Review Article

Review of Sociological Theories: A Guide to Agricultural Extension Professionals

[1]Udemezue, J.C.* and [2]Odia, F.N.

[1]National Root Crops Research Institute Umudike, PMB, 7006 Umuahia Abia State, Nigeria
[2]Deparment of Agriculture and Bio-Environmental Engineering Technology, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi Uku

*Corresponding author: **Udemezue, J.C.**

National Root Crops Research Institute Umudike, PMB, 7006 Umuahia Abia State, Nigeria

Abstract

Change is the law of nature; what is today shall be different from what it would be tomorrow because social structure is in a state of flux. Things we see today may not be the same things we see tomorrow and this could be as a result of social change. In the light of this, Sociology was developed to study and understand the changes that occurred in a society as a result of changes in the society. In the course of this research, this paper lays its effort on agricultural sociology which is an offshoot of rural sociology that brings about community development. Agricultural sociology is the application of sociology to the agricultural profession. As the majorities of those who are involved in agriculture live and work in the rural areas, agricultural sociology heavenly relies on the utilization of rural sociological concepts. Therefore, it is the scientific study of the social lives of people who are engaged in the agricultural occupation. A sociological theory on the other hand, is a set of ideas that provides an explanation of human behaviors in a society. Theories are selective in terms of their priorities, perspectives and the ways they assumed as important. As a matter of this, they provide an imaginary view of reality. The theories can be grouped together according to a variety of criteria, but the most important of these is the separation between Structural and Social action theories. Therefore, sociologists study social events, interactions, patterns, and develop a theory as to explain why things work as they do. According to sociologists, a theory is a way to give different interpretations of the aspects of social interactions to create a testable proposition, called hypothesis. Therefore, Sociological theories are based on the explanation of social occurrences such as protest and rallies in which society can express their grievances. In view of this, this paper reviewed the followings: the concept of sociology, importance of rural sociology in Nigeria, theorists and their contributions, sociological theories and their limitations.

Keywords: rural farmers, sociology, agriculture, theories and limitations.

Introduction

Sociology was developed to study and understand the changes that occurred in a society as a result of Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of the earliest sociologists thought that the roles of societies and individuals in a society could be studied using the same scientific approaches applied in the natural sciences, while others assumed that it was impossible to predict human behavior scientifically, others are still debating the value of such predictions and these lead to various arguments in sociology as a discipline.

Sociologists have defined sociology in many ways. Auguste Comte (1789-1857) who is the father of sociology coined the field of the study from two words – (1) The Greek "Logos" meaning word, speech, reasoning or computation, and (2) Latin "socius" meaning companion. "Logus" indicates scientific study; for example, bio-means science of life, geology- science of earth, anthropology-science of man, sociology will therefore mean the study or theory of companions, concerned with people's relationship and interaction with one and another. The word sociology was remembered by Auguste Comte in 1837 but from that time till now, a number of specialties have emerged from the field. Sociology extends in scope to deal with such institutions, conditions and constraints as family life, population, crime, community life, poverty, deviant behaviour among others. Furthermore, there are special sociological aspects of the

economic, political, religious, educational institutions and other activities. The study of these by sociologists has given rise to specialties like sociology of education, political sociology, agricultural sociology, economic sociology among others. However, these branches provide the intellectual tools or instruments for the study of rural sociology (Mundi, 2008). In the course of this research, this paper lays its effort on agricultural sociology which is an offshoot of rural sociology that brings about community development in totality. These lead us to the definition of agricultural and rural sociology as follows:

Agricultural Sociology is the application of sociology to the agricultural profession. As the majorities of those who are involved in agriculture live and work in the rural areas, agricultural sociology heavenly relies on the utilization of rural sociological concepts. It is the scientific study of the social lives of people who are engaged in the agricultural occupation.

Rural sociology is a branch of sociology which deals mainly with the study of social and cultural factors affecting the lives of those in rural or agrarian communities. Rural sociology as a science is the study and measurement of recurring phenomena in order to discover the principles by which these phenomena operate. An example of the phenomena which rural sociology studies, includes rural man's reciprocal interaction with other rural people. That is, behaviours and relationship not within an individual but between individuals. Rural Sociology is interested in the farmers' participation and their families in the wider systems of social relationships viz: community, mosque/church, local government, state and the nation. It is also interested in a determining those factors which influence clientele (farmers) decisions and actions, the effect of culture on the acceptance and rejection of innovations (improved technologies), their reactions to social and political changes in the society and the methods by which they adapt to these changes.

According to Mundi (2008), the importance of rural sociology in community is as follows:
- Exposes the characteristics and problems of ruralites: It exposes the main characteristics and problems of rural areas and this enables us to interact with them.
- Provides direct change program: Rural Sociology provides a change program designed to meet the needs of the rural man. The change program should be a direct one such as Governmental Rural Development Programs (GRDP) containing relevant information needs about rural people.
- Provides feedback to the agricultural agencies on the progress made so far and the modifications needed in their change program.
- Acts as a change agent interaction with rural people: Interaction of any change agent with rural people with sociological knowledge on leadership, power, roles, norms, culture, family organization etc, enables him perform his job/work more effectively because of experience and understanding acquired from them.
- Develops greater understanding: The point underlying the study of rural sociology is to develop greater understanding of the behaviour of rural people and rural society.
- Equips students with tools of understanding: It equips students with tools of understanding to enable them analyze behaviour of rural people in their relationship with others in rural society. It helps an individual understand himself and his own social nature and his relation to people in the society.
- Helps to develop a scientific attitude: Rural sociology helps to develop the scientific attitude of thinking critically and objectively with precision. This attitude is useful for future occupation.
- Provides professional training for a future career as a rural sociologist: Rural sociology can provide the beginners the required training for a future career as a rural sociologist. For example, (a) as a teacher or researcher following academic interest in the field and (b) as a consultant of change and rural analyst in rural community development.
- The teaching of rural sociology helps to introduce the learners or students to sociological concepts and the application of such concepts to the analysis and understanding or rural social organization, rural economic problems and the responses of ruralites to social change.
- It is important to emphasize that we cannot do without the rural areas because they are the back bone sector of the economy since a large majority of people live there. For a country to develop, it must arise and tackle the problems in the rural areas, because agricultural productivity is indeed the cornerstone in the economic development and social progress of any developing country.

