**DC Sociology: Four Theoretical Perspectives:**

***What is a theoretical perspective?***

Theoretical perspectives are basic assumptions about how society functions, the role of sociology, and the application of a specific set of theories in studying social life. Also refer to your book (Ch 1, Sec 3)

**What are the four major perspectives?**

1. ***Functionalism (Also known as structural Functionalism):*** Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely [norms](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norms), [customs](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_%28norm%29), [traditions](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditions) and [institutions](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institutions). A common analogy, popularized by [Herbert Spencer](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Spencer), presents these parts of society as "organs" that work toward the proper functioning of the "body" as a whole. In the most basic terms, it simply emphasizes "the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible.”
2. ***Conflict Perspective:*** The conflict perspective views the social world as riddled with tension and strife. While stability and order remain recognized facts of the social world, the conflict perspective seeks to discover the tensions that exist behind the facade of order. Because some segments of human systems hold more power, money, prestige, and other valuables than do other segments, there is inevitably a conflict of interests between the "haves" and the "have-nots." Those who possess valuable resources naturally wish to retain them. Those without resources want to secure them.
3. ***Symbolic Interaction:*** Is a theory that human interaction and communication is facilitated by words, gestures, and other symbols that have acquired conventionalized meanings. It looks at the big picture of society and suggests how social problems are affected at the institutional level Symbolic interactionism also suggests that our identity or sense of self is shaped by social interaction. We develop our self-concept by observing how others interact with us a label us. By observing how others view us, we see a reflection ourselves.
4. ***Feminism:*** Feminist theory is one of the major contemporary sociological theories, which analyzes the status of women and men in society with the purpose of using that knowledge to better women's lives. [Feminist theorists](http://womenshistory.about.com/od/feminism/tp/feminist_theory.01.htm) also question the differences between women, including how race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, and age intersect with gender. [Feminist theory](http://womenshistory.about.com/od/feminism/tp/feminist_theory.htm) is most concerned with giving a voice to women and highlighting the various ways women have contributed to society.