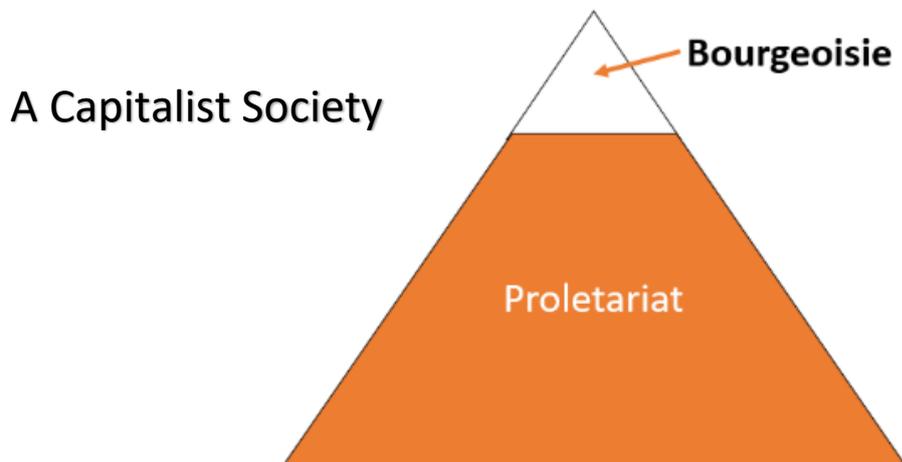


Sociological Perspectives

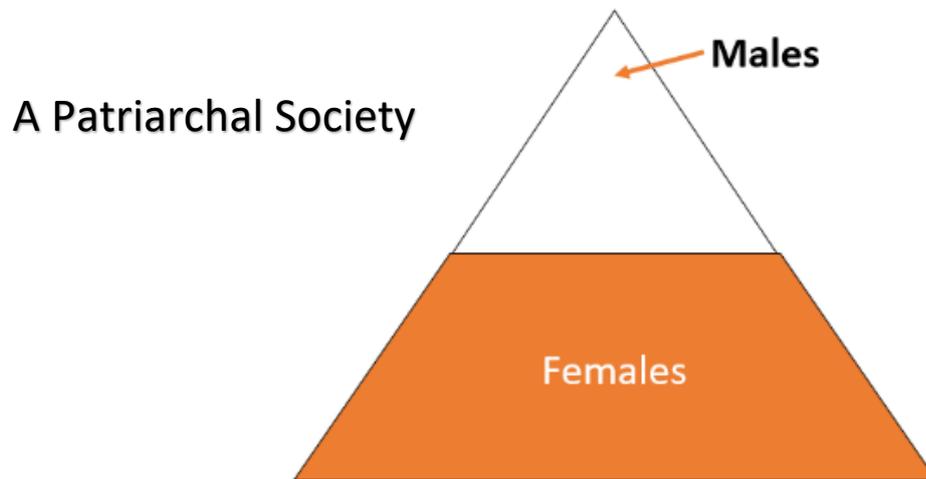
Structuralist Perspectives: Marxism, Functionalism and Feminism

1. Marxism (Conflict Structuralism)



- Society is based on the re-production of **Capitalism**. The **Ruling Class** (Bourgeoisie/ Capitalists) control the Capitalist Society as they are the **owners of the means of production** i.e. Land, technology and resources.
- The Ruling Class therefore control Society's financial **infrastructure** (Economy, Workforce) and thus get to control society's **superstructure** (Education, Arts, Legal System, Political System, Values etc.)
- The maintenance of Capitalism leads to (and is dependent upon), the **exploitation of the Working Class** (the Proletariat) who can only survive by selling the one thing they have of worth—their **labour power** (in exchange for a wage).
- Instead of paying the Working Class wages for the full value of their labour, the Ruling Class force the W/C to over-produce—this is known as **surplus value** - the profit from this extra production goes straight to the Ruling Class.
- Here then, capitalism creates a **class conflict** - a conflict of interests. This has the potential to upset the capitalist society as the Working Class could revolt—not good news for the Ruling Class who want to maintain capitalism.
- To prevent rebellion, and to ensure capitalism continues, the Ruling Class must ensure that the Working Class are socialised to accept that work is normal and natural, and also that it is actually beneficial to them i.e. that capitalism provides the best life for everyone.
- The Ruling Class must pass on their **dominant ideology** to the Working Class as well as create a **false class consciousness** amongst them.
- Dominant ideology & false class consciousness are spread throughout the Working Class through **ideological state apparatus (I.S.A)** such as education, the family, and Religion, as well as, **repressive state apparatus (R.S.A)** such as the Criminal Justice System and the Military.

