or technology

**Second proposition,**
Mode of production

\[ \downarrow \text{conditions} \]

social, political and intellectual life-process in general

Third proposition

Consciousness or idea, beliefs etc \textit{does not determine} \[ \rightarrow \] being

\textbf{RATHER}

Social being \textit{determines} \[ \rightarrow \] consciousness

Required Readings

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<tr>
<td>George Ritzer</td>
<td>“Sociological Theory” p.278-326</td>
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</table>

1.4 \textbf{RALF DAHRENEORF}

Dahrendorf’s conflict theory arises out of a critical evaluation of the work of Karl Marx, Dahrendorf accepts that Marx’s description of capitalism was generally accurate in the nineteenth century when Marx was writing, but he argues that in the twentieth century it has become outdated as a basis for explaining conflict. Dahrendorf argues that important changes have taken place in countries such as Britain and USA. They are now ‘post-capitalist’ societies. He claims that far from the two main classes becoming polarized, as Marx predicted, the opposite has happened. The proportion of skilled and semi-skilled workers has grown, as has the size of the ‘new middle class’ of white-collar worker such as clerks, nurses and teachers. Inequalities in income and wealth have been reduced, partly because of changes in the social structure, and partly because of measures taken by the
state. Social mobility has become more common, and, crucially, the link between ownership and control in industry has been broken. Managers, rather than owners, now exercise day-to-day control over the means of production. In these circumstances, Marx’s claim that conflict was based upon the ownership or nonownership of wealth is no longer valid. This is because there is no longer a close association between wealth and power. Shareholders, for example, might own the wealth of a company, but in practice they do not exercise close control over the management.

In view of these changes Dahrendorf argues that conflicts are no longer based upon the existence of the two classes identified by Marx, nor are they based upon economic divisions. Instead, Dahrendorf sees conflict as being concerned with authority.

To Dahrendorf, authority is legitimate power attached to the occupation of a particular social role within an organization. Thus, for example, a manager in a company, or a teacher in a classroom, has the right to take certain decisions regardless of the wishes of the workforce or pupils. A manager has the authority to instruct workers to arrive in time and a teacher has the authority to instruct pupils for homework. All organizations, or associations as Dahrendorf calls them, have positions of domination and subjection. Some are able to take decisions legitimately and issue commands, and others are not. It is this situation which Dahrendorf sees as the basis for conflict in ‘post-capitalist’ societies.

Dahrendorf believes that the existence of dominant and subordinate positions produces a situation in which individuals have different interests. Those occupying dominant positions have an interest in maintaining a social structure which gives them more authority than others. Those in subordinate positions have, on the other hand, an interest in changing a social structure which deprives them of authority. This conflict of interests is present in a much wider range of social relationships than the economic conflict of interests between the ruling class and the subject class which Marx identified as the basis for conflict in society.

As a consequence, there are many different potential groups, which could be in conflict with each other. Some of these groups will join together and act to pursue their interests.
More generally conflict theory, whether Dahrendorf’s or that of other writers, produces a rather confused picture of the social structure. Society is portrayed as consisting of so many different groups, all of which may be in conflict with each other, that it is difficult to get a clear picture of how society works. It is not clear what the end result of the conflict will be, who will win and who will lose. Nor does conflict theory provide an adequate explanation of why one group will be successful and another will not. Marxism and neo-Marxism give more coherent answer to these types of question. On the other hand, conflict theory is able to encompass conflict between such groups as men and women, which does not fit neatly into a Marxist framework for understanding society.

1.5 Required Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jonathan H. Turner</th>
<th>“The Structure of Sociological Theory” p.143-158</th>
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<tr>
<td>George Ritzer</td>
<td>“Sociological Theory” p.265-276</td>
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1.6 Self-Assessment Questions

Q.1 Explain the class structure and the cause of conflict among classes in modern society from Marxist perspective.

Q.2 Explain the ideas of Ralf Dahrendorf about conflict.

Q.3 How do views of Marx and Dahrendorf differ regarding conflict?
UNIT NO. 7 & 8

MAX WEBER: SOCIAL ACTION THEORY
UNIT NO. 7 & 8

MAX WEBER: SOCIAL ACTION THEORY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In these units we will study Weber’s analysis of social and his elaboration of the methods by which human action can be analysed and understood. He argued that all human actions are directed by meaning. In order to understand and explain action, the meanings and causes which lie behind it must be understood. Thus Weber identified various types of action which are distinguished by the meanings on which they are based. Actions are practical conclusion drawn from intentions and beliefs; ‘action’ and ‘rationality’ are interrelated. Social action are always part of larger systems and of processes of part of inter subjective understanding, and this raises the question of the role of the acting subject (‘human agency’) in the processes by which action are coordinating. Sociological action theories from the time of Max Weber build on this relation in analysing action into components and types (Brunkhorst, 1993).

Sociologists who adopt social action or interpretive perspectives usually reject the view that society has a clear structure which directs individuals to behave in certain ways. Some social action theorists do not deny the existence of a social structure, but see this structure as rising out of the action of individuals. Thus Weber, who to some extent spans the gap between structure and social action perspectives, acknowledges the existence of classes, status, groups and parties, but he challenges the view of Durkheim that society exists independently of the individuals who make it up. These units are all about the Weber’s theory of social action.

1.2 OBJECTIVE

After studying these units you will be able to:

1. Define social action
the meaning, which actors actually give within their lived experience; and the typical meaning which an observer may ascribe. Weber divided social action into four types and distinguished them by the meanings on which they are based. These include: instrumentally rational action, value rational action, affectual action and traditional action.

1. Instrumentally rational action: action that is the means by which individuals can attain their own rationally pursued and calculated ends.

2. Value rational action: action determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some religious, ethical or other type of commitment. Examples of such actions might include making a donation to charity, or accepting work as an Imam in a mosque without pay because one believes in the value of such work.

3. Affectual action: action determined by the actors specific feeling or emotional state at a particular time. Loss of temper in result of verbal or physical violence is an example of such action.

4. Traditional action: action determined by deep-rooted habituation. Individuals act in a certain way because of ingrained habit, because things have always been done that way. Eating habits or routine work fall in this category of action.

1.4.1 Social action and Verstehen

Having identified the subject matter of sociology, Weber went on to suggest how social action could be explained. Before the cause of a social action could be found, it was necessary to understand the meaning attached to it by the actor. He distinguished two types of understanding.

Firstly, he referred to *aktuelles Verstehen*, which can roughly be translated as direct observational understanding of texts and other human accomplishments such as actions and cultural phenomena, where
understanding these phenomena is often seen as being in some way like the understanding of a written text. For, example, it is possible to understand that someone is angry by observing their facial expression. Similarly, it is possible to understand what is happening when a woodcutter hits a piece of wood with an axe, that is the woodcutter is chopping wood. However, this is not, to Weber, a sufficient level of understanding to begin to explain social action.

The second type of understanding is erklarendes Verstehen, or explanatory understanding. In this case the sociologist must try to understand the meaning of an act in terms of the motives, which give rise to it. Thus erklarendes Verstehen, would require an understanding of why the woodcutter was chopping wood. Was he or she doing so in order to earn a wage, to make a fire, or work off anger? To achieve this type of understanding it is necessary to put yourself in the shoes of the person whose behaviour you are explaining. You should imagine yourself in their situation to try to get at the motives behind their actions.

Even this level of understanding is not sufficient to explain a series of actions or events. For a full casual explanation it is necessary to determine what has given rise to the motives, which led to the actions. Here Weber advocated the use of methods closer to a positivist approach. He attempted to discover connections between events and to establish casual relationships. This can be seen from his study, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Weber tried to show that there was a relationship between ascetic Protestantism and Capitalism. He claimed that ascetic Protestantism preceded capitalism and was found almost exclusively in those countries, which became capitalist. Nevertheless, this was not sufficient to convince Weber that there was casual connection between the two, because it did not establish how or why ascetic Protestantism contributed to the rise of capitalism. In order to establish this link, Weber tried to understand the motives of ascetic protestants for adopting capitalist behaviour. He believed that their main motive was to convince themselves that they were predestined to go to heaven.