Theorists and Their Contributions to Sociology
Every field in academic discipline has its cast of characters, and sociology can never be exceptional to that belief. However, many individuals have contributed to sociology's development into a social science, but the likes of; Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, W.E.B.Du Bois and Harriet Martineau deserve special mention.

August Comte: The French philosopher who lived from 1798–1857) was the "father of sociology". He first used the term "sociology" in 1838 to refer to the scientific study of society. He believed that all societies develop and progress through the following stages: religious, metaphysical, and scientific. Comte said that society needs scientific knowledge based on facts and evidence to solve its problems and not speculation and superstition, which dominate the religious and metaphysical stages of social development. Comte saw the science of sociology with two branches: dynamics, or the study of the processes by which societies change; and statics, or the study of the processes by which societies endure. He also perceived sociologists as eventually developing a base of scientific social knowledge that would guide society into positive directions. Comte was of the opinion that social behavior had to be studied scientifically.

Herbert Spencer: He was an English man who lived from 1820–1903.Spencer compared society to a living organism with interdependent parts. Change in one part of society causes change in the other parts, so that every part contributes to the stability and survival of society as a whole. If one part of society malfunctions, the other parts must adjust to the crisis and contribute even more to preserve society. Family, education, government, industry, and religion comprise just a few of the parts of the "organism" of society.

Spencer suggested that society will correct its own defects through the natural process of "survival of the fittest." The societal "organism" naturally leans toward homeostasis, or balance and stability. Social problems work themselves out when the government leaves society alone. The "fittest"—the rich, powerful, and successful—enjoy their status because nature has "selected" them to do so. In contrast, nature has doomed the "unfit"—the poor, weak, and unsuccessful—to failure. They must fend for themselves without social assistance if society is to remain healthy and even progress to higher levels. Governmental interference in the "natural" order of society weakens society by wasting the efforts of its leadership in trying to defy the laws of nature. He believed society was composed of parts working together to promote its well-being and survival. Spencer promoted Social Darwinism because he believed natural selection would ensure the survival of the fittest in society. "The poor deserve to be poor and the rich deserve to be rich."

Karl Marx (1818–1883), was a German political philosopher and economist who observed society's exploitation of the poor by the rich and powerful. Marx argued that Spencer's healthy societal "organism" was a falsehood. Rather than interdependence and stability, Marx claimed that social conflict, especially class conflict, and competition dominate all societies. Marx also coined the term capitalists - which describes those who own the means for producing wealth and he was very concerned with the inequality among social classes that brought about the bourgeoisie. The class of capitalists that Marx termed the bourgeoisie particularly provoked (enraged) him. Members of the bourgeoisie own the means of production and exploit the class of laborers, called the proletariat, who do not own the means of production. Marx believed that the very natures of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat inescapably lock the two classes in conflict. He predicted that the laborers are not selectively "unfit," but are destined to overthrow the capitalists because history is from their side. Such a class revolution would establish a "class free" society in which all people work according to their abilities and receive according to their needs. Marx believed that economics, not natural selection as argued by Spencer, determines the differences between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. He further opinionated that a society's economic system chooses peoples' norms, values, mores, and religious beliefs, as well as the nature of the society's political, governmental, and educational systems.

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), A French philosopher and sociologist who systematically applied scientific methods to sociology as a discipline. Despite their differences, Marx, Spencer, and Comte all acknowledged the importance of using science to study society, although none actually used scientific methods. Durkheim emphasized the importance of studying social facts, or patterns of behavior characteristic of a particular group. The phenomenon of suicide especially interested Durkheim. But he did not limit his ideas on the topic to mere speculation. Durkheim formulated his conclusions about the causes of suicide based on the analysis of large amounts of statistical data collected from various European countries. Durkheim certainly advocated the use of systematic observation to study sociological events, but he also recommended that sociologists avoid considering people's attitudes when explaining society. Sociologists should only consider as objective "evidence" what they themselves can directly observe. In other words, they must not concern themselves with people's subjective experiences. He argues that society exists because of widespread consensus, or agreement. Preindustrial times involved mechanical solidarity - widespread consensus of values and beliefs, strong social pressures for conformity and dependence on family. Industrial times involved organic solidarity - social interdependency based on a web of highly specialized roles, making individuals reliant on other members of society for survival.

Max Weber: The German sociologist (1864–1920) disagreed with the "objective evidence only". He argued that sociologists must also consider people's interpretations of events—not just the events themselves. Weber believed that individuals' behaviors cannot exist apart from their interpretations of the meaning of their own behaviors, and that people tend to act according to these interpretations. Because of the ties between objective behavior and subjective interpretation, Weber believed that sociologists must inquire into people's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions regarding their own behaviors. Weber recommended that sociologists should adopt his method of Verstehen (vûrst e hen), or

empathetic understanding. Verstehen allows sociologists to mentally put themselves into "the other person's shoes" and thus obtain an "interpretive understanding" of the meanings of individuals' behaviors. On the other way round, he believed humans act on their own understanding of a situation, thus, sociologists must discover the personal meanings, values, beliefs, and attitudes underlying human behavior. Weber used language "Verstehen" meaning understanding the social behavior of others by putting yourself mentally in their shoes. He also identified rationalization - use of knowledge, reason, and planning as an indicator of the future.

