

# Functionalism and conflict theory

Psychology



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## Functionalism and Conflict Theory

Wilma's behavior with her family may be a result of functionalism as well as conflict theory. There are many aspects to structural functionalism and it has developed into an explanation that is used by many people even today. An example of functionalism at work is if a person has a way of thinking or behaviors that are false or negative, the functionalist can help them become a better person by countering these assumptions with positive and helpful ones. " Structural functionalism views society as a functionally integrated system that holds an equilibrium, while conflict theory emphasizes a disintegration of society, stating that there is a conflict of interest in all organizations and at all times, as society is subject to change" (Yin, 2003). The societal balance suggested by the influx of positive thinking on Wilma's situation can be seen from a psychological or sociological perspective as being basically functionalist. This theory assumes that while the above is useful, it will not succeed unless healthy concepts are socially constructed and the environmental factors are reinforcing. Functionalism is a very positive viewpoint.

Conflict theory, as the above quote suggests, looks at Wilma's situation from a more negative perspective, in terms of what her and her family's struggles can tell us about social class, oppression, and unique issues facing aboriginals in Australia. From a conflict perspective focusing on Wilma's race or gender, for example, scholarship may focus on the patriarchal norms that are carried out by traditional family structures in terms of male dominance and female submission, and this also affects the concept of marriage as it is seen as a relationship that mirrors this type of

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societal relation at the same time that it also seems to transcend it. This is an ideal that Wilma often comes close to in the case, but never really achieves, and the results are relatively tragic to her as the world she has tried to reverse, reverses on her when she is cornered. But in the end, it is all about class and socio-economic status from a conflict theory perspective. Socio-economic status is also seen by conflict theorists as being passed on from one generation to another in terms of wealth and privilege, or the lack thereof, within a family structure that is seen as a space of economic restriction that also works to keep advantaged groups in the same place from generation to generation. This is seen through Wilma's constant struggles to meet the most basic needs for her family, such as healthcare and housing. From the perspective of society which values the imposition of a theoretical structure of patriarchal control, this makes conflict theory very important to look at, though, in terms of how it may motivate Wilma. I think that conflict theory perspectives would be most helpful to Wilma and her family. " It is because people who are in dominant positions want to maintain their status quo while those who are in subordinate positions want to seek change. Under this situation, there is a conflict of interest between these two groups of people in every association" (Yin, 2003). In Wilma's current situation, she is frustrated and angry without being empowered. I think that the positive nature of functionalism wouldn't really appeal to her because of her anger. I think that Wilma and her family would be more empowered to act and advocate on their own for social change, and organize, through conflict theory. This would supplant Wilma's desire to run away from the problem, with a desire to confront it.

#### REFERENCE

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Yin, Y (2003). Functionalism and conflict theory.

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