Weber’s work on the rise of capitalism illustrates this belief that social actions, particularly those involving large number of people behaving in similar ways, could lead to large-scale social changes such as the advent of
capitalism. Furthermore, even when Weber sounds rather like a structuralist sociologist, he usually insists that he is really describing a type of social action. Thus, while society might contain institutions and social groups, these institutions and social groups are composed of individuals engaged in social action. Weber said, ‘when reference is made in a sociological context to a state, a nation, a corporation, a family or an army corps, or to similar collectivities, what is meant only a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons’.

This point of view can be illustrated to Weber’s work on bureaucracy. Bureaucracies might be seen as institutions which closely control and direct human behaviour or social actions. Although Weber was aware of, and indeed concerned about, the power of bureaucracies in restricting human freedom, he nevertheless saw them as composed of individuals carrying out social actions. Thus he believed that bureaucracies consisted of individual carrying out ‘rational’ social actions designed to achieve the goals of bureaucracies. Significantly, Weber saw the whole development of industrial societies in terms of a move towards national social action. Thus, to Weber, modern societies were undergoing a process of rationalization, as effective or emotional action, and action directed by custom and tradition (traditional action), became less important.

1.5 Materialism and idealism

Given the importance that Weber attached to social action, it is not surprising that he also attached considerable importance to the role of ideas in shaping social life. Weber was very much opposed to what he saw as the one-sided materialism of Marxism. He denied that human beliefs are entirely shaped by material or economic forces: indeed his work on protestantism suggested that religious beliefs could transform an economic system. However, Weber was equally concerned to reject a one-sided idealism, which saw human history as directed by the ideas and beliefs held by people. Instead, Weber maintained that both material factors and beliefs were important. He believed that religious beliefs could develop quite independently of material factors, for example through theological arguments within a church. On the other hand new beliefs would only be taken up if circumstances made them likely to thrive. Thus, material
circumstances might affect whether or not ideas became widely accepted, but they did not determine what ideas were produced in the first place.

Weber adopted a similar type of argument to explain the role of religion in the advent of capitalism. To Weber, before capitalism could fully develop it was necessary to have both the appropriate beliefs, and the appropriate material circumstances. In a simple tribal society neither would be present, according to Weber, many oriental societies had the economic conditions, which could have led to capitalism, but they lacked religion, which encouraged rational activity. Countries such as Britain and the USA had both the material conditions and ascetic protestantism beliefs, which were necessary preconditions for the development of capitalism.

1.6 Weber a Critique

Weber has undoubtedly made a great contribution to the development of modern sociology, although like the other classical sociologists his work has been hotly debated. Weber has been accused of ‘methodological individualism’, which has been a central weakness of his sociology. David Lee and Howard Newby sum up this criticism in the following way: ‘Weber was willing to treat all social forces and pressures as if they could be explained, (or reduced) to the actions and purposes of seemingly isolated individuals,. The structural approach examined earlier, particularly those of Durkheim and Marx, were strongly oppose to any such view. Furthermore, in Weber’s own work, his social action approach exists rather uneasily alongside his views on particular type of social institution. Thus it is hard to reconcile his view that bureaucracies could severely restrict human freedom, or that society was divided into social classes, with his claim that society simply consisted of individuals choosing courses of action according to their motives.

1.7 Required Readings

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<td>George Ritzer</td>
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1.7 Self-Assessment Questions

Q.1 Explain the social action and its types from Weber's perspective.

Q.2 Weber suggests how social action could be explained. He distinguished two types of understanding. Explain these.

Q.3 Weber opposed the one-sided materialism of Marxism. What did he suggest, explain.
UNIT NO. 9 & 10

SOCIAL EXCHANGE/
RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY
UNIT NO. 9 & 10

SOCIAL EXCHANGE/ RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Social exchange / Rational choice theory is applied to thoughts, actions, people and systems of organization, which conform to the rules of logic or to consistent maxims of practically effective action. In these units we will study the theories of Skinner, Homans and Blau about rationality and exchange.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying these units you will be able to:

1. Explain social exchange theory.

2. Differentiate between economic and social theories of rationality.

3. Discuss the views of eminent sociologists about these theories.

1.3 SOCIAL EXCHANGE/ RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

In the field of sociology, anthropology, and social psychology, social exchange theory is developing in a way that is radically different from, the traditional study of exchange in economics. The major difference in this: at its core, neoclassical economics theory views the actor as dealing not with other actors but with a market. In economic theory, decisions are made by actors not in response to, the decisions of another party but in response to environmental parameters such as market price (Emerson, 1987). By
contrast, sociologists view a wide variety of non-economic relationships as exchange in the various form of social exchange theory. This is done in three main ways: 1) extending the economic analysis to cover a wide range of activities; 2) using the mixture of behavioural psychology and economics; and 3) viewing exchanges as expressions of underlying social relationship. The first two approaches focus on the individual, and the third on the collective. Applying the third approach Levi-Strauss discovered a connection between exchange practices and social solidarity in his comparative studies of kinship and marriage rules: direct (or restricted) exchange, in which two groups give and take from each other (A↔B), generates mechanical solidarity; whereas indirect (or generalized) exchange, involving a network of several exchange partners who do not give to those whom they receive, for instance, A→B → C→D → A, promotes organic solidarity. In these studies it is a group that form exchange partnerships.

Social exchange and rational choice: Rational choice denotes actions motivated by personal gains in the course of economic activities that constrain actorsto make choices from scarce means. From its beginning, the Anglo-American brand of social exchange theory has used rational choice arguments, borrowed from economics and game theory, to conceptualise social exchange behaviours in Western and non Western societies.

Waters summarized rationality theories as:

1. Human beings seek to maximize the gratification they receive from the social world. These ‘interests’ in relation to the social world have an objective character.

2. Each member of society is in control of supply of social valuables. Valuables consist of items with both material and psychological consequences. Individual gratification is maximized to the extent that the supply of valuables under the individual’s control is maximized and, correspondingly, that the need or demand for the valuables is maximized.

3. Interaction with others in the social world is conceived as a series of trading negotiations or games, which are competitive in character. The object of social participation is to increase the supply of social valuables
through this process of interaction. This may involve simply the exchange of valuables with a view to profit or may involve a more complex attempt to use the supply one has in order to control, coerce and/or exploit the other. In many theories of rationality the total costs of all participants set against the total benefits are held to amount zero—that is, the game is a ‘zero-sum’ game. This means that self-advantage automatically implies disadvantage for the other.

4. Human behaviour is thus held to be rational because individuals engage in a continuous calculation of returns to engagement in a particular piece of action against the costs of that engagement.

5. Because human wants and gratifications are relatively unchanging, stable interaction patterns emerge which offer regular exchanges that are understood by the participants to be normative in character, i.e. morally correct. These stable exchange patterns, taken together, constitute large-scale phenomena. To reverse the reasoning, macro-structural phenomena can always be reduced to rationalized exchanges between individuals. The technical term for describing such a position is ‘methodological individualism’.

6. However, emergent structural arrangement are not the main focus of interest for theories of rationality. Rather, the general tendency is to reach and analyse small group interaction, or hypothetical small empirical generalization. These empirical generalizations become the building block of theory.

