Your notes

GCSE Sociology: revision notes

Sociological perspectives

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Functionalism

- Functionalists see society as a system of parts (institutions) that work together, like the organs of a body.
- Society is based on **consensus**: shared norms and values. Each institution, such as the family or education, has functions that help society run smoothly.
- Key thinkers include Durkheim and Parsons. Critics say **functionalism** ignores conflict and inequality.

Marxism

- Marxists see society as based on conflict between social classes.
- In capitalist society, the **bourgeoisie** (the ruling class, who own the means of production) exploit the **proletariat** (the working class, who sell their labour).
- Institutions such as education and the media spread ruling-class ideas, keeping inequality in place. Critics say **Marxism** overemphasises class and ignores other inequalities.

Feminism and interactionism

- Feminists see society as patriarchal: dominated by men. Liberal feminists seek equality through changes in law and attitudes; radical feminists see **patriarchy** everywhere, including in the family; Marxist feminists link women's oppression to capitalism.
- Interactionists study how people create meaning through everyday interactions, and how labels affect behaviour. They focus on small-scale interactions rather than the whole structure of society.
- Structural approaches (**functionalism** and **Marxism**) look at the whole of society; **interactionism** looks at individuals.

Key terms

Functionalism	The view that society is a system of parts working together based on consensus.
Marxism	The view that society is based on conflict between social classes.
Bourgeoisie	The ruling class who own the means of production.
Proletariat	The working class who sell their labour.
Patriarchy	A society dominated by men.
Consensus	Agreement based on shared norms and values.
Interactionism	The study of how people create meaning through everyday interactions.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What do functionalists believe society is based on?
2. What do Marxists believe society is based on?
3. Who are the bourgeoisie?
4. Who are the proletariat?
5. What is patriarchy?
6. What do interactionists study?
7. Which thinker is linked to functionalism?
8. What is a criticism of functionalism?

Answers

1. Consensus: shared norms and values
2. Conflict between social classes
3. The ruling class who own the means of production
4. The working class who sell their labour
5. A society dominated by men
6. How people create meaning through everyday interactions
7. Parsons
8. It ignores conflict and inequality

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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