Harriet Martineau (1802–1876): Harriet Martineau was a writer who addressed a vast range of social science issues. She was an early observer of social practices, including economics, social class, religion, suicide, government, and women's rights. Her journey to academic field began in 1931 with a series of stories titled Illustrations of Political Economy, in which she tried to educate ordinary people about the principles of economics (Johnson 2003).

Martineau was the first to translate Comte's writing from French to English and thereby introduced sociology to English-speaking scholars (Hill 1991). She is also credited with the first systematic methodological international comparisons of social institutions in two of her most famous sociological works: Society in America (1837) and Retrospect of Western Travel (1838). Martineau found the workings of capitalism at odds with the professed moral principles of people in the United States; she pointed out the faults with the free enterprise system in which workers were exploited and impoverished while business owners became wealthy. Martineau believed women's lack of economic power led them to have inferior positions in society. Based on this, she focused on restructuring of the inferior position of women in society. She also saw a link between slavery and oppression of women and highlighted the way in the oppressed and slavery should be liberated from the shackles of leadership.

Georg Simmel (1858–1918): Georg Simmel was a German art and also a critic who wrote widely on social and political issues as well. He took an anti-positivism stance and expressed topics such as social conflict, the function of money, individual identity in city life, and the European fear of outsiders (Stapley 2010). Much of his work was on the micro-level theories, and it analyzed the dynamics of two-person and three-person groups. His work also emphasized individual culture as the creative capacities of individuals. Simmel's contributions to sociology are not often included in academic histories of the discipline, perhaps outshined by his contemporaries Durkheim, Mead, and Weber (Ritzer and Goodman 2004).

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931): George, H. M. was a philosopher and sociologist whose work relied on the ways in which the mind and the self were developed as a result of social processes (Cronk n.d.). He argued that how an individual comes to view himself or herself is based to a very large extent on interactions with others. Mead called specific individuals that impacted a person's life significant others and he also conceptualized "generalized others" as the organized and generalized attitude of a social group. Mead's work is closely associated with the symbolic interactionist approach and emphasizes the micro-level of analysis.

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES
A sociological theory is a set of ideas that provides an explanation for human society. Theories are selective in terms of their priorities, perspectives and the data they define as significant. As a result, they provide a particular and partial view of reality. Sociological theories can be grouped together according to a variety of criteria. The most important of these is the distinction between Structural and Social action theories (Trueman, 2015)

Sociologists study social events, interactions, patterns, and develop a theory as to explain why things work as they do. In the field of sociology, a theory is a way to interpret different aspects of social interactions to create a testable proposition, called hypothesis (Allan 2006). Although, suicide is generally considered an individual phenomenon and personal decision, sociologist like Emile Durkheim was of the interest in studying the social factors that affect it. He studied social ties within a group, or social solidarity, and hypothesized that differences in suicide rates might be explained by religion-based differences. Durkheim collected a large amount of data about Europeans who had ended their lives through suicide, and he indeed found the differences based on religion. According to him, Protestants were more likely to commit suicide than Catholics in Durkheim's society, and his work supports the utility of theory in sociological research. Sociologists develop theories to explain social occurrences such as protest and rallies in which society can express their grievances. In view of the above, the theories can be summarized as follows:

Functionalism
Functionalism (structural-functional theory), views society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individuals in that society. Functionalism came out of the thesis of an English philosopher and biologist, Hebert Spence, who observed the similarities between society and the human body; he argued that just as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning, the various parts of society work together to keep society functioning. According to him, the parts of society were the social institutions, or patterns of

beliefs and behaviors focused on meeting social needs, such as government, education, family, healthcare, religion, and the economy. Emilie Durkheim applied Spence's theory to explain how societies change and survive over time. Durkheim believed that society is a complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability (Durkheim 1893), and that society is held together by shared values, languages, and symbols. In a healthy society, all parts work together to maintain stability, a state called dynamic equilibrium. Durkheim believed that individuals may make up society, but in order to study society, sociologists have to look beyond individuals to social facts. Social facts are the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life (Durkheim 1895). Each of these social facts serves one or more functions within a society. For example, one function of a society's laws may be to protect society from violence, while another is to punish criminal behavior, while another is to preserve public health.

Another noted structural functionalist, Robert Merton (1910–2003), pointed out that social processes often have many functions. Manifest functions are the consequences of a social process that are sought or anticipated, while latent functions are the unsought consequences of a social process. A manifest function of college education, for example, includes gaining knowledge, preparing for a career, and finding a good job that utilizes that education. Latent functions of your college years include meeting new people, participating in extracurricular activities, or even finding a spouse or partner. Another latent function of education is creating a hierarchy of employment based on the level of education attained. Latent functions can be beneficial, neutral, or harmful. Social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society are called dysfunctions. In education, examples of dysfunction include getting bad grades, truancy, dropping out, not graduating, and not finding suitable employment.