7. There is a general convergence between sociological theories of rationality and both economic theory and game theory because each stresses the maximization of individual advantage within a rational calculus of action (1994:57-58)

1.4 Burrhus Frederick Skinner

Skinner’s theoretical statement is indeed a rationalistic one. He sees an image of behaviourism as a recipe for solving individual anxieties and the world’s ills. He begins with the view that many items in the environment of
the human organism are critically necessary for its survival, including food, water, fuel and shelter. Behaviour which reduces threats to organic survival, that is, which procures necessary items, is strengthened or reinforced by that consequence. There are two types of such behaviour: reflex behaviour, which is involuntary and automatic, and more important and interesting, operant behaviour, which is a product of the will. Skinner argued that operant behaviour is conditioned, that is, to have been reinforced by events in the external environment. A positive reinforcer strengthens the behaviour that produces it for example, eating reduce hunger and is therefore likely to be repeated; similarly a negative reinforcer strengthens any behaviour that stops or prevents it.

1.5 GEORGE CASPER HOMANS

Homans launched an individualistic social exchange theory in which interactions are limited to direct reciprocities. This version of social exchange theory underscores the significance of the unique individual by employing such key concepts in economics and psychology as rewards, costs, punishment, profits and investments. He presents people as providing each other with rewards which have costs to them but that also elicit behaviour that they find rewarding. Viewing people as exchange rewards provides the basis of an attempt to combine behavioural psychology with economics.

Homans confenes his analysis to what he calls everyday or subinstitutional social behaviour, that is to interpersonal interaction. The behaviour in which he is interested has three significant characteristic. These are:

1. It is social in the sense that when an individual acts, the performance will be rewarded or punished by the behaviour of another person.

2. The other person must be the direct source of reinforcement which must not be the mediated through some larger structure.

3. The behaviour must be actualised rather than merely ideal or expected.
Homans argues that his theory is not a grand theory in the accepted sense of seeking to explain everything. He does not seek, for example, to examine the ways in which rules are established and institutionalised or the way in which whole societies change. Homans intention is to established some propositions about exchange between human beings which hold universally and he aims to do this at the most elementary or primitive level. These are the basis of his exchange theory of social behaviour. These are classified as:

1. The success proposition
2. The stimulus proposition
3. The value proposition
4. The deprivation-satiation proposition
5. The aggression-approval proposition
6. The rationality proposition

1.6 PETER M. BLAU

Like Humans, Blau begins at a primitive level of why people associate with each other at all. For Blau this is obvious, human association can be rewarding, as he said “most human pleasures have their roots in social life. But participating in human associations can also bring costs and the distribution of costs and benefits is seldom even—people do things for each other, calling these things favours or help or assistance without any immediate or apparent return. However, normally they receive social approval in return or at least anticipate that the other person will be in a position to do them a favour at some point in the future.

When one party need something from another but has nothing comparable to offer in return, four alternatives are available. First, people can force other people to help them. Second, they can find another source to
UNIT NO. 11 & 12

INTERACTIONISM
UNIT NO. 11 & 12

INTERACTIONISM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The interrelated behaviour of individuals who influence each other by means of communication is called social interaction. According to Hare (1976), interaction means 'all words, symbols, and gestures with which person respond to each other'. In recent studies non-verbal communication (facial expression, exchange glances, body movement, special behaviour, extralinguistic behaviour and so on) is considered to be of great importance for understanding social interaction (Weick 1985). The theory of symbolic interactionism is an influential sociological interaction theory which is mainly associated with the philosopher and sociologist George Herbert Mead. In these units we will study the work of Mead and Herbert Blumer.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying these units you will be able to:

1. Analyse the symbolic interactionism of Mead.

2. Discuss the importance of symbols or language as a key foundation for social life.

3. Examine the basic premises of symbolic interactions.

4. Apply the theory of symbolic interactionism in research.
1.2 SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Symbolic interactionism, usually referred to as interactionism, in a distinctly American branch of sociology. It developed from the work of a group of American philosophers who included John Dewey, William I. Thomas and George Herbert Mead. However, the term symbolic interaction was coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937. It denotes that this branch of sociology and social psychology focuses on processes of interaction-immediate reciprocally oriented social action-and that it has an underlying concept of interaction which stress its symbolically mediated character. One should not think here of social relations in which action is a mere act on behalf of pre-given rules, but of those in which common and reciprocal definitions of the relation are proposed and established. Social relations then do not appear as fixed once and for all, but as open and depending on constant common approval. This basic principle of symbolic interactionism explains its methodology too. It stands opposed to all social sciences traditions, which theorize without having a close, first-hand intimate involvement with those phenomena about which they theorize. Strongly empirical, it advocates a wide range of research tools especially participation observation, life histories and depth interviewing to gain this. Like Max Weber, symbolic interactionists are concerned with explaining social actions in term of the meanings that individuals give to them. However, they tend to focus on small-scale interaction situations rather than large-scale social change.

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) is generally regarded as the founder of symbolic interactionism. His views will now be examined.

1.4 George Herbert Mead

1.4.1 The Act

A basic unit of symbolic interactionism developed especially by G.H.Mead and Blumer, stressing that people act, rather than simply react. Human life is composed of an ongoing stream of interpretive ‘doings’ both covert (e.g. thinking) and overt (e.g. arguing). For Mead an act is built up through four stages. (1) Impulse-the generalized disposition to act, which
involves an immediate sensuous stimulation and the actor’s reaction to the situation, the need to do something about it. Hunger is a good example of an impulse. (2) perception- the organizing, selecting and defining of a situation. People do not simply respond immediately to external stimuli but rather think about, and assess them through mental imagery. (3) Manipulation-taking action with regard to the situation. Once the impulse has manifested itself and the object has been perceived, the next step is manipulating the object. For Mead, the manipulation phase constitutes an important temporary phase in the process so that a response is not manifested immediately. Before acting people can examine all the possibilities of their action. (4) Consumption-The completion of the act with an achieved goal. Such act may be of various classes: automatic, blocked, incomplete, and traditional. Mead sees the dialectical relationship among the four stages. The later stages of the act may lead to the emergence of earlier stages. For example, manipulating or consumption of food may lead the individual to the impulse of hunger and the perception that one is hungry and that food is available to satisfy the need.

1.4.2 Symbols

In Mead’s view, human thought, experience and conduct are essentially social. They owe their nature to the fact that human being interact in terms of symbols, the most important of which are contained in language. A symbol does not simply stand for an object or event: it defines them in a particular way and indicates a response to them. Thus the symbol ‘chair’ not only represents a class of objects and defines them similar, it also indicates a line of action that is the action of sitting. Symbols impose particular meanings on objects and in doing so largely exclude other possible meanings. For example, chair may be made out of metal, cane or wood, and on this basis be defined as very different objects. However, such differences are reduced insignificant by the fact that they are all categorized in terms of the symbol ‘chair’. Similarly, chairs can be stood on, used as a source of fuel or as a means for assaulting another, but the range of possible activities that could be associated with chairs is largely excluded by the course of action indicated by the symbol ‘chair’. Symbols provide the means whereby human can interact meaningfully with their natural and social environment. They are human-made and refer not to the intrinsic nature of objects and events but to the ways in which people perceive them.
Without symbols there would be no human interaction and no human society. Symbolic interaction is necessary since human have no instincts to direct their behaviour. Humans are not genetically programmed to react automatically to particular stimuli. In order to survive they must therefore construct and live within a world of meaning. For example, they must classify the natural environment into categories of food and non-food in order to meet basic nutritional requirements. In this way humans both define stimuli and their response to them. Thus when hunters on the African Savannah categorise antelope as a source of food, they define what is significant in the natural environment and their response to it. Via symbols, meaning is imposed on the world of nature and human interaction with that world is thereby made possible.

1.4.3 Role-taking

Communication only occurs where each of the parties not only gives meaning to their own behaviour but also understands or seek to understand the meaning the other gives. Each person places his or herself in the place or position of the other person. Such sharing of meanings helps in developing language and thus becomes truly symbolic in character.

