

# Functionalism Theory

Key Players, Concepts, and Assumptions  
What Societies Need To Survive  
The Functions Of Family





# Who We Are

- Mostly (95 percent) identify as women
- Two-thirds are heterosexual, 25% are bi, and the rest are lesbian, queer, and pansexual
- Eight percent of us are Black, 27 percent Asian, 28 percent White, and 37 percent Hispanic
- We average about 2 siblings, with five only children and one of us having 8 siblings (combo of full, halves, and steps)
- For those of us with siblings, 37 percent are first-born and 18 percent are last-born
- Seven percent of us come from single-parent homes; none of us from same-sex ones.

Married couples should divorce only if childless (5% agree)

Open relationships are probably more normal (7% agree)

Women should return to traditional roles (0% agree)

I could be a very successful single parent (81% agree)



# Functionalism

## Key Players

**George Murdock:** argued that nuclear families are universal & perform essential social functions

**Talcott Parsons:** argued that extended families are universal, but industrialization makes nuclear families best

## Key Concept

**Social Facts:** patterns of acting, thinking, and feeling that exist outside of individuals but exert **social control** over us

## Key Assumptions

Every system needs to achieve a state of order or system equilibrium (*homeostasis*). The keys to this are *moral/value consensus* and *institutions* like the family



- **Replace Its Members:**  
Groups do this through procreation, conversion, or immigration
- **Teach New Recruits:**  
Groups do this through education, indoctrination, or informal interaction.
- **Produce/Distribute Goods:**  
Groups must satisfy members' needs or face discontent and disorder.
- **Preserve Order:**  
Groups protect their members from both internal and external threats.
- **Provide A Sense Of Purpose:**  
Groups help members understand their value to the society, providing motivation for them to continue as members of it..

**Social Institutions**

**What Societies  
Need To Survive**

Family  
Schools  
Markets  
Government  
Churches



# The Functions Of Family



***The “Benchmark” Family Is The Traditional Intact Nuclear Family Of A Breadwinner Husband, Homemaker Wife, And Their Children (Preferably A Boy And A Girl)***



# The Functions Of Family

**They regulate sexual activity**

**They ensure that new babies survive to become adult members of the society**

**They ensure that children are socialized into the norms and values of society via **primary socialization****

**They provide “economic” support for family members**

**They satisfy our emotional needs for love and security**

**To provide us with a sense of place and position**



*What kinds of consequences might follow if kids are raised in families that deviate from the “benchmark” nuclear model?*

*How might a functionalist respond to rising acceptance of challenges to the theory’s assumptions? Shrug or revise?!*

*Do all of these functions still depend on families? Are some of them (better) handled by other institutions or technologies?*



# JOURNAL QUESTION



For functionalists, “gender role socialization” is a key family responsibility and benchmark families (intact, man & woman) are the best form for teaching it.

If you grew up in the benchmark family, did your parents model “normal” male and female gender roles?

If not, who modeled these norms? Is one set absent in single-sex or same-sex households?