2. Feminism (Conflict Structuralism)



Liberal Feminism

- Liberal Feminists believe that the main causes of gender inequality are ignorance and socialisation. They do not believe that social institutions are inherently patriarchal.
- Within the family, evidence shows men are doing a greater share of domestic labour, decision making is becoming more equal and that male and female children are socialised in a much more similar manner with similar aspirations.
- Liberal Feminists do not seek revolutionary changes: they want changes to take place within the existing structure. The creation of equal opportunities is the main aim of liberal feminists – e.g. the **Sex Discrimination Act** and the **Equal Pay Act**.

Marxist Feminism

- The traditional **nuclear family** only came about with capitalism, and the traditional female role of housewife supports capitalism – thus women are double oppressed through the nuclear family and capitalist system. Women's oppression within the nuclear family supports capitalism in at least three ways:
 1. **Women reproduce the labour force** – through their unpaid domestic labour, by socialising the next generation of workers and servicing the current workers (their husbands!)
 2. **Women absorb anger** – women are just absorbing the anger of the Working Class, who are exploited and who should be directing that anger towards the Ruling Class. **Fran Ansley (1972)** male partners are inevitably frustrated by the exploitation they experience at work and women are the victims of this, including domestic violence.
 3. **Women are a 'reserve army of cheap labour'**

Radical Feminism

- Radical Feminists see society and its institutions as **patriarchal** – most of which are dominated and ruled by men – men are the Ruling Class and women the Working Class. Gender inequalities are the result of the oppression of women by men, and it is primarily men who have benefited from the subordination of women. Women are an oppressed group.

- Against Liberal Feminists they argue that paid work has not been ‘liberating’. Instead women have acquired the ‘dual burden’ of paid work and unpaid housework and the family remains patriarchal – men benefit from women’s paid earnings and their domestic labour.
- Some Radical Feminists go further arguing that women suffer from the ‘**triple shift**’ where they have to do paid work, domestic work and ‘**emotion work**’ – being expected to take on the emotional burden of caring for children.
- Rape, violence and pornography are also methods through which men have secured and maintained their power over women. (Andrea Dworkin, 1981).