Social life can only proceed if members of the society largely share the meaning of symbols. If this were not the case, meaningful communication would be impossible. However, common symbols provide only the means by which human interaction is accomplished. In order for interaction to proceed each person involved must interpret the meaning and intentions of others. This is made possible by the existence of common symbols, but actually accomplished by means of a process which Mead terms ‘role-taking’.

The role-taking involves the individual taking on the role of another by imaginatively placing her or himself in the position of the person with whom she or he is interacting. For example, if a person observes another smiling, crying, waving his or her hand or shaking a fist, they will put themselves in that person’s position in order to interpret the intention and meaning. On the basis of this interpretation they will make their response to the action of the other. Thus if individuals observe someone shaking a fist, they may interpret this gesture as an indication of aggression but their
interpretation will not automatically lead to a particular response. They may ignore the gesture, respond in kind, and make an effort to defuse the situation with a joke and so on. The person with whom they are interacting will then take their role, interpret their response and either continue or close the interaction on the basis of this interpretation. In this respect human interaction can be seen as a continuous process of interpretation with each taking the role of the other.

1.4.4 The Self

Among the Mead most notable achievements is his account of the genesis of consciousness and the self through the gradually developing ability in childhood to take the role of the other and to visualize his own performance from the point of view of others. Mead argues that through the process of role-taking individuals develop a concept of ‘self’. By placing themselves in the position of others they are able to look back upon themselves. Mead claims that the idea of a self can only develop if the individual can get outside himself (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself. To do this they must observe themselves from the standpoint of others. Therefore the origin and development of a concept of self lies in the ability to take the role of another. Mead distinguishes two aspects of the self. The ‘me’ is your definition of yourself in a specific social role. For example, you might see yourself as a ‘good father’ (or mother) or a ‘loyal friend’. The ‘I’ is your opinion of yourself as a whole. The ‘I’ which can also be called your ‘self-concept’, is built up from the reactions of others to you, and the way you interpret those reaction. It can exercise considerable influence over your behaviour. For example, if you see yourself as cowardly on the basis of the self-concept you have built up, you are unlikely to act bravely in dangerous situations.

The notion of self is not inborn, it is learned during childhood. Mead sees two main stages in its development. The first, known as the ‘play stage’, involves the child playing roles which are not his or her own. For example, children may play at being mother or father, a doctor or a nurse. In doing so they become aware that there is a difference between themselves and the role they are playing. Thus the idea of a self is developed as the child takes the role of other, and sociability begins to be established. The second stage in the development of self is known as the ‘game stage’. In playing a game, children
come to see themselves from the perspective of the various participants. In order to play a game such as football or cricket, children must become aware of their relationship to the other players. They must place themselves in the role of the other in order to appreciate their own particular role in the game. In doing so, they see themselves in terms of the collective viewpoint of the other players. In Mead’s terminology they see themselves from the perspective of ‘the generalized other’.

The self reaches its most advanced stages of development when it is able to integrate the orientations of the others with which it interacts into a general set of standard of behaviour, when it takes the role of the generalized other. In Mead’s view the development of a consciousness of self is an essential part of the process of becoming a human being. It provides the basis for thought and action and the foundation for human society. Without an awareness of self the individual could not direct action or respond to the action of others. Only by acquiring a concept of self can the individual take the role of self. In this way thought is possible, since in Mead’s view the process of thinking is simply an ‘inner conversation’. Thus unless the individual is aware of a self, he or she would be unable to converse with him or herself and thought would be impossible. By becoming ‘self-conscious’, people can direct their own action by thought and deliberation. They can set goals for themselves, plan future action and consider the consequences of alternative courses of action. With an awareness of self, individuals are able to see themselves as others see them. When they take the role of others, they observe themselves from that standpoint and become aware of the view of themselves the others hold. This provides the basis for cooperative action in society. Individuals will become aware of what is expected of them and will tend to modify their actions accordingly. They will be conscious of the general attitudes of the community and judge and evaluate themselves in terms of this generalized order. From this perspective thought becomes ‘an inner conversation going on between this generalized other and the individual’. Thus a person is constantly asking what people will think and expect when he or she reflects upon him or herself. In this way conduct is regulated in terms of the expectations and attitudes of others. Mead argues that, ‘It is in the form of the generalized other that the social process influences the behaviour of the individuals involved in it....... that the community exercise control over the conduct of its individual members’.
behaviour is necessary. Social roles are not therefore fixed or unchanging; in reality they are constantly being modified in the course of interaction.

1.4.6 The individual and Society

Mead's view of human interaction sees humans as both actively creating the social environment and being shaped by it. Individuals initiate and direct their own action while at the same time being influenced by the attitude and expectations of others in the form of the generalized other. The individual and society are regarded as inseparable as the individual can only become a human being in a social context. In this context she or he develops a sense of self, which is a prerequisite for thought. She or he learns to take the roles of others, which is essential both for the development of self and for cooperative action. Without communication in terms of symbols whose meaning are shared, these processes would not be possible. Humanity therefore lives in a world of symbols which give meaning and significance to life and provide the basis for human interaction.

1.5 Herbert Blumer

1.5.1 The basis premises of symbolic interactionism

Blumer, a student of George Herbert Mead, has systematically developed the ideas of his teacher. In Blumer's view, symbolic interactionism rests on three basic premises.

i) Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning which things have for them. By things he means physical objects, other people, social institutions and abstract ideas and values.

ii) Meaning arise from the process of interaction rather than simply being present at the outset and shaping future action. To some degree meanings are created, modified, developed and changed within interaction situation rather than being fixed and preformed. In the process of interaction actors do not mindlessly follow preset norms or mechanically act out established roles.
iii) Meaning are the result of interpretive procedures employed by actors within interaction context. By taking the role of the other, actors interpret the meanings and intentions of others. By means of the ‘the mechanism of self-interaction’, individuals modify or change their definition, rehearse alternative courses of action and consider their possible consequences. Thus the meanings that guide action arise in the context of interaction via a series of complex interpretive procedures.

In brief, Blumer central assumption implies that individuals behave on the basis of meaning, which comes from social interactions. Meaning is constantly modified by a continuing interpretation process of the individuals who participate in the interaction.

Blumer argues that the interactionist perspective contrast sharply with the view of social action presented by mainstream sociology. He maintains that society must be seen as an ongoing process of interaction, involving actors who are constantly adjusting to one another and continuously interpreting the situation. By contrast, mainstream sociology, and functionalism in particular; have tended to portray action as a mechanical response to the constraints of social systems. This view fails to see ‘the social actions of individuals in human society as being constructed by them through a process of interpretation. Instead action is treated as a product of factors which play on and through individual’. Rather than actively creating their own social world, humans are pictured as passively responding to external constraints. Their actions are shaped by the needs of social systems and the values, roles and norms, which form a part of those systems. Blumer rejects this view, arguing that ‘the likening of human group life to the operation of a mechanical structure, or to the functioning of a system seeking equilibrium, seems to me to face grave difficulties in view of the formative and explorative character of interaction as the participants judge each other and guide their own acts by that judgement’.

1.5.2 Social action and social systems

Although he is critical of those who see action as a predictable and standardized response to external constraints, Blumer accepts that action is
to some degree structured and routinized. He states that ‘In most situations in which people act towards one another they have in advance a firm understanding of how to act and how other people will act’. However, such knowledge offers only general guidelines for conduct. It does not provide a precise and detailed recipe for action which is mechanically followed in every situation. Within these guidelines there is considerable room for manoeuvre, negotiation, mutual adjustment and interpretation.