In summary, Structural-functionalism draws its inspiration primarily from the ideas of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim was concerned with the question of how societies maintain internal stability and survive over time. He sought to explain social cohesion and stability through the concept of solidarity. Many functionalists argue that social institutions are functionally integrated to form a stable system and that a change in one institution will precipitate a change in other institutions. Societies are seen as coherent, bounded and fundamentally relational constructs that function like organisms, with their various parts (social institutions) working together to maintain and reproduce them. The various parts of society are assumed to work in an unconscious, quasi-automatic fashion towards the maintenance of the overall social equilibrium. All social and cultural phenomena are therefore seen as being functional in the sense of working together to achieve this state and are effectively deemed to have a life of their own. These components are then primarily analyzed in terms of the function they play. In other words, to understand a component of society, one can ask the question, "What is the function of this institution?" A function, in this sense, is the contribution made by a phenomenon to a larger system of which the phenomenon is a part (Ford ,1969). In view of this, this theory is relevant to agriculture because agriculture deals with rural people that have norms and values and each norm and value work in conjunction with one another to keep society functioning. In agrarian society, people made laws to consume and not to consume by the law, those laws serve as limitations to different parts of organs that formed the society through the maintenance of social cohesion and stability growth of social system. In Igbo land, stealing of seed yam is a serious crime that has to be meted with capital punishments and that will serve as deterrent to others. This is done to maintain internal stability and survival of the society over time.

Limitations

Structural-functionalism has been criticized for being unable to account for social change because it focuses so intently on social order and equilibrium in society. This implies that it it can't adequately express social change above the ambit of society. There are some other factors like natural occurrences that can bring about change in a social system apart from society function itself. For instance, in the late 19th Century, higher education transitioned from a training center for clergy and the elite to a center for the conduct of science and the general education of the masses (George, 1996; Smith, 2003). In other words, education did not always serve the function of preparing individuals for the labor force (with the exception of the ministry and the elite). As structural-functionalism thinks about elements of social life in relation to their present function and not their past functions, structural-functionalism has a difficult time explaining why a function of some element of society might change or how such change occurs. However, structural-functionalism could, in fact, offer an explanation in this case. Also occurring in the 19th Century (though begun in the 18th) was the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution, facilitated by capitalism, was increasingly demanding technological advances to increase profit. Technological advances and advanced industry both required more educated workforces. Thus, as one aspect of society changed - the economy and production - it required a comparable change in the educational system, bringing social life back into equilibrium.

Another philosophical problem with the structural-functional approach is the ontological argument that society does not have needs as a human being does; and even if society does have needs they need not be met. The idea that society has needs like humans do is not a tenable position because society is only alive in the sense that it is made up of living individuals. Thus, society cannot have wants and/or needs like humans do. What's more, just because a society has some

element in it at the present that does not mean that it must necessarily have that element. For instance, in the United Kingdom, religious service attendance has declined precipitously over the last 100 years. Today, less than 1 in 10 British attend religious service in a given week (Bruce, 2002), while one might argue that religion has certain functions in British society, it is becoming apparent that it is not necessary for British society to function. Another criticism often leveled at structural-functionalist theory is that it supports the status quo. According to some opponents, structural-functionalism paints conflict and challenge to the status quo as harmful to society, and therefore tends to be the prominent view among conservative thinkers.

Conflict Theory

This theory argues that society is competitive in nature and looks at society as a competition for limited resources. This perspective is the brain child of Karmas who saw society as being made up of individuals in different social classes who must compete for social, material, and political resources such as food and housing, employment, education, and leisure time. Social institutions like government, education, and religion reflect this competition in their inherent inequalities and help maintain the unequal social structure. Some individuals and organizations are able to obtain and keep more resources than others, and these "winners" use their power and influence to maintain social institutions. Several theorists suggested variations on this basic theme. Polish-Austrian sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909) expatiated on Marx's ideas by saying that war and conquest are the basis of civilizations. He agreed that cultural and ethnic conflicts led to states being identified and defined by a dominant group that had power over other groups (Irving 2007).

Weber a German sociologist agreed with Max with Marx but also believed that, in addition to economic inequalities, inequalities of political power and social structure cause conflict. Weber noted that different groups were affected differently based on education, race, and gender, and that people's reactions to inequality were moderated by class differences and rates of social mobility, as well as by perceptions about the legitimacy of those in power.

Another German sociologist Georg Simmel believed that conflict can help integrate and stabilize a society. He said that the intensity of the conflict varies according to the emotional involvement of the parties, the degree of solidarity within the opposing groups, and the clarity and limited nature of the goals. Simmel also agreed that groups work to create internal solidarity, centralize power, and reduce dissent. Resolving conflicts can reduce tension and hostility and can pave the way for future agreements.

In the 1930s and 1940s, German philosophers, known as the Frankfurt School, developed critical theory as an elaboration on Marxist principles. Critical theory is an expansion of conflict theory and is wider than just sociology, including other social sciences and philosophy. A critical theory attempts to give a clear view of the structural issues causing inequality; it must explain what's wrong in current social reality, identify the people who can make changes, and provide practical goals for social transformation (Horkeimer 1982). More recently, inequality based on gender or race has been explained in a similar manner and has identified institutionalized power structures that help to maintain inequality between groups. Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1941–2006) presented a model of feminist theory that attempts to explain the forces that maintain gender inequality as well as a theory of how such a system can be changed (Turner 2003). Similarly, critical race theory grew out of a critical analysis of race and racism from a legal point of view. Critical race theory looks at structural inequality based on white privilege and associated wealth, power, and prestige.

