

HHS4M

Major Theories About Families & Society

Learning Goal

Today we will learn:

- what different theories are
 - how theories explain families and society
 - simple examples of each theory
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Success Criteria

I can:

- ✓ explain theories in simple words
 - ✓ give a real-life example of each theory
 - ✓ compare different theories
 - ✓ understand important vocabulary words
 - ✓ explain theories using my own examples
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Important Vocabulary

Theory

A theory is an idea people use to explain why something happens.

Example:

Different people may explain the same family problem in different ways.

Macro Theory

Looks at BIG society.

Examples:

- government
- schools
- laws
- economy

Think BIG picture

Micro Theory

Looks at SMALL everyday interactions.

Examples:

- family relationships
- friendships
- communication

Think CLOSE-UP picture

1. Structural Functionalism

(Macro Theory)

Main Idea

Society is like a machine or team.

Every part has a job to do.

If everyone does their job, society works well.

Roles keep society working

Example

A soccer team:

- goalie protects
- defenders defend
- strikers score

Everyone has a role.

Society works the same way.

Family Example

Parents:

- care for children
- teach rules
- provide food and safety

Children:

- learn values and behaviour
-

Strengths

- explains order and stability
 - shows importance of institutions
-

Weaknesses

- ✗ does not explain change well
 - ✗ thinks one family type is “normal”
-

2. Systems Theory

(Micro + Macro)

Main Idea

Everything is connected.

If one person changes, others are affected too.

People are connected and affect each other

Easy Example

The body is a system:

- heart
- lungs
- brain

All parts work together.

Family Example

If one parent loses a job:

- stress increases
- children may feel upset
- family routines change

One change affects everyone.

Strengths

explains family connections
explains patterns of behaviour

Weaknesses

- ✗ hard to know who causes problems
 - ✗ ignores outside problems sometimes
-

Family Example

Structural Functionalism

Parents provide care and discipline because that helps society function.

Systems Theory

If parents fight, children's behaviour changes, which affects the whole family dynamic.

3. Symbolic Interactionism

(Micro Theory)

Main Idea

People act based on meanings and feelings.

We react to how we think others see us.

' I am not what I think I am,

I am not what you think I am,

I what I think you think I am" Charles Cooley

Example

If students think others see them as “smart,”
they may feel confident.

If they think others see them as “lazy,”
they may feel bad.

Family Example

A child smiles because smiling means happiness.

People learn symbols and meanings.

Strengths

explains emotions and communication
focuses on personal experiences

Weaknesses

- ✗ ignores big social problems
 - ✗ different people interpret things differently
-

4. Social Exchange Theory

(Micro Theory)

Main Idea

People look at costs and benefits in relationships.

People want more rewards and fewer problems.

Example

Friendship:

- benefit = fun, support
- cost = stress, fighting

If friendship has more benefits,
people stay friends.

Family Example

A person may stay in a relationship because:

- love
 - support
 - money
 - safety
-

Strengths

explains relationship choices
explains why people stay together

Weaknesses

- ✗ relationships are not just “business deals”
- ✗ ignores emotions sometimes

5. Developmental Theory

(Micro Theory)

Main Idea

People grow and change through life stages.

Each stage has challenges and goals.

Example

Baby → child → teenager → adult

People learn different skills at each stage.

Family Example

Teenagers:

- learn independence
- prepare for adulthood

Parents:

- adjust to children growing older
-

Strengths

explains growth and change
explains life stages clearly

Weaknesses

- ✗ not everyone follows same stages
 - ✗ life does not always happen in order
-

6. Conflict Theory

(Macro Theory)

Main Idea

Society has inequality and power struggles.

Some groups have more power than others.

Easy Example

Imagine one person gets most of the cake.

Others may feel treated unfairly.

Conflict happens because resources are unequal.

Family Example

Arguments may happen because:

- money

- power
 - control
 - unfair responsibilities
-

Strengths

explains inequality and power
explains social problems

Weaknesses

✗ focuses mostly on problems and conflict

7. Feminist Theory

(Macro Theory)

Main Idea

Men and women are not always treated equally.

This theory studies gender inequality.

Example

If women do:

- housework
- childcare
- job work

but still have less power,
feminists ask why this happens.

Family Example

A mother may:

- work outside home
- cook
- clean
- care for children

Feminist theory asks:

“Is this fair?”

Strengths

explains gender inequality
supports fairness and equality

Weaknesses

✗ sometimes focuses mainly on women’s experiences

SIMPLE THEORY SUMMARY TABLE

Theory	Main Idea	Easy Example
Structural Functionalism	Society works like a machine	Soccer team
Systems Theory	Everything is connected	Human body
Symbolic Interactionism	Meanings affect behaviour	Mirror/self-image
Social Exchange Theory	Relationships = costs vs benefits	Friendship

Developmental Theory	People grow through stages	Life cycle
Conflict Theory	Society has power struggles	Unequal cake
Feminist Theory	Focus on gender inequality	Unequal household work

Final Review Questions

1. Which theory says society is like a machine?
 2. Which theory says everything is connected?
 3. Which theory focuses on meanings and symbols?
 4. Which theory talks about costs and benefits?
 5. Which theory explains life stages?
 6. Which theory focuses on inequality and power?
 7. Which theory focuses on gender inequality?
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One-Sentence Review

- Structural Functionalism → society works together
- Systems Theory → everything is connected
- Symbolic Interactionism → meanings shape behaviour
- Social Exchange → people compare costs and rewards
- Developmental Theory → people grow through stages
- Conflict Theory → society has inequality
- Feminist Theory → studies gender inequality