Similarly, Blumer recognizes the existence of social institutions and admits that they place limits on human conduct, but even in situations where strict rules prevail, there is still considerable room for human initiative and creativity. Even when action appears particularly standardized and structured, this should not be taken as an indication that actors are merely responding to external forces. Blumer argues that, ‘The common repetitive behaviour of people in such situation should not mislead the student into believing that no process of interpretation is in play; on the contrary, even though fixed, the action of the participating people are constructed by them through a process of interpretation’. Thus standardized action is constructed by social action, not by social systems. Much of Blumer’s work has been concerned with developing an appropriate methodology for his view of human interaction.

1.6 Fred Davis

Davis (1975) conducted a research from an interactionsist perspective. It provides specific illustration for many of the general points made by interactionist. Haralambos and Holborn (1991) cited this research as under.

1.6.1 Physical handicap and social interaction

In an article entitled Deviance Disavowal: The Management of Strained Interaction by the Visibly Handicapped, Fred Davis examines interaction situations involving physically handicapped and ‘normal’ persons. Davis obtained his data from lengthy interviews with people who were blind, facially disfigured or crippled and confined to wheelchairs. He was concerned with interaction situations which lasted longer than a passing exchange but not long enough for close familiarity to develop. Such situations
would include a conversation with a fellow passenger, getting to know someone at work and socializing at a party. The handicapped person wishes to present him or herself as ‘someone who is merely different physically but not socially deviant’. Such people seek to achieve ease and naturalness in their interaction with others, since this will symbolize the fact that they have accepted their preferred definition of self, but their handicap poses a number of threats to the type of sociability they desire. This stems from the fact that they are defined as ‘different’, ‘odd’ and something other than normal by those who do not share their disability.

1.6.2 Threats to sociability

The first threat to sociability involves the possibility that others will become preoccupied with handicap. The norms of everyday, casual sociability require an individual to act as if the other were a whole person rather than expressing concern or interest in a particular aspect of his or her person. However, there is a danger that the visible handicap will become the focal point of the interaction. Davis’s respondents stated that the normal was unlikely to make explicit references to the handicap but it appeared to the ‘uppermost in his awareness’. They sensed the normal’s discomfort and felt it placed a strain on the interaction. In particular they noted’ confused and halting speech, the fixed stare elsewhere, the artificial levity, the compulsive loquaciousness, the awkward solemnity’. Such responses disrupted the smooth flow of interaction.

A second threat to sociability arises from the possibility that the handicap will lead to display of emotions which exceed acceptable limits. Thus normals may be openly shocked, disgusted, pitying or fearful. Such emotional display overstep what is usually considered appropriate and so place a strain on the interaction. Even if normals manage to contain their emotion, sociability may be further threatened by what Davis terms the ‘contradiction of attributes’. This involves an apparent contradiction between the normal attributes of handicapped people such as their job, interest and other aspects of their appearance and their handicap. This contrast often appears discordant to others and can result in remarks such as, ‘How strange that someone so pretty should be in a wheelchair’. According to Davis’s respondents, such remarks ‘almost invariably cast a pall on the interaction and embarrass the recovery of smooth social posture’.

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Finally, sociability may be threatened by uncertainty concerning the ability of handicapped persons to participate in particular activities. For example, normals are unsure whether a blind person should be invited to the theatre or a crippled asked to play a game of bowls. This uncertainty can place a strain on the interaction when handicapped people are invited to participate in such activities. If they refuse, the normal person will wonder, whether they are Simply polite or whatever their handicap actually present participation. Similarly, handicapped people wonder whether normals genuinely want their company or merely acting out of pity. Such uncertainties threaten to ruin the ease and smoothness of the interaction process.

1.7 Required Readings

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<td>George Ritzer</td>
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1.8 Self-Assessment Questions

Q.1 According to Mead, society must be understood as ‘a structure’ that emerges through an ongoing process of communicative act. Give good reasons for the support of this statement.

Q.2 According to Mead what is the importance of the concept of ‘I’ and ‘me’ in the development of self. Explain

Q.3 How the concept of ‘self’ develop through the games. Discuss with the reference of Mead work.

Q.4 According to Blumer what are the basic premises of symbolic interactionsism.

Q.5 Discuss the findings of Davis research in your own words.
UNIT NO. 13 & 14

PHENOMENOLOGY AND ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Symbolic interactionists accept the existence of social roles, but deny that these roles are fixed inflexible, or determined by the supposed 'needs' of the social system. Phenomenology and ethnomethodology represent a much more radical rejection of structural perspectives. They deny the existence of any sort of social structure. All of these perspectives argue that sociologists need to understand and interpret human behaviour and discover the meanings that lie behind it. Phenomenology and ethnomethodology claim that sociology can go no further than reaching an understanding of the meanings individuals attach to the world around them. These perspectives will now be examined in detail.

Phenomenology and ethnomethodology are related perspective which analysis society in terms of the attempts of members to create social order. Phenomenology is an understanding of the meanings employed by members of society in their everyday life. Or seeing things as they are without bothering their inner meanings. While the study of how people make sense of what other say and do in the course of day to day social interaction is called ethnomethodology. Ethnomethodology is concerned with the ethnomethods by means of which human beings sustain meaningful interchanges with one another. In these units we will study the work of different sociologists about these two perspectives of sociology.
1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying these units you will be able to:

1. Examine the perspective of “Phenomenology” and “Ethnomethodology”

2. Explain the importance of sense to know about the outside world.

3. Appreciate the contribution of Husserl and Schutz about phenomenology

4. Discuss the ideas of Garfinkel about ethnomethodology

1.3 EDMUND HUSSELR

Phenomenology was originally a philosophical perspective which was first developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and developed along more sociological lines by Alfred Schutz (1899-1959). Husserl wanted to develop a philosophy which presented human action in terms of the meanings of actors rather than as the product of external influences. Husserl argued that there is no knowledge objective reality out there but that each individual makes her or his own reality by categorising or sorting out their own experience. Thus one individual may explain a loss of job as inefficiency of worker, another may explain it as punishment and other still may explain just as bad luck.

Its emphasis is upon the internal workings of human mind and the way that human classify and make sense of the world around them. It is the study of the ways in which people directly experience every day life and imbue their activity with meaning. It is not concerned with casual explanation of human behaviour in the same way as other perspectives. Phenomenologists try to understand the meaning of phenomena or things, rather than explaining how they came into existence.
1.3.1 Making sense of sensory experience

According to phenomenologists, individuals only come into contact with the outside world through their senses, touch, smell, hearing, sight and taste. It is not possible to know about the outside world except through these senses. Simply possessing senses, though is not enough for a person to be able to make any sense out of the world. If human took their sense experiences at face value, they would be confronted by an unintelligible mass of impressions, of colours, lights, sounds, smells, feelings and tastes which are meaningless. In order to overcome this problem human begin to organize the world around them into phenomena; they classify their sense experiences into things which appear to share characteristics in common. For example, a distinction may be made between animate and inanimate objects. This distinction may be refined by dividing animate objects into mammals and non-mammals. Mammals may be divided into different species and species subdivided into different breeds. Thus humans have a series of shorthand ways of classifying and understanding the world external to their own consciousness. For example, a small white animal making a barking noise may be identified as a poodle.

Husserl did not believe that this process was in any sense objective; the classification of phenomena was entirely a product of the human mind, and could not be evaluated in terms of whether it was true or false. He did not deny the existence of physical objects beyond and outside the human mind, but he argued that since people could only come into contact with them through their senses, they could never be sure about their true nature. Thus, in trying to secure knowledge, humans had to 'bracket' reality and commonsense beliefs to put them inside brackets and forget about whether they were true or false.

