

[Get extra material \(summary, flashcards, practice test\) here.](#)
More flashcards [here](#).

AWL vocabulary is in **bold**.

Steckley, J. (2017). *Elements of Sociology. A Critical Canadian Introduction* (4th ed.) (pp. 4–33). Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Copyright ©2017, Oxford University Press

PART ONE

Foundations of Sociology

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Sociology

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory (sometimes called the **conflict approach**) is based on the “four Cs”:

- conflict
- class
- **contestation**¹
- change.

The **approach** is based, first, on the idea that *conflict* exists in all large societies. The **stress** lines are factors such as **sex** and gender, “race” and ethnicity, religion, age, and class—the sociological **ingredients**² of a person’s or group’s social location. Second, it **asserts**³ that *class* divisions exist and are a **source** of conflict in all large societies. Third, it **contends**⁴ that the functions of society, as laid out in traditional structural-**functionalist theory**, can be **contested**,⁵ or challenged, based on the question, *What group does this function best serve?* Finally, the **approach** involves the assumption that society either will or should be *changed*.

A **major** figure in the early history of sociology was German economist and political philosopher **Karl Marx** (1818–1883). For Marx, conflict was all about **class**: the division of society into a **hierarchy** of groups, with each group’s position determined by its **role** in the

¹ **Contestation**: disagreement; argument

² **Ingredients**: things that go together to makes something

³ **Assert**: claim; say

⁴ **Contend**: claim; say

⁵ **Contest (v)**: argue or fight about; disagree with

production of wealth. Marx saw class conflict as the driving force behind all **major** socio-historical change. He believed that conflict between the class of **capitalists**⁶ (the **bourgeoisie**⁶) and the class of workers (the **proletariat**⁷) would **initiate** a **socialist revolution** that would produce a **classless**,⁸ or **egalitarian**,⁹ society. A **classless**⁸ society has never existed in more **complex** societies, but many of Marx's insights about class conflict and **capitalist**⁶ production are still **valid**. This is true on a global scale, if you think of **transnational**¹⁰ corporations **headquartered**¹¹ in Western societies as the **capitalist** "owning class" and **underpaid**¹² workers in poorer countries (say **garment**¹³ workers in Bangladesh producing cheap clothes for Canadian shoppers) as the **ultimate** "working class."

The **territory**¹⁴ of conflict **theory** now stretches well beyond Marxism and incorporates applications in **feminist**¹⁵ sociology, critical **disability**¹⁶ thinking, "**queer**"¹⁷ **theory**, anti-**colonialism**,¹⁸ and other approaches that fall under the umbrella of "critical sociology," which we'll **encounter** shortly.

⁶ **Capitalist:** someone who owns land, buildings, or companies

⁷ **Proletariat:** the people who have to work, who are not capitalists

⁸ If the capitalists and proletariat are classes, then a **classless** society is one without such divisions.

⁹ **Egalitarian:** where everybody has equal power

¹⁰ **Transnational:** operating in more than one country or across countries

¹¹ **Headquartered:** based; having the main offices

¹² **Underpaid:** not paid enough

¹³ **Garment:** clothing

¹⁴ **Territory:** area belonging to one theory/group

¹⁵ **Feminist:** a person who believes in equal rights, power, and opportunity for all people

¹⁶ **Disability:** a condition that makes it difficult for someone to use a part of their body easily, or to learn easily

¹⁷ **Queer:** not fitting into what is considered normal by society when talking about gender and/or sexuality

¹⁸ **Colonialism:** when a powerful country directly controls less powerful countries and uses their resources to increase its own power and wealth