# Sociology includes three major **theoretical perspectives**:

**FUNCTIONALISM**

**CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE**

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM**

Click the hyperlink to learn more about theoretical perspectives or click on a graphic to learn more about a particular type of theoretical perspective.
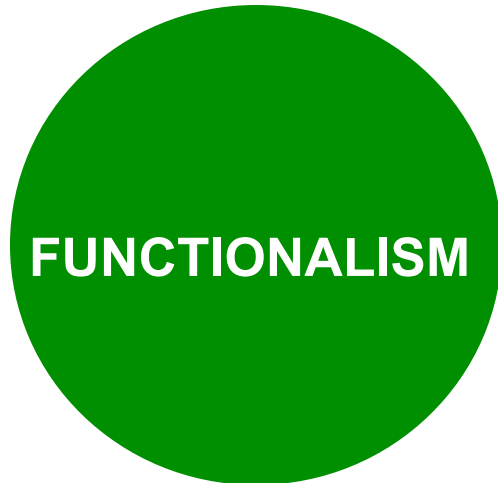
EXIT

# Functionalism

Emphasizes the contributions made by each part of society

- Society is a relatively integrated whole.

- Society tends to seek relative stability.

- Most aspects of a society contribute to the society's well-being and survival.

- Society rests on the voluntary participation of its members.

**FUNCTIONALISM**

EXIT

# Conflict perspective

Emphasizes the role of conflict, competition, change, and constraint within a society

- Society experiences inconsistency and conflict everywhere.

- Society is continually subjected to change.

- Society involves the constraint and coercion of some members by others.
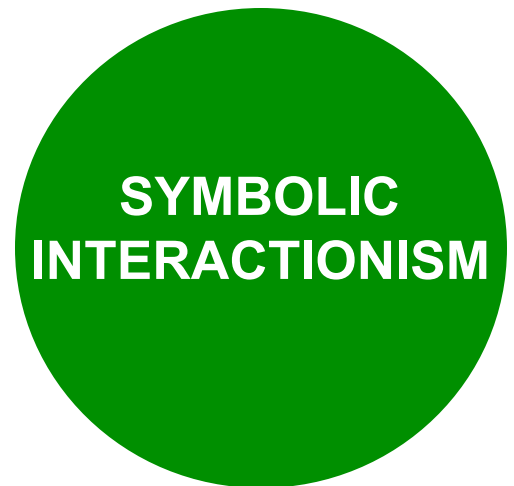
**CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE**

# Symbolic interactionism

Focuses on the interactions among people based on mutually understood symbols.

- People learn to interpret the meanings of **symbols** from others.

- People base their interaction on their interpretations of symbols.

- Symbols permit people to predict the behavior expected of them.

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM**

# A theoretical perspective is:

- a set of assumptions about an area of study, in this case about the workings of society

- viewed as true by its supporters and it helps them organize their research

# Which perspective is the best?

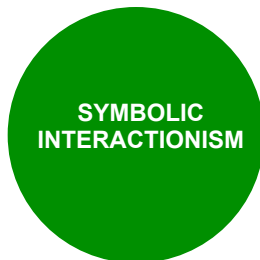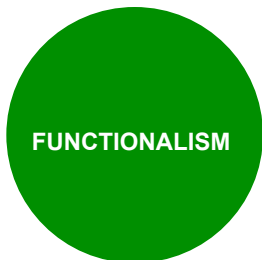There is no "better" theoretical perspective.

- Each perspective highlights certain areas of social life.

- The advantages of one perspective are the disadvantages of another.

- Certain issues and problems are best understood from a particular perspective.

EXIT

# Society Looks at the Internet

## Chapter 16

We can use technology to help us understand the role of "perspective taking."

- The Internet began as a way for military and scientific personnel to share information after a nuclear war.

- ARPAnet (the Internet's forerunner) was formed in 1969 with only four connected computers.

- According to some estimates, there will be more than 500 million users worldwide by the year 2003.

- Cyberspace technology showcases the usefulness of the three theoretical perspectives.

**FUNCTIONALISM**

**CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE**

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM**

Click on each theoretical perspective to learn more.

# Functionalism Chapter 16a

- Cyberspace has both positive and negative consequences.

- Advantages: parents can work at home and spend more time with children; individuals with disabilities can do jobs at home that would otherwise be denied, becoming more fully integrated into society.

- Dysfunctions: young people may have easy access to pornography, which can distort views of human sexuality; hate groups can be formed by strangers living many miles apart; anonymity may encourage antisocial or violent behavior.

# Conflict perspective

- The Internet is changing American society by contributing to the increasing speed of technological change.

- Social instability created by rapid change might be investigated; workers may be let go as more tasks are performed by computers.