3. Functionalism (Consensus Structuralism)

Durkheim’s Functionalism

1. Society shapes the Individual

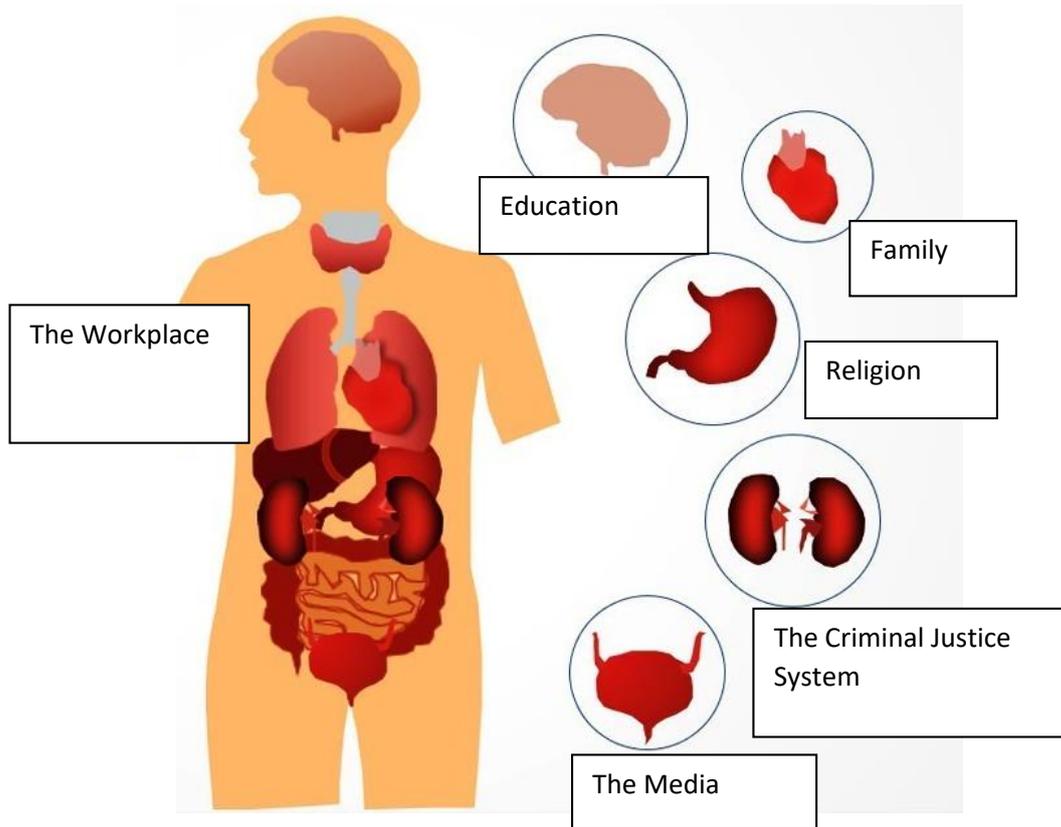
2. Social solidarity socialisation and anomie

- Durkheim believed that too much freedom was bad for the individual –when there is no clear guidance about what’s right and wrong, individuals suffer from a sense of uncertainty and confusion about their place in world, not knowing what they should be doing, a condition Durkheim called **anomie**.
- Durkheim argued that societies needed to create a sense of **social solidarity** – which is making individuals feel as if they part of something bigger and teaching them the standards of acceptable behaviour. At one level this is achieved through the family and through religion. Durkheim was concerned that religion was fading, and that modern societies faced a **crisis of anomie**.
- He also theorised that new institutions such as schools, work places and voluntary organisations would eventually provide the **social glue** which would make people feel like they belonged.

The Organic Analogy

Durkheim saw society as working like a human body, arguing that institutions in society were like organs in the body – each performing specific functions which were necessary to the maintenance of the whole. **Parsons** argued that parts of society should be understood in terms of what they contribute to the maintenance of the whole.

The body	Institutions
Each Organ has a unique function	Institutions have a unique function
All the bits essentially work together harmoniously	All institutions work together harmoniously
Organs are interdependent	Organs are interdependent
Has an identifiable boundary	Has an identifiable boundary
The sum is greater than its parts	The sum is greater than its parts.
Normal: healthy	Normal: low rates social problems.



Social Action Perspective:

4. Interactionism

Max Weber: Verstehen and Social Change

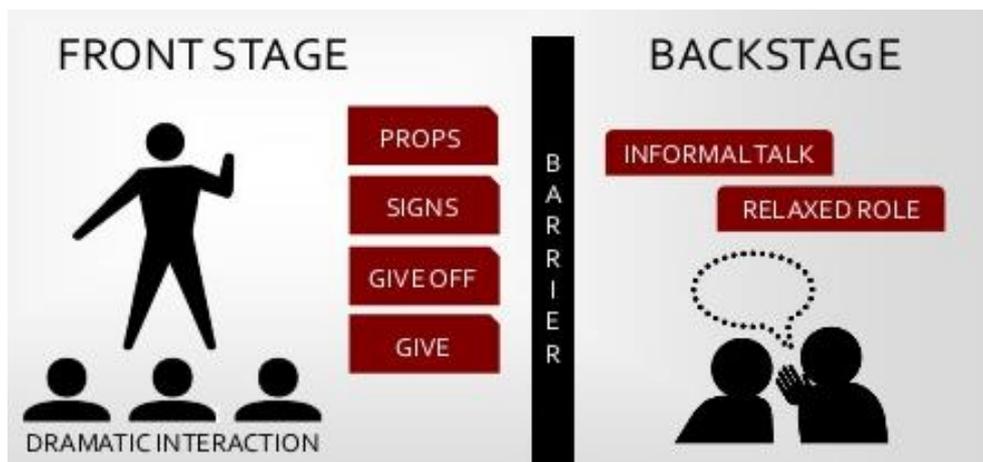
- Observation alone is not enough to understand human action; we need empathetic understanding. Gaining **Verstehen** is the main point of Sociology.
- Understanding individual motives is crucial for understanding changes to the social structure.