All in all, conflict theory argues that society is not best understood as a complex system striving for equilibrium but rather as a competition. Society is made up of individuals competing for limited resources (e.g., money, leisure, sexual partners, etc.). Broader social structures and organizations (e.g., religions, government, etc.) reflect the competition for resources in their inherent inequalities; some people and organizations have more resources (i.e., power and influence) and use those resources to maintain their positions of power in society. Conflict theory was developed in part to illustrate the limitations of structural-functionalism. The structural-functionalist approach argued that society tends toward equilibrium, focusing on stability at the expense of social change. This is contrasted with the conflict approach, which argues that society is constantly in conflict over resources. One of the primary contributions conflict theory presents over the structural-functional approach is that it is ideally suited for explaining social change, a significant problem in the structural-functional approach. A heuristic device to help you think about society from a conflict perspective is to ask, "Who benefits from this element of society?" Using the same example as we did above, we can ask, "Who benefits from the current higher educational system in the U.S.?" The answer, of course, is the wealthy. Why? Because higher education in the U.S. is not free. Thus, the educational system often screens out poorer individuals not because they are unable to compete academically but because they cannot afford to pay for their education. Because the poor are unable to obtain higher education, this means they are also generally unable to get higher paying jobs which mean they remain poor. This can easily translate into a vicious cycle of poverty. Thus, while the function of education is to educate the workforce, it also has built into it an element of conflict and inequality, favoring one group (the wealthy) over other groups (the poor). Thinking about education this way helps illustrate why both structural-functionalist and conflict theories are helpful in understanding how society works.

Three primary assumptions of modern conflict theory:

➢ Competition over scarce resources is at the heart of all social relationships. Competition rather than consensus is characteristic of human relationships.

➢ Inequalities in power and reward are built into all social structures. Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure strive to see it maintained.

➢ Change occurs as a result of conflict between competing interests rather than through adaptation. Change is often abrupt and revolutionary rather than evolutionary.

Limitations

The primary limitation of the social-conflict theory is that it overlooks the stability of societies. While societies are in a constant state of change, much of the change is minor. Many of the broader elements of societies remain remarkably stable over time, indicating the structural-functional perspective has a great deal of merit.As noted above, sociological theory is often complementary. This is particularly true of structural-functionalism and social-conflict theories. Structural-functionalism focuses on equilibrium and solidarity; conflict-theory focuses on change and conflict. Keep in mind that neither is better than the other; when combined, the two approaches offer a broader and more comprehensive view of society.

Symbolic Interactionist Theory

Symbolic interactionism: Is a micro-level theory that relies on the relationships among individuals within a society. Communication, the exchange of meaning through language and symbols is believed to be the way in which people make sense of their social worlds. George Herbert Mead is the founder of symbolic interactionism though he never published his work on it (Larossa and Reitzes 1993). Mead's student, Herbert Blumer, coined the term "symbolic interactionism" and outlined these basic premises: humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society; the meanings of things are interpreted by a person when dealing with things in specific circumstances (Blumer 1969). If you love books, for example, a symbolic interactionist might propose that you learned that books are good or important in the interactions you had with family, friends, school, or church; maybe your family had a special reading time each week, getting your library card was treated as a special event, or bedtime stories were associated with warmth and comfort.

Social scientists who apply symbolic-interactionist thinking look for patterns of interaction between individuals. Their studies often involve observation of one-on-one interactions. For example, while a conflict theorist studying a political protest might focus on class difference, a symbolic interactionist would be more interested in how individuals in the protesting group interact, as well as the signs and symbols protesters use to communicate their message. The focus on the importance of symbols in building a society led sociologists like Erving Goffman (1922–1982) to develop a technique called dramaturgical analysis. Goffman used theater as an analogy for social interaction and recognized that people's interactions showed patterns of cultural "scripts." Because it can be unclear what part a person may play in a given situation, he or she has to improvise his or her role as the situation unfolds (Goffman 1958). Studies that use the symbolic interactionist perspective are more likely to use qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, because they seek to understand the symbolic worlds in which research subjects live. To summary it, Symbolic Interactionism is a theoretical approach to understanding the relationship between humans and society. The basic notion of symbolic interactionism is that human action and interaction are understandable only through the exchange of meaningful communication or symbols. In this approach, humans are portrayed as acting as opposed to being acted upon (Herman and Reynolds,1994). This approach stands in contrast to the strict behaviorism of psychological theories prevalent at the time it was first formulated (in the 1920s and 1930s). According to Symbolic Interactionism, humans are distinct from infrahuman (lower animals) because infrahuman simply respond to their environment (i.e., a stimulus evokes a response or stimulus > response) whereas humans have the ability to interrupt that process (i.e., stimulus > cognition > response). Additionally, infrahumans are unable to conceive of alternative responses to gestures. Humans, however, can. This understanding should not be taken to indicate that humans never behave in a strict stimulus > response fashion, but rather that humans have the capability of not responding in that fashion (and do so much of the time).

According to symbolic interactionism, the objective world has no reality for humans, only subjectively-defined objects have meaning. Meanings are not entities that are bestowed on humans and learned by habituation. Instead, meanings can be altered through the creative capabilities of humans, and individuals may influence the many meanings that form their society (Herman and Reynolds,1994). Human society, therefore, is a social product. Neurological evidence based on EEGs supports the idea that humans have a "social brain," that is, there are components of the human brain that govern social interaction (Sabbagh, Lindsay, Bowman, Lyndsay, Evraire, and Jennie, 2009).]These parts of the brain begin developing in early childhood (the preschool years) and aid humans in understanding how other people think (Sabbagh,et al,2009). In symbolic interactionism, this is known as "reflected appraisals" or "the looking glass self" and refers to our ability to think about how other people will think about us. A good example of this is when people try on

clothes before going out with friends. Some people may not think much about how others will think about their clothing choices, but others can spend quite a bit of time considering what they are going to wear. And while they are deciding, the dialogue that is taking place inside their mind is usually a dialogue between their "self" (that portion of their identity that calls itself "I") and that person's internalized understanding of their friends and society (a "generalized other" called the "me"). An indicator of mature socialization is when an individual quite accurately predicts how other people think about him/her. Such an individual has incorporated the "social" into the "self" and will thus experience the world through an ongoing internal communication process that seeks to determine "if I do this, what will be thought of me."