Once they had done this, they could turn their attention to a phenomenological understanding of the world. In order to understand social life, he argued phenomenologists should study the way that humans placed the external world into categories by distinguishing particular phenomena. In doing so it would be possible to understand the meaning of a phenomenon by discovering its essence. What Husserl meant by this was that the researcher could find the distinguishing features (the essence), of a group of things (or phenomena), which humans classed together. Thus, for example,
might be found that a distinguishing feature - part of the essence of an aircraft, was that it could fly.

1.4 ALFRED SCHUTZ

The general approach adopted by phenomenology is a type of philosophy of knowledge, rather than a sociological perspective. Alfred Schutz was the first to try to explain how phenomenology could be applied to develop insights into the social world. Schutz’s main contribution was to insist that the way that humans classified and attached meaning to the outside world was not a purely individual process. He assumes at the outset that people encounter each other in an already constituted, meaningful, intersubjective life-world, which is the ‘paramount reality’ for human beings, and advocates the study of the way in which people experience this everyday life-world. The characteristic commonsense posture people take in this sphere Schutz call the natural attitude. The existence of others is taken for granted in everyday life since we assume a reciprocity of perspectives. Humans developed what he called ‘typification’ - the concepts which are attached to classes of things which are experienced. People orientate themselves using typifications.

Thus a ‘bank manager’, a ‘football match’, a ‘mountain’, and ‘a tree’, are examples of typifications. These typifications are not unique to each person, but are shared by members of a society. They are passed on to children through learning a language, reading books, or speaking to other people. By the use of typifications people are able to communicate with others on the basis of the assumption that they see the world in the same way. Gradually, a member of society builds up a stock of what Schutz calls ‘commonsense knowledge’, which is shared with other members of society and allows humans to live and communicate together. Schutz believes that such knowledge is essential to accomplish practical tasks in everyday life. For example, he describes the way in which a simple act such as posting a letter rests upon commonsense knowledge and the existence of shared typifications. The person writes the letter assumes that another person (a postman whom they may never have met) will be able to recognize the piece of paper with writing on it as a letter, and along with other postmen, will deliver it to the address on the envelope. People also assume that the recipient of the letter, again someone they might not have met, will have similar commonsense
knowledge to their own, and will therefore be able to understand the message, and react in an appropriate way.

Although Schutz stresses that knowledge is shared, he does not think that it is fixed and unchanging. Indeed, commonsense knowledge is constantly modified in the course of human interaction. Schutz acknowledges that each individual has a unique biography, and interprets and experiences the world in slightly different ways, but the existence of a stock of commonsense knowledge allows humans to understand, at least partly, each other's actions. In doing so, they convince themselves that there are regular and ordered patterns in the world, and to social life.

In engaging in such a scheme he seeks to apply the phenomenological insights of Husserl to the sociological insights of Weber. Schutz accepts that Weber was on the right track but that there are some problematic aspects of his conception of action as subjectively meaningful behaviour which require refinement.

First he questions Weber's idea that meaning of action is identical with the motive for action. It is perfectly possible to some extent that some of one's particular actions during the day are indeed meaningful such as habitual or affectual. They are meaningful because they make sense with the course of one's life experience. So most action, and not merely rational action, is in fact meaningful. Second, Schutz argues convincingly that Weber says little or nothing about the way in which we come to know the meaning endowed by others. This leads Schutz into a critique of Weber.

1.4.1 ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Ethnomethodology is a field of sociology, which investigates the functioning of commonsense knowledge and practical reasoning in social contexts. In contrast to perspectives that view human behaviour in terms of external casual factors or internalised motivations, ethnomethodology stresses the active, reasoned and knowledge character of human conduct.

Many of the concerns of ethnomethodology have reflected the type of approach developed by Schutz, however, did not carry out detailed research into social life, he merely speculated about the nature of society. In 1967
Harold Garfinkel first coined the term 'Ethnomethodology'. Roughly translated, Ethnomethodology means a study of the methods used by people. It is concerned with the methods used by people to construct for and give meaning to their social world. Two concepts used by the ethnomethodologists need to be introduced. The concepts are 'the documentary methods' and 'indexicality'. The documentary method is employed by all of us and involves the assumption that a given event or occasion can be made sense of by seeing it as just one example, or document of a general type. The concept of indexicality means that sense can only be made of any object or event by relating it back to its context, or the circumstances of its occurrence. For example the word 'five' makes sense as an answer to the question, 'What time is it'? But not as an answer to 'How many players are in a cricket team'?

1.4.2 Social order as a fiction

Ethnomethodologist follow Schutz in believing that there is no real social order, as other sociological perspectives assume. Social life appears orderly to members of society only because members actively engage in making sense of social life. Societies have regular and ordered patterns only because members perceive them in this way. Social order therefore becomes a convenient fiction; an appearance of order constructed by members of society. This appearance allows the social world to be described and explained, and so made knowledgeable, reasonable, understandable and accountable to its members. It is made accountable in the sense that members of society become able to provide descriptions and explanations of their own actions and of the society around them that are reasonable and acceptable to themselves and others. Thus in Atkinson's study, coroners were able to justify and explain their actions to themselves and others, in terms of the commonsense ways they went about reaching a verdict.

The point of Ethnomethodology according to Zimmerman and Weider is to explain 'how members of society go about the task of seeing, describing, and explaining order in the world in which they live'. Ethnomethodologists have therefore conducted investigations into techniques that are used by members to achieve the appearance of order.
1.5 Harold Garfinkel

Garfinkel, the founding in the tradition, seeks to direct empirical study at routine and commonplace activities of everyday life. He argues that their central characteristic is their reflexive character. By this he means that the way in which people act out and organize their social arrangements is identical with their procedures for giving accounts of those arrangements. To give an account is to reflect on behaviour and to seek to make it understandable or meaningful, to oneself and to others. Human beings are argued to do this on a continuous basis and, in so doing create and remake the social world. In Garfinkel’s analysis, ordinary understandings are the product of a circular process in which an event and its background are dynamically adjusted to one another to form a coherent ‘gestalt.’ Garfinkel described this process as the documentary method of interpretation and argued that it is an ever-present feature of the recognition of all objects and events.

Garfinkel argues that members employ the ‘documentary method’ to make sense and account for the social world, and to give it an appearance of order. This method consists of selecting certain aspects of the infinite number of features contained in any situation or context, of defining them in a particular way, and seeing them as evidence of an underlying pattern. The process is then reversed and particular instances of the underlying pattern are then used as evidence for the existence of the pattern. In Garfinkel’s words, the documentary method ‘consists of treating an actual appearance as “the document of”, as “pointing to “, as “standing on behalf of” a presupposed underlying pattern. Not only is the underlying pattern derived from its individual documentary evidences, but also the individual documentary evidences, in their turn, are interpreted on the basis of “what is known” about the underlying pattern. Each is used to elaborate the other. For example, in the case of Atkinson’s study of coroners, those deaths defined as suicide were seen as such by reference to an underlying pattern. This pattern is the coroner’s commonsense theory of suicide. However, at the same time, those deaths defined as suicide were seen as evidence for the existence of the underlying pattern. In this way particular instance of the pattern itself are mutually reinforcing and are used to elaborate each other. Thus the documentary method can be seen as ‘reflexive’. The particular instance is seen as a reflection of the underlying pattern and vice versa.
UNIT NO. 15 & 16

FEMINIST THEORIES

1.1 INTRODUCTION

These units begin with some definitions of feminism. Feminism has a history as long as women’s subordination. Sociological theory traditionally holds the view that gender differentiation is inevitable and that there is no such thing as gender inequality. Social theories of gender arise largely from the practical concerns of women’s movement rather than from attempts to complete theoretical projects in sociology. These units review contemporary contribution to feminism.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying these units you will be able to:

1. Understand traditional gender roles.

2. Compare and contrast different feminist theories

3. Identify the central elements of a contemporary sociological theory of gender.

1.3 WHAT IS FEMISM

During the first year of the new women’s movement one could hear the term feminism used very narrowly as a criticism for those in the movement, who-according to their opponents did not put enough emphasis on the class struggle in contrast to the gender conflict. There are several reasons for this disapproval. Malcolm Waters tried to explain it as:
"One of the most extraordinary characteristics of contemporary social theory is that, while it consistently attempts to make general statements about human society, it overlooks its most general and universal fact. This is the fact of universal gender difference and inequality. It is perhaps the most starting evidence of the effectiveness of patriarchal domination that the social science, which specialize in questions to do with human differentiation and inequality has remained blind to, or possibly conspired in the concealment of this fact. While every other aspect of society has been theorized at a social level, gender has traditionally been assumed to be a natural phenomenon which did not need to be explained, which could be conceptualised as sex" (Waters 1994:250).

