

# [Assessing functionalism and the conflict theory sociology essay](https://assignbuster.com/assessing-functionalism-and-the-conflict-theory-sociology-essay/)

Functionalism: As applied to the family unit, functionalism would claim that each member of the family is interdependent and contributes to the functioning of the family as a whole. When all family members are playing their part and have good attitudes there is balance, peace and unity in the family. When any one member is rebelling against his/her role or responsibilities then the family as a whole suffers imbalance, stress, disunity and dysfunctional tendencies. Functionalists would also claim that the family will work best when each member has some power to agree or disagree with what is decided. By having input into decisions each member feels validated and the family can grow based on the idea of consensus rather than authoritarianism.

Interactionism: Family members attach meaning to words and symbols and extrapolate meaning from these symbols. Consider the idea of “ clean”. A parent who tells his child to go clean their room attaches certain meaning to the word “ clean.” The child, of course, applies a completely different, and in most cases more liberal, meaning of the word “ clean.” “ Fair” is another great word illustrating interactionism. A child claims that parents are not being fair because they don’t buy them the latest Ipod like their friends have. A parent feels like it’s not fair that their child does little work around the house, complains about anything the parent asks him to do, and yet expects to be fed, sheltered, left alone, chauffeured around town at a moment’s notice and financially funded. Other words or symbols that illustrate interactionism are the concepts of: “ good music”, “ loud”, “ style”, “ appropriate clothes”, “ a nice boy”, “ hair cut”, and the list goes on.

Similarities: All assume some conflict between members of society or in this case the family. Interactionism tends to be a way of explaining certain behavior while the other two examine the behavior itself. Conflict theory thrives on conflict and stress while the other two tend to try to find a middle ground.

Functionalism: The individual’s perspective is formed by understanding his or her role in the family. Unity and progress are achieved when each individual understands and accepts his/her role. Disunity and chaos are achieved when even one member either does not understand or refuses to accept and function within his/her role.

Conflict: If members of the family buy interpret their reality through conflict theory they will have the following views. Parents will see children as entities that need to be controlled so that they do not rebel against the established authority. Children are objects to be manipulated or endured until they are out of the house. Children view the parents as authoritarian, antiquated and irrelevant. Rules established by parents are viewed as encroachments on the child’s liberty and freedom. Subversion or outright rebellion are the predictable results of the conflict perspective as applied to a family.

Interactionism: I think most people can identify with the different interpretations or definitions of identical words or icons. Parents interpret enormous baggy pants hanging around a teenager’s knees as a sign of momentous bad taste at best and severe mental retardation at worst. Teenage boys of course interpret this symbol as “ cool” and a vital step toward being accepted. Low rider jeans on girls and low cut tops are interpreted by parents as the first step down the slippery slope toward prostitution and slow death in a Las Vegas gutter. Girls view it as a way to get attention they aren’t getting from their dad, and or a step toward social inclusion and being part of the “ in” crowd.

Similarities: All address the inherent conflict that families face. Conflict theory implies that conflict is the foundation of family life and therefore inevitable. Interactionism addressed stress that results from different definitions of the same symbol. If family members can come to an agreement about the way symbols are defined and interpreted conflict can be minimized and unity becomes a possibility. Functionalism stresses the role of each family member.

Functionalism: Social change within the family is expected and planned for if one employs the functional perspective. As a child grows social change and interaction within the family is hoped for. A toddler learns to walk, children learn to dress themselves, teens begin choosing their own music and style of dress and by graduation they are nearly autonomous. As long as children and parents can come to an agreement about the roles they are expected to fill the family can live in harmony and be productive.

Conflict: Social change is a source of conflict and stress. Children desire more freedom than responsibility. Parents desire their children to exhibit responsibility in order to earn freedom. Change never occurs quickly enough for the children and way to quickly for most parents. Before he knows it daddy’s little girl is getting a nose piercing and wearing a bikini that covers practically nothing. Mom sees the little boy she held through fevers, teething, and hurt feelings, start to talk about getting a tattoo with a profanity in it and buying a motorcycle. All this change generates conflict which is inevitable.

Interactionism: Parents tend to get stuck in the past regarding the symbols they use and understand. Slang of today makes no sense to the parents but is readily understood by their children. Styles of clothing, taste in music, and appropriate ways of displaying feelings are all areas that are changing. Unless parents and children can come to a mutual understanding regarding these symbols conflict will occur. However, if they can come to an agreement, change can become a fun though crazy ride.

Similarities: Functionalism and interactionism rely on understanding in order for unity to be achieved. If parents and children can agree on their roles or the symbols they use this will build a foundation on which a harmonious relationship can be built. If there is no common ground or compromise however, disunity and stress will be the result. Conflict theory assumes stress and chaos and so offers no hope for common ground.

Functionalism: Children and parents will view society based on the perspective of functionalism. If a healthy give and take has occurred in developing and understanding roles both children and parents will be optimistic about success in society. They will look at society and determine what role they are to play and live accordingly. Children have been taught that living according to certain expectations is not burdensome. Parents will have learned that discussing roles with their children does not have to be threatening and does not necessarily undermine their role as parents. Individuals have been prepared to function within society. One area of future conflict will be when children see groups of society refusing to function within their determined roles or insisting on deliberately seeking to destabilize society.

Conflict: Because they have been preconditioned to view life as a conflict, family members view society as a huge stage on which conflicting desires and lifestyles are paraded. If they encounter situations they don’t like they will seek to undermine or subvert that aspect of society. If they have interpersonal problems they will be uninterested in discussing roles or definitions of specific symbols. They will concentrate their actions on rebelling against that person or removing him/her from the position of authority over them.

Interactionism: Life is made up of encounters with other people who attribute different meanings to identical symbols. For those families who have devised a healthy way to discuss and debate the meaning of shared symbols, social interaction will be a challenging yet healthy endeavor. For those families who have refused to acknowledge the possibility that someone else’s interpretation of a particular symbol may be as equally valid as their own, life will more than likely be a sequence of confrontations in which neither party is sure of where the other one is coming from. Because they have never considered that their own interpretation may be wrong or at least one of many correct interpretations, the individual will constantly feel misunderstood, superior to his/her peers, and/or disillusioned with others and perhaps with life.

Similarities: Functionalism provides perhaps the best platform from viewing society although interactionism can be equally positive. Conflict theory again is very negative and pessimistic in its view of society. Conflict is assumed and little energy is devoted to solving it because the underlying assumption is that it is a constant. Interactionism can be extremely positive if helpful strategies have been taught that can be used to interact with others. However it can be very negative if individuals are locked in to the view that their personal definition and the definitions of others are mutually exclusive.