Specifically, Symbolic Interaction seeks to uncover the ways "meanings" are deployed within interactions and embedded within larger social structures to facilitate social cohesion (Structural Functionalism) and social change (Conflict Theories). To use the case above, Symbolic Interaction may be used to explain the distinction between Conflict and Structural Functionalist approaches to education. If people act toward education based on the meaning they have for it, for example, then people that believe (or are taught to believe) that education serves an important function for all of society (e.g., Structural Functionalism) will be hesitant to change this social structure. On the other hand, if people believe (or are taught to believe) that education transmits social inequalities from generation to generation (e.g., Conflict Theory), then they will be more likely to attempt to change this structure over time. In either case, societies (and the people that form them) will move towards cohesion (Structural Functionalism) or conflict (Conflict Theory) concerning educational structures based upon the meanings these people have for the current educational structure. Symbolic Interaction thus often focuses on elaborating the multitude of ways that micro patterns of interaction and interpretation justify, sustain, and / or change large scale social structures and patterns of activity within the world. According to Blumer (1986), the main principles of symbolic interactionism are:
- ➢ Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them
- ➢ These meanings arise from ongoing processes of social interaction and interpretation
- ➢ Social action results from a "joint action", or the fitting together of individual lines of action

Limitations
The most significant limitations of symbolic interactionism relate to its primary contribution: it focuses on the ongoing construction and contestation of meanings in society (e.g., norms, rules, cultures, and interpersonal experiences), which can only be grasped via examination of small groups or individual beings. As a result, Symbolic Interactionism typically focuses on "how" things are done (e.g., the ways people accomplish things that can be observed in real time and in the natural world) rather than "why" things are done (e.g., hypotheses that can only be examined within mathematical and / or experimental settings disconnected from the natural world). As a result, Symbolic Interaction is more adequately suited to explaining how the world is, but is unable to demonstrate and document predictions about how the world might differ, if circumstances were hypothetically altered. Research done from this perspective is often scrutinized because of the difficulty of remaining objective.

Constructivism is an extension of symbolic interaction theory which proposes that reality is what humans cognitively construct it to be. We develop social constructs based on interactions with others, and those constructs that last over time are those that have meanings which are widely agreed-upon or generally accepted by most within the society. This approach is often used to understand what's defined as deviant within a society. There is no absolute definition of deviance, and different societies have constructed different meanings for deviance, as well as associating different behaviors with deviance. One situation that illustrates this is what you believe you're to do if you find a wallet in the street. In the United States, turning the wallet in to local authorities would be considered the appropriate action, and to keep the wallet would be seen as deviant. In contrast, many Eastern societies would consider it much more appropriate to keep the wallet and search for the owner; turning it over to someone else, even the authorities, would be considered deviant behavior.

Social constructionism is a school of thought introduced into sociology by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann with their 1966 book The Social Construction of Reality *(*Berger and Thomas, 1967*)*. Drawing on Symbolic Interactionist insights about the ongoing production and affirmation of meaning, social constructionism aims to discover the ways that individuals and groups create their perceived reality. Social constructionism focuses on the description of institutions and actions and not on analyzing cause and effect. Socially constructed reality is seen as an on-going dynamic process; reality is re-produced by people acting on their interpretations of what they perceive to be the world external to them. Berger and Luckmann argue that social construction describes both subjective and objective reality - that is that no reality exists outside what is produced and reproduced in social interactions.

A clear example of social constructionist thought is, following Sigmund Freud (2009) and Durkheim (2008), religion. Religion is seen as a socially constructed concept, the basis for which is rooted in either our psyche (Freud) or man's need to see some purpose in life or worship a higher presence. One of the key theorists of social constructionism, Peter Berger, explored this concept extensively in his book, The Sacred Canopy *(*Berger, 1990*)*.

Social constructionism is often seen as a source of the postmodern movement, and has been influential in the field of cultural studies.

Feminist Theory

Although women were primarily ignored, barred, and/or disenfranchised within most scientific communities prior to the women's rights movement of the 1960's and 1970's (for a notable exception in Sociology, see Dorothy Swaine Thomas), women have contributed to scientific disciplines, methods, and theories since at least the 1830's. Following the establishment of women's academic conferences and coordinated protests of the American Sociological Association's annual meetings during the 1970's, women made significant inroads into Sociology. For example, women such as Dorothy E. Smith, Joan Acker, Myra Marx Ferree, Patricia Yancey Martin, and bell hooks were all pioneers in Sociology who developed insights and empirical findings that challenged much of existing sociological practice, knowledge, and methods. These early scholars also founded women's academic organizations like Sociologists for Women in Society to lobby for the admittance and inclusion of minority people and perspectives within scientific disciplines. The theoretical perspectives these and subsequent scholars developed is broadly referred to as Feminist Theory. The name derives from the ties many of these individuals had and continue to have with women's movement organizations, the promotion of minority perspectives, their experience in relation to the subjective nature of scientific practice, and commitment to principles of social justice. Feminist Theory uncovered a vast "history" of women's (and other minority) academic thinking, writing, and activism, and integrated insights from these essays and studies into the scientific enterprise. In so doing, these scholars uncovered many ways that Feminist theorists from as far back as the 1830's had already introduced insights - such as Social Constructionism, Intersectionality, and the subjective nature and critical possibilities of scientific work - that have become crucial to scientific research and theorizing across disciplines.