The origins of feminist theory lie largely outside sociology. Before we explain feminist theory here are some definitions of the discipline.

Richard Evans (1977) defines feminism as ‘the doctrine of equal rights for women, based on the theory of the equality of the sexes’. Gerda Lerner defines feminism as ‘any struggle designed to elevate their (women’s) status, socially, politically, economically and in respect to their self-concepts’ (1971:236). David Bouchier (1983) states that feminism includes any form of opposition to any form of social, personal or economic discrimination, which women suffer because of their sex. Janet Radcliffe Richards supports a very broad definition of feminism, not limited to the autonomous women’s movement, as a very general belief that society is unjust to women. In the introduction to a book The New Women’s Movement, Drude Dahlerup (1986) gave a broad definition of feminism as an ideology whose basic goal is to remove the discrimination and degradation of women and to break down the male dominance of society. She further explains that feminism is an ideology and a doctrine. The women’s movement comprises the conscious, collective activities of women fighting for feminist goals. Nancy F. Cott (1987) defines feminism as an ideology having three essential features: (1) opposition to all forms of stratification based on gender, (2) belief that biology does not consign females to inferior status, and (3) a sense of common experience and purpose among women to direct their efforts to bring about change.
1.3.1 FEMINISM: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

On July 19, 1848, a group of women gathered in Seneca Falls, a village in upstate New York, to discuss the social, civil, and religious rights of women. The group issued a “Declaration of Sentiments”, modelled on the Declaration of Independence, proclaiming that “all men and women are created equal”. Thus was born what was known throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century as the “women movement”. Although there were many factions and conflicting points of views within the women movement, two somewhat contradictory positions were widely shared: (1) there was no difference between man and woman and (2) woman possessed a superior moral nature from which the whole of society stood to gain. The tension between these two positions grew as time passed. Cott (1987) in her historical study of American feminism summed up the situation as:

“By the close of the century the spectrum of ideology in the women movement had a see-saw quality: at one end, the intention to eliminate sex-specific limitations; at the other, the desire to recognize rather than quash the qualities and habits called female, to protect the interests women already had defined as theirs and give those much greater public scope.”

However, underlying ideological ambiguities were submerged as the women movement gave rise to the suffragette movement, decided to obtain the right of vote for all American women. At that time, it was bitterly opposed by many men (and some women), who felt that giving women the right of vote would destroy an effective and orderly way of life. After all, voting requires a certain degree of rationality and calculation, and women were believed to be deficient in this department. It was not unit 1920 and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment that women’s constitutional right to full participation in national, state, and local elections were formally guaranteed. The passage of this constitutional amendment came only after intense and sustained efforts by members of the women’s suffrage movement.

Second-wave feminism simply indicates a new impetus to this movement which has experienced period of bloom, strength, and visibility alternating with period of more quite dogged struggle to better women’s position in a male dominated society.
The women’s movement as a collective activity by women to better women’s position and change the male dominance of society started in the USA in the 1840s, in England in the 1850s, in France and Germany in the 1860s. Though there are some revolts by women in earlier times, for instance, during the French Revolution or the Renaissance. It is quite possible that even before that all male dominated cultures have experienced some kind of revolt by women.

Nighat S. Khan (1991) in a review ‘theories of feminism’ wrote that feminism is not a new struggle, nor it is a new ideology. Over the centuries and all over the world, including what is now Pakistan, women and men have been taking stands and struggling against the oppression of women. This struggle intensified over the last two hundred years when it manifested itself as the struggle for the right to education and employment; the right to own property; the right to vote; the right to enter parliament; the right to birth control; the right to divorce, etc.

Alice Rossi (1973) the US sociologist, identifies three peaks of feminist political activity and public visibility in US history: the first from the 1840s to the 1860s, starting with Seneca Falls; the second, from 1900 to the passage of the suffrage Amendment in the 1920s; and the third, from the 1960s onwards.

1.4 THEORIES OF GENDER DIFFERENCE

Although we come into this world with the biological equipment of a male or female, these physical organs do not determine what we shall be like as a male or female. Whether or not we defer to members of the opposite sex is not an automatic result of our particular sexual equipment but is due to what we learn is proper for us because of the particular biological differences we possess. This learning process is called sex role socialization. Our gender extends into almost every area of our lives, even into situations for which it may be quite irrelevant. Social theories of gender arise largely from the practical concerns of women’s movement rather than from attempts to complete theoretical projects in sociology-gender theory is largely feminist theory. Unlike other ideologies, feminism does not drive its theoretical or conceptual base from any single theoretical formulation. However, functionalists maintain that gender differentiation has contributed to overall
social stability. Sociologist Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales (1955) argue that in order to function more efficiently the family requires two adults who will specialize in particular roles. The “instrumental role” which is usually taken by the father and the “expressive role” which is usually taken by the mother. For Parson, the fat of instrumental-expressive differentiation is not problematic. However, there remains the difficulty of why, on his assumption, men should universally be the instrumental leader and women the expressive leaders. His explanation is biological. However Parson is not content to let the matter rest at the level of biology. He moves on to analyse the socialization processes, which produce gender differences. Socialization theories of gender often seem to suggest that fairly permanent gendered way of life may be put in place. These theories say nothing about the strains placed on modern women who want to play an instrumental role or on men would prefer to play an expressive one. However, a functionalist analysis does offer a plausible explanation of how traditional gender roles and sexual inequalities arose in the first place. Theories of biological explanation and cultural feminism are best example of gender differences.

1.5 THEORIES OF GENDER INEQUALITY

The most extreme display of social inequality is power systematically used to destroy other people. Four themes characterize the theories of gender inequality. First, men and women are situated in a society unequally, men possess more power and resources than women. Man has relatively greater access to wealth, power and prestige. He can earn more money, control more of his environment, and experience a range of career and other opportunities that are beyond the reach of most women. Many other aspects of daily life reveal and reinforce the inequality of the sexes. Most obvious are the names by which people are known and the title by which they address each other. A married woman replaces her last name with that of her husband, rather than the other way around. Married or not a man is known only as Mr., but until recently a woman had to be known as either Miss or Mrs-a public indication of whether or not she was already a man’s property.

Second, this inequality is based on the structure of the society, which places males in controlling position not from any biological or personality differences between women and men. Modern theorists argue that men can enjoy superior status only if women have inferior status, and the existing
gender role patterns allow them to maintain their political, social and economic privileges. It means that the dominant group benefits from the existing arrangement and has little motivation to change them. Since the cultural arrangements of any society always reflect the interests of the dominant group, gender roles continue to reinforce the pattern of male dominance.

Third, it is claimed that women are situationally less empowered than men to realize the need they share with men for self-actualisation. Studies show that up to 96 percent of all interruptions in cross-sex conversations are initiated by men. Men are more likely than women to change topics chosen by members of the opposite sex, and to validate their own contributions.

