

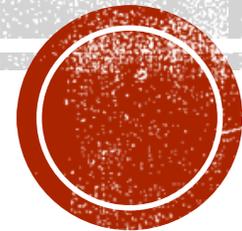
SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES

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INDIVIDUALISTIC EXPLANATION

- An explanation which tries to explain a situation solely in terms of the individual or persons involved in it. There is no attempt to understand the situation in terms of wider social forces.



SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

- Explanations which attempt to explain social behaviour in terms of wider social forces, processes and structures, using evidence from objective research to support these explanations.



SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS OF

- **INCREASE IN DIVORCE RATE :**

- Divorce laws have changed.
- Attitudes to divorce have changed.
- Value of marriage has changed.
- Changing role of women in society.
- Economic independence of women through work or benefits.

- **POVERTY :**

- Low pay. •
- Low benefit levels. •
- Unemployment. •
- Unfair tax laws which benefit the rich.



SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES

- **Consensus approaches-** Functionalism which makes up the bulk of these theories.
- Key contributors-
- Emile Durkheim Suicide, Deviance, Religion
- Talcott Parsons Family Roles
- Robert Merton Deviance
- **Conflict approaches-** These include Marxism and neo-Marxism.



CONSENSUS APPROACHES

- **Key features:**
- Assumption that there is a certain pattern to behaviour.
- Explain behaviour through notion of social structure.
- Emphasise:- Integration Harmony Stability Continuity.
- Tend to use biological or mechanical analogies to explain theories.
- Functional prerequisites (Functionalism)
- Value consensus (Functionalism)



CONSENSUS APPROACHES- STRENGTH&WEAKNESS

- **Strengths:**

- Look at society as a whole.
- Refer to social structure when analyzing social behaviour.
- Good at explaining persistence of social phenomena.

- **Weaknesses:**

- Ignores individual or group interaction.
- Finds it difficult to explain conflict and change.
- Makes assumptions about value consensus



CONFLICT APPROACHES

- Key Contributors

- Karl Marx Capitalism Class conflict
- Gramsci Capitalism Hegemony
- Goldthorpe Class conflict



CONFLICT APPROACHES

- **Key features:**
- Sees society as a structured whole.
- Structure of society is based on inequality of distribution or production. •
- Struggle for power between different groups in society.
- Society is therefore characterised by conflict.
- Within Marxism ownership and relations of production are the cause of inequality and oppression.
- Within Marxism, society is made up of infrastructure and superstructure. • In other conflict perspectives, inequality of power and wealth may arise from differences in such things as education. This produces conflict in society.



CONFLICT APPROACHES

- **Strengths:**

- Looks at society as a whole.
- Recognizes power interests of different groups.
- Good at explaining conflict and change.

- **Weaknesses:**

- Finds it difficult to explain persistence of certain phenomena.
- Individual and small group interaction plays little part in these types of explanations



COMPARING CONSENSUS & CONFLICT APPROACHES

- **Consensus theorists** view society as being made up of social institutions which are all dependent on each other and are important for maintaining order in society as a whole. **Conflict theorists** (especially Marxists) tend to view society as having an infrastructure, and a superstructure (law, religion, etc.).
- **Conflict theorists** do acknowledge the interdependence of social institutions but do not necessarily see relations between institutions as harmonious, whereas **Consensus** theorist stress the necessity for co-operation and harmony between social institutions.



- **Consensus** theorists consider there to be a functional unity between the different social institutions, but **Conflict** theorists highlight conflict and contradictions.
- **Consensus** theorists argue that there is a 'value consensus' which holds social institutions and society together. In other words, they think there is general agreement in society about which things are important and how things should be done. The **Conflict** theorists disagree with this and argue that values are often imposed by powerful groups in society, even though everyone may not agree with these values.



- Within **Consensus approach**, Functionalists explain everything in terms of the function it performs in society especially the way in which it keeps the social system as a whole in good order. **Conflict** theorists are more interested in explaining society in terms of causes and development. For this reason, Conflict theory is seen as more dynamic.
- In general, **Consensus approach** emphasises harmony, integration and stability whereas **Conflict approach** puts more stress on conflict, struggle and change.