Further, historical research into the history of Feminist Thought has uncovered a litany of social theorists - including but not limited to early abolitionists and women's rights proponents like Maria W. Stewart, Elisbabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony; the first woman pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Jarena Lee; early abolitionist writers and activists like Anna J. Cooper, Harriet Tubman, and one of the first African American women to earn a college degree, Mary Church Terrell; early black feminist writers promoting gender and sexual equality like Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Richard Bruce Nugent; early 20th Century writers and activists that sought racial civil rights, women's suffrage, and prison reform like Ida B. Wells, Alice Paul, Amy Jacques Garvey, and Lucy Burns; and mid-20th Century writers and activists that challenged unequal labor practices, racial discrimination, women's oppression, and homophobia like Bayard Rustin, Betty Friedan, Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Gloria Steinem, and Robin Morgan. Many of these individuals were disenfranchised, ignored, and/or silenced by the scientific communities of their time due to racism, sexism, and heterosexism. Feminist scholars across disciplines have continuously sought to expand scientific "facts" beyond their initial (and often continuing) white, male, heterosexual biases and assumptions while seeking knowledge as an entryway into a more just social world.

Similar to the other theories outlined in this chapter, Feminist Theory is far more expansive than can adequately be explored within one textbook, let alone within a single chapter in a textbook. Feminist theorists and methods, for example, can be found in wide ranging fields beyond sociology including biology, genetics, chemistry, literature, history, political science, fine arts, religious studies, psychology, anthropology, and public health. Feminist Theory often dramatically influences scientific theory and practice within such fields. Below we offer summaries of the major conceptual approaches within Feminist Theory. It is important to note, however, that while we outline these perspectives under distinct headings and within specific orders for the purposes of clarity and introduction, contemporary Feminist theorists and researchers across disciplines often draw upon more than one of these perspectives in practice and continually seek ways to refine and integrate each of these approaches. Before presenting this outline, however, it is important to be aware of three basic premises or foundational ideas within and between contemporary Feminist Theories (Kleinman, 2007).

➢ Scientific practice is subjective: If one admits that social experience and environment influence individual and collective perceptions, then one cannot form a question without expressing - implicitly or explicitly - a socially influenced perspective. As long as people are the "doers" of research, all research will ultimately be subjective and open to debate or refinement on some level. Feminist theorists thus argue that understanding the social or natural world also requires interrogating our own conscious or unconscious bias, perspective, beliefs, and values, and our own positions within systems of racial, class, gender, sexual, political, and scientific social systems.

➢ The personal is political: Experiences we consider personal are generally shaped by our social locations within existing systems of oppression and privilege. As a result, every personal decision or action ultimately reproduces and/or challenges systems of social inequality. Feminist theorists therefore argue that understanding and/or changing large-scale systems of oppression and privilege requires examining the ways people think, feel, and act in all aspects of life since all such endeavors will ultimately influence the social and natural worlds they experience.

➢ Everything is more than one thing: Rather than simple one to one relationships or isolated causal patterns, all social and natural systems are interlocked systems that may only be understood, reproduced or challenged in relation to the other systems they depend on. If one examines women's oppression, for example, one must also explore the ways of thinking and feeling that produce scientific categorization systems, the system of categorization that simplifies the world into only two sexes or genders, the social construction of the term "woman" within historical and contextual power relations, and the other systems that make up a given "woman". For example, in order to understand the experience of one woman requires examining the ways her position within racial, classed, sexual, religious, political, scientific, and other systems create the definition of what it means for her to be a "woman". Feminist theorists therefore argue that the social and natural worlds cannot be understood via the isolation or control of various parts of social and/or natural experience. As a result, scientific inquiries require attending to the whole entity, system, and/or structure in relation to other entities, systems, and/or structures in the world at that time.

With these foundational ideas in mind, we now present the primary Feminist theoretical perspectives.

Liberal Feminism
➢ Liberal feminists believe that men and women both are disadvantaged by society's gender expectations. They advocate working within institutions to "level the playing field" through changing laws, education, and socialization to bring about gender equality.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism
➢ Marxist feminists believe that the oppression of women stems primarily from capitalism, which exploits women's labor and is upheld through women's unpaid domestic labor. They believe that economic inequalities are the most central form of inequality. Therefore, eliminating capitalism would get rid of gender inequalities.

➢ Socialist feminists believe that women's oppression is inseparable from class oppression. Therefore, to bring about gender equality, we must work to eliminate both capitalism and patriarchy in all social and natural fields of knowledge and experience.

Radical, Separatist, and Cultural Feminism
➢ Radical feminists believe that women are oppressed by our patriarchal society. They do not believe that men are oppressed. They seek a fundamental reorganization of society because our existing political, scientific, religious, and social organization is inherently patriarchal.

➢ Separatist feminists, like radical feminists, believe that women are oppressed by our patriarchal society. They, however, believe that we can't get rid of this problem if women and men are together. In order to achieve equality, women need to separate themselves from men. Some believe this is a temporary stage while others see this as a permanent goal.

➢ Cultural feminists, like radical feminists, believe that women are oppressed by our patriarchal society. They, however, focus on empowering women through valuing, emphasizing, and encouraging the positive qualities traditionally associated with women, such as nurturing, caring, cooperation, relationships with others, childbirth, morality, peace, pureness, and women's connection to nature and the earth.