Fourth, all inequality theories assume that both women and men will respond fairly easily to more democratic social structure and situation. In other words, they assert that it is possible to change the situation. In this regard theories of gender inequality contrast with the theory of gender differences. For the explanation of gender inequality please study Liberal feminism and Marxian feminism.

1.6 THEORIES OF OPPRESSION

Sociologists are more interesting in power especially the means by which more powerful groups oppress groups with less power. Around the world, gender is universal basis for sorting people into groups, with men the group in power, and the group that has instituted practices to keep women subservient to them. All theories of gender oppression describe women’s situation as the consequence of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have concrete interest in oppressing women. Many people find it difficulty to conceive women as a subordinate and oppressed group. But there are plenty of evidences, which show the acceptance of the oppression, for example, Chinese practice of binding the feet of women, the Indian practice of sati and female circumcision in many parts of Africa. Women’s situation, for theories of gender oppression, is centrally that of being used, controlled, subjugated, and oppressed by men. This pattern of oppression is incorporated in patriarchy. One of the first treatments of gender domination comes in the work of Maine. Maine (1963) introduces the term patriarchy. He argues that prior to the institutionalisation of modern
law, society was constituted by families which were universally patriarchal in character. In this system women could be disciplined and governed by their husbands without the hindrance of legal or state protection. In most theories of oppression, gender differences and gender inequalities are by-products of patriarchy. There are three major variants of oppression theory: psychoanalytic feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism.

1.7 Required Reading

| George Ritzer | “Sociological Theory” p. 436-474 |

1.8 Self-Assessment Questions.

Q.1 Find out the origin of feminism.

Q.2 Why sociologist did not give due importance to feminism in the first place?

Q.3 Gender inequality is a universal phenomena. Why does this gender inequality always take the form of masculine domination. Explain

Q.4 What are the main features of theory of gender oppression and theory of gender differences?
Unit 17 & 18

Recent Development in Sociological Theory
UNIT NO. 17 & 18

RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In these units we will deal with the development, which occur about the issue of the micro-macro linkage. In European sociological theory this development is the rise in interest in the relationship between agency and structure and at parallel in American sociology it is micro-macro connection.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying these units you will be able to:

1. Identify the most important development in recent sociological theory.

2. Identify the similarities and differences between American micro-macro literature and the European work on agency and structure.

1.3 MICRO-MACRO INTEGRATION

Before we study the development in this field it would be appropriate to define micro and macro in sociological perspective. ‘Micro’ means small. Micro sociology stress study of small groups and often involves the detailed study of what people say, do, and think moment by moment as they go about their daily lives. This level research includes studies like how teacher’s expectations can affect a student’s academic performance or how people feel after divorce. But when we study big group and societies and view life at this level, this approach is termed as macro-sociology. Durkheim’s cross-cultural study of suicide is an example of macro-level research. At this level sociologist direct their attention to the interplay between economic, political or religious processes in a society. The recent study of population patterns of Islamic countries comes under this. Clearly the microsociological and
macrosociological level are not independent of one another. The individual behaviour of fertility surely affects the overall pattern of the population of the region. Similarly individuals are influenced at the macro level by overall policy of larger structure. For example, the government level decision (macro level) of one child family in China influences the individual’s (micro) behaviour. Even Durkheim was concerned with the effect of macro-level social facts on individuals and individual behaviour (for example, suicide).

On the micro extreme side we can point to a good portion of symbolic interactionism. Blumer (1969) concerned with micro level phenomena and argued that human being act toward things on the basis of meaning which things have for them and the meaning of such thing is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. Exchange theory is also an example of micro level analysis. Homans concentrates his analysis at the level of two-person interaction. Then there is ethnomethodology and the concern for the everyday practices of actors. Garfinkel proposed the use of folk or people’s own methods in sociology. As he said, “I use the term “ethnomethodology” to refer to the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expression and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life” (1967:11). Ethnomethodology seeks to reveal the underlying unspoken, unmentionable social realities over which actors gloss when they speak to one another.

While micro-macro extremism has characterized much of twentieth-century sociological theory, however the focus of the discipline had shifted by the middle of the twentieth century. Sociologist, Robert Merton made an important contribution to the discipline and proposed a theory that is one of the most frequently cited explanations of deviant behaviour. He noted different ways in which people attempt to achieve success in life. For example, Merton’s explanation of crime is based on individual behaviour-influenced by society’s approved goals and means-yet it has wider applications. It helps to account for the high crime rates among the nation’s poor, who may see no hope of advancing themselves through traditional road to success. So they accept the goal of pursuing material wealth but use illegal means to do so, including robbery, burglary, and extortion. Merton also emphasized that sociology should strive to bring together the macro-level and micro-level approaches to the study of society. However it has been possible mainly in the 1980s, largely in American sociology. The focus is on the
integration (or synthesis, linkage) of micro and macro theories and/or levels of social analysis instead of extremism of micro-macro analysis.

There are major strands of work on micro-macro integration. Some theorists focus on the integrating micro and macro theories, while other are concerned with developing a theory that deals with the linkage between micro and macro levels of social analysis. In addition, there are substantial differences within the groups working toward theoretical integration and integration of levels of social analysis. Examples of different work on this synthesis are given in Ritzer’s book such as George Ritzer: integrated sociological Pradigm Jeffrey Alexander multidimensional sociology, Norbert Wiley. Level of analysis and James Coleman: micro to macro model. It is required from you to study all these perspective in these units.

1.4 AGENCY STRUCTURE INTEGRATION

As was pointed out earlier, paralleling the growth in interest in American sociological theory in the micro-macro issue has been an increase in interest among European theorists in the relationship between agency and structure.

Before we study the development in the field here is the definition of agency and structure in sociological perspective. According to Waters agency lies within the arena of human subjectivity. It concerns what happens in the consciousness when an individual undertakes to act in the social world. It includes the meaning that subjects give to their behaviour and their reasons or motives for acting. The topic of agency also extends to the way in which meanings are communicated within interaction and to the ways in which stable intersubjective social worlds are thus established. He explains it by giving an example as, “If you ask some one why they do something, why they engage in a particular piece of social behaviour, they will usually answer by giving you a reason. So a politician runs for office because he she wants to serve the public; a man marries because he is in love; a student puts extra work in order to achieve a better grade or mark. These reasons capture the idea of agency, the idea that people set goals for themselves and act in relation to these goals in an intentional way. In acting in relation to goal they give meaning to their behaviour make sense to them and, when they give explicit reasons or accounts, their behaviour can also make sense to people.
The process of acting in relation to a set of meanings, reasons or intensions is known as agency.

Social structure refers to any relatively stable pattern of social behaviour. In sociology, it is a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. Social structure gives our lives shape, whether it is in families, the workplace, or the college classroom.

So Agency generally refers to micro-level, individual human actors, while structure usually refers to large-scale social structure. But when we look closely at the micro-macro and agency-structure schemas, we find that there are substantial differences between them. Since American theorists tend to focus on the micro-macro linkage and European on the relationship between agency and structure, there are substantial differences between the consensuses in the United States and Europe.

Examples of different work on this synthesis are given in Ritzer's book such as Anthony Gidens's structuration theory, Margaret Archer's culture and agency, Pierre Bourdieu's habitues and field Jurgen Habermas's colonization of the life-world. You have to study all these in these units.

1.5 Required Reading

| George Ritzer | "Sociological Theory" p. 489-561 |

1.6 self-Assessment Questions

Q.1
Discuss the recent development in sociological theories.

Q.2
What do you understand by micro-macro integration? Give at least two examples of sociological work to elaborate your answer.

Q.3
What is agency and structure? How agency-structure integration is different from micro macro integration?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Haralambos, Michael and Martin Holborn (1991) *Sociology Themes and Perspectives* London: Collins Educational