Symbolic Interactionism (Cooley and Mead)

- People's **self-concepts** are based on their understanding of how others perceive them (**the looking glass self**).
- We 'are constantly taking on the role of the other – thinking about how people see us and reacting accordingly, this is very much an active, conscious process.
- Each of us has an idea in the back of our minds of **the generalised other** – which is basically society – what society expects of us, which consists of different norms and values associated with different roles in society.
- These social roles are not specific or fixed; they can be interpreted in various different ways.

Impression Management Theory (Goffman)

- People are actors on a **social stage** who actively create an impression of themselves (our **social identity**)
- To create this front, we manipulate the setting in which we perform, our appearance and our manner.
- Impression management involves projecting an **idealised image** of ourselves.
- In addition to the front-stage aspect of our lives, we also have back-stage areas where we can drop our front and be more relaxed, closer to our **true-selves**.



Labelling Theory (Becker)

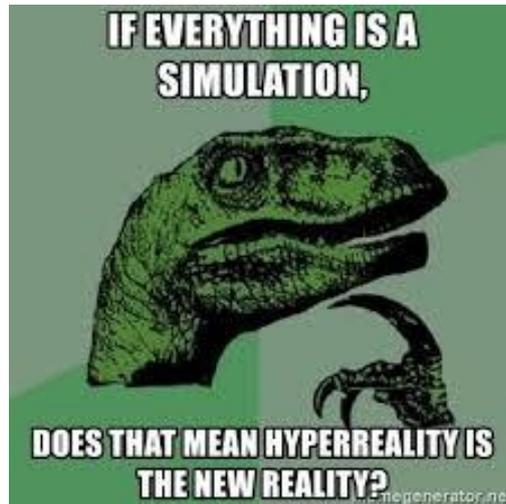
- Focuses on how the definitions (meanings) people impose on situations or on other people can have real consequences (even if those definitions are not based in reality).
- People in power generally have more ability to impose their definitions on situations than the powerless.
- We still need to understand where people are located in the power-structure of society to fully understand the process of labelling and identity construction.

'Other' Perspective:

5. Postmodernism

- Postmodernists claim that the classic social thinkers took their inspiration from the idea that history has a shape – it 'goes somewhere' and is progressive. **Jean Francois Lyotard** argues that this idea has now collapsed and there are no longer any **metanarratives**.
- The postmodern world is not destined, as **Marx** hoped, to be a harmonious socialist one, and thus Marxism (along with **Functionalism** and **Feminism**) and its promise of a better future are no longer relevant to the more complex and less predictable post-modern age.

- For **Jean Baudrillard (1929 – 2007)**, the post-modern age is a world where people respond to media images rather than to real persons or places. Thus when Diana, princess of Wales, died in 1997, there was an enormous outpouring of grief all over the world. But were people mourning a real person? Princes Diana existed for most people only through the mass media, and her death was presented like an event in a soap opera rather than an event in real life. Separating out reality from representation has become impossible when all that exists is **hyperreality** – the mixing of the two.



- **Zygmunt Bauman (1992)** suggests the social world has moved rapidly in a postmodern direction. The enormous growth and spread of the mass media, new information technologies, the more fluid movement of people across the world and the development of multicultural societies – all of these mean that we no longer live in a modern world, but in a postmodern world. However, on this view there is no compelling reason to think that sociology cannot describe, understand and explain the emerging postmodern world.
- Sociology successfully analysed the modern world of **capitalism, industrialisation, and nation states**. But it is no longer capable of dealing with the **de-centred, pluralistic, media-saturated, globalising postmodern** world. In short, we need a postmodern sociology for a postmodern world.