Black Feminist Thought and Queer Feminism
➢ Black feminists believe that many inequalities are important in society today, not only gender. In addition to gender inequalities, they focus on race, ethnicity, and class — and sometimes also add sexuality, nationality, age, disability, and others. They believe that people experience gender differently depending on their location in socially constructed cultural, political, and biological structures of race, ethnicity and class. Therefore, there is no universal female experience. This perspective is sometimes referred to as multicultural feminism, multiracial feminism, or womanism.

➢ Queer feminists - sometimes referred to as Postmodern Feminists - believe that gender and sex (as well as other social locations and systems of social and natural organization and categorization) are multiple, constantly changing, and performed by individuals and groups within situated social, historical, scientific, and political contexts. There are many (i.e., more than two) genders and sexes, and variations (biologically and socially) within other "accepted" or "normalized" categorizations. They focus on creating social change through challenging the existence and blurring the boundaries of these categories. This perspective shares many ideas with Queer Theory.

Integration Theory
Recently, some sociologists have been taking a different approach to sociological theory by employing an integrationist approach - combining micro- and macro-level theories to provide a comprehensive understanding of human social behavior (while these studies rarely cite Symbolic Interaction Theory, most of their models are based heavily upon Herbert Blumer's initial elaboration of Symbolic Interaction in relation to social institutions(Blumer, 1969; Collins,

2004). Numerous models could be presented in this vein. George Ritzer's Integration Model is a good example ((Ritzer, and Douglas, 2003). Ritzer proposes four highly interdependent elements in his sociological model: a macro-objective component (e.g., society, law, bureaucracy), a micro-objective component (e.g., patterns of behavior and human interaction), a macro-subjective component (e.g., culture, norms, and values), and a micro-subjective component (e.g., perceptions, beliefs). This model is of particular use in understanding society because it uses two axes: one ranging from objective (society) to subjective (culture and cultural interpretation); the other ranging from the macro-level (norms) to the micro-level (individual level beliefs).

Role Theory

Another more micro-oriented approach to understanding social life that also incorporates the more structural elements of society is Role Theory (Ebaugh, 1988). Role theory emerged from the integration of Structural and Procession Symbolic Interactionist insights, and often draws heavily upon both of these theoretical traditions (see also dramaturgy). Role theory posits that human behavior is guided by expectations held both by the individual and by other people. The expectations correspond to different roles individuals perform or enact in their daily lives, such as secretary, father, or friend. For instance, most people hold pre-conceived notions of the role expectations of a secretary, which might include: answering phones, making and managing appointments, filing paperwork, and typing memos. These role expectations would not be expected of a professional soccer player.

Individuals generally have and manage many roles. Roles consist of a set of rules or norms that function as plans or blueprints to guide behavior. Roles specify what goals should be pursued, what tasks must be accomplished, and what performances are required in a given scenario or situation. Role theory holds that a substantial proportion of observable, day-to-day social behavior is simply persons carrying out their roles, much as actors carry out their roles on the stage or ballplayers theirs on the field. Role theory is, in fact, predictive. It implies that if we have information about the role expectations for a specified status (e.g., sister, fireman, and prostitute), a significant portion of the behavior of the persons occupying that position can be predicted. What's more, role theory also argues that in order to change behavior it is necessary to change roles; roles correspond to behaviors and vice versa. In addition to heavily influencing behavior, roles influence beliefs and attitudes; individuals will change their beliefs and attitudes to correspond with their roles. For instance, someone over-looked for a promotion to a managerial position in a company may change their beliefs about the benefits of management by convincing him/her that they didn't want the additional responsibility that would have accompanied the position. Many role theorists see role theory as one of the most compelling theories bridging individual behavior and social structure. Roles, which are in part dictated by social structure and in part by social interactions, guide the behavior of the individual. The individual, in turn, influences the norms, expectations, and behaviors associated with roles. The understanding is reciprocal.

Role theory includes the following propositions:

1. people spend much of their lives participating as members of groups and organizations
2. within these groups, people occupy distinct positions
3. each of these positions entails a role, which is a set of functions performed by the person for the group
4. groups often formalize role expectations as norms or even codified rules, which include what rewards will result when roles are successfully performed and what punishments will result when roles are not successfully performed
5. individuals usually carry out their roles and perform in accordance with prevailing norms; in other words, role theory assumes that people are primarily conformists who try to live up to the norms that accompany their roles
6. group members check each individual's performance to determine whether it conforms with the norms; the anticipation that others will apply sanctions ensures role performance

Limitations

Role theory has a hard time explaining social deviance when it does not correspond to a pre-specified role. For instance, the behavior of someone who adopts the role of bank robber can be predicted - she will rob banks. But if a bank teller simply begins handing out cash to random people, role theory would be unable to explain why (though role conflict could be one possible answer; the secretary may also be a Marxist-Communist who believes the means of production should belong to the masses and not the bourgeoisie). Another limitation of role theory is that it does not and cannot explain how role expectations came to be what they are. Role theory has no explanation for why it is expected of male soldiers to cut their hair short, but it could predict with a high degree of accuracy that if someone is a male soldier they will have short hair. Additionally, role theory does not explain when and how role expectations change. As a result, role theorists typically draw upon insights from Symbolic Interaction Theory and Historical Comparative analyses to address these questions.

Conclusion

Sociology was developed just to study and understand the changes that occurred in a society as a result of Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of the earliest sociologists thought that the roles of societies and individuals in a society could be studied using the same scientific approaches used in the natural sciences, while others assumed that it was impossible to predict human behavior scientifically, whereas others are still debating the value of such predictions and these lead to various arguments in sociology as a discipline. In the light of this, this paper reviewed the followings: importance of rural sociology in Nigeria, theorists and their contributions, sociological theories and their limitations.

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