- Could guide investigation comparing numbers of computers used in school districts of varying socioeconomic levels.  Because computer literacy is becoming essential for obtaining a well-paying job, students at wealthy schools with access to computers may have an advantage over students in poorer districts.
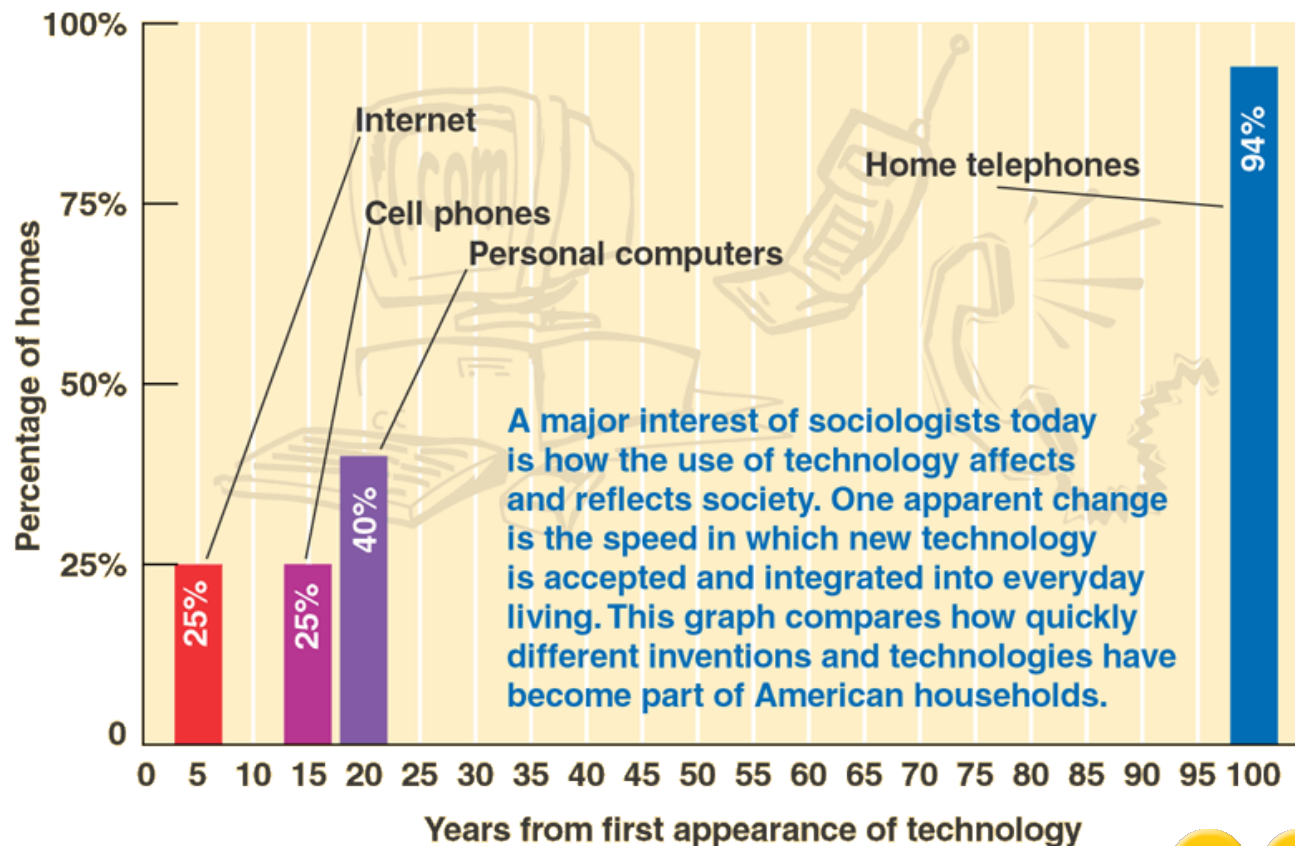
# Symbolic interactionism

- Can the Internet affect a child's social development?

- Popularity of TV cartoon characters reinforced by Web pages where children join fan clubs, interact with other fans, and view video clips whenever they want.

- Some TV shows feature children behaving in ways unacceptable in many American homes. TV provides limited exposure, but the Internet allows them to become part of daily life.

- Might conclude that what children come to accept as desirable behavior is based increasingly on interpretations of symbols and behaviors represented by these characters, thus the Internet lessens adult influence on children.

*Which perspective would you choose to conduct an in-depth study of the Internet's effect on society? Why?*



EXIT

**LEARNING ✓**

*Indicate whether the following statements represent functionalism (F), the conflict perspective (C), or symbolic interactionism (S).*

a. Societies are in relative balance.   **F**

b. Power is one of the most important elements in social life.   **C**

c. Symbols are crucial to social life.   **S**

d. Social life should be understood from the viewpoint of individuals involved.   **S**

e. Social change is constantly occurring.   **C**

f.  Conflict is harmful and disruptive to society.   **F**

EXIT