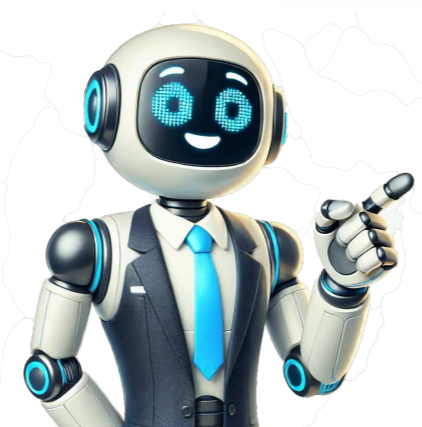


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## Examples of the conflict theory

Perspectives in sociology and political philosophy
For a historiographical theory with a similar name, see Conflict thesis. This article needs additional citations for verification. Please help improve this article by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed.Find sources: "Conflict theories" – news · newspapers · books · scholar · JSTOR (December 2023) (Learn how and when to remove this message)
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Conflict theories are perspectives in political philosophy and sociology which argue that individuals and groups (social classes) within society interact on the basis of conflict rather than agreement, while also emphasizing social psychology, historical materialism, power dynamics, and their roles in creating power structures, social movements, and social arrangements within a society. Conflict theories often draw attention to power differentials, such as class conflict, or a conflict continuum. While generally contrasts historically dominant ideologies, economies, currencies or technologies. Accordingly, conflict theories represent attempts at the macro-level analysis of society. Many political philosophers and sociologists have been framed as having conflict theories, dating back as far as Plato's idea of the tripartite soul of The Republic,[1] to Hobbes' ideas in The Leviathan. Other historical political philosophers associated with having "conflict theories" include Jean Bodin, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Robert Malthus, Karl Marx, and Georg Simmel.[2] Georg Simmel was one of the earliest sociologists to formally use "conflict" as a framework to understand social change, writing about the topic in his 1908 book, "Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations"[3] While many conflict theories set out to highlight the ideological aspects inherent in traditional thought, conflict theory does not refer to a unified school of thought, and should not be confused with, for instance, social conflict theory, or any other specific theory related to social conflict. Two early conflict theorists were the Polish-Austrian sociologist and political theorist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909) and the American sociologist and paleontologist Lester F. Ward (1841–1913). Although Ward and Gumplowicz developed their theories independently they had much in common and approached conflict from a comprehensive anthropological and evolutionary point-of-view as opposed to Marx's rather exclusive focus on economic factors. Gumplowicz, in Grundriss der Soziologie (Outlines of Sociology, 1884), describes how civilization has been shaped by conflict between cultures and ethnic groups. Gumplowicz theorized that large complex human societies evolved from war and conquest. The winner of a war would enslave the losers; eventually a complex caste system develops.[4] Horowitz says that Gumplowicz understood conflict in all its forms: "class conflict, race conflict, and ethnic conflict", and calls him one of the fathers of conflict theory.[5] What happened in India, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, and Rome may sometimes happen in modern Europe. European civilization may perish, over flooded by barbaric tribes. But if anyone believes that we are safe from such catastrophes he is perhaps yielding to an all too optimistic delusion. There are no barbaric tribes in our neighborhood to be sure — but let no one is deceived, their instincts lie latent in the populace of European states.— Gumplowicz (1884), [6] Conflict theories were popular in early sociology, and accordingly often date back to the early 1900s founders of Sociology, and particularly the ideas of Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Karl Marx, and Lester Frank Ward. Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) opposed conflict theory views and instead saw society as a functioning organism. His primary lens of functionalism concerns "the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom, or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system,[7] Seeing social conflict as a deviation that appeared in society as crime. Durkheim saw crime as "a factor in public health, an integral part of all healthy societies."[8] The collective conscience defines certain acts as "criminal." Crime thus plays a role in the evolution of morality and law: "[i]t implies not only that the way remains open to necessary changes but that in certain cases it directly prepares these changes.[9] Max Weber's (1864–1920) approach to conflict is contrasted with that of Marx. While Marx focused on the way individual behavior is conditioned by social structure, Weber emphasized the importance of "social action," i.e., the ability of individuals to affect their social relationships.[10] Karl Marx (1818–1883) based his conflict theory on a dialectical materialist account of history. Marxism posited that capitalism, like previous socioeconomic systems, would inevitably produce internal tensions leading to its own destruction. Marx ushered in radical change, advocating proletarian revolution and freedom from the ruling classes, as well as critiqued political economy. At the same time, Karl Marx was aware that most of the people living in capitalist societies did not see how the system shaped the entire operation of society. Just as modern individuals see private property (and the right to pass that property on to their children) as natural, many of the members in capitalist societies see the rich as having earned their wealth through hard work and education, while seeing the poor as lacking in skill and initiative. Marx rejected this type of thinking, viewing it as something Friedrich Engels termed false consciousness, the use of misdirection by the ruling class to obfuscate the exploitation intrinsic to the relationship between the proletariat and the ruling class. Marx wanted to replace this false consciousness with something Friedrich Engels termed class consciousness, the workers' recognition of themselves as a class unified in opposition to capitalists and ultimately to the capitalist system itself. In general, Marx wanted the proletarians to rise up against the capitalists and overthrow the capitalist system. The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes.—Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels The Communist Manifesto 1848. [11] Lester Frank Ward directly attacked and attempted to systematically refute the elite business class's laissez-faire philosophy as espoused by the hugely popular social philosopher Herbert Spencer. Ward's Dynamic Sociology (1883) was an extended thesis on how to reduce conflict and competition in society and thus optimize human progress. At the most basic level, Ward saw human nature itself to be deeply conflicted between self-aggrandizement and altruism, between emotion and intellect, and between male and female. These conflicts would be then reflected in society and Ward assumed there had been a "perpetual and vigorous struggle" among various "social forces" that shaped civilization.[12][13] Ward was more optimistic than Marx and Gumplowicz and believed that it was possible to build on and reform present social structures with the help of sociological analysis. C. Wright Mills has been called the founder of modern conflict theory.[14] In Mills's view, social structures are created through conflict between people with differing interests and resources. Individuals and resources, in turn, are influenced by these structures and by the "unequal distribution of power and resources in the society." [14] The power elite of American society, (i.e., the military-industrial complex) had "emerged from the fusion of the corporate elite, the Pentagon, and the executive branch of government." Mills argued that the interests of the elite were opposed to those of the people. He theorized that the policies of the power elite would result in "increased escalation of conflict, production of weapons of mass destruction, and possibly the annihilation of the human race." [14] Gene Sharp (1928-2018) was a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth [15] He is known for his extensive writings on nonviolent struggle, which have influenced numerous anti-government resistance movements around the world. In 1983 he founded the Albert Einstein Institution, a non-profit organization devoted to studies and promotion of the use of nonviolent action in conflicts worldwide.[16] Sharp's key theme is that power is not monolithic; that is, it does not derive from some intrinsic quality of those who are in power. For Sharp, political power, the power of any state—regardless of its particular structural organization—ultimately derives from the subjects of the state. His fundamental belief is that any power structure relies upon the subjects' obedience to the orders of the ruler or rulers. If subjects do not obey, leaders have no power. Sharp has been called both the "Machiavelli of nonviolence" and the "Clausewitz of nonviolent warfare." [17] Sharp's scholarship has influenced resistance organizations around the world. More recently, the protest movement that toppled President Mubarak of Egypt drew extensively on his ideas, as well as the youth movement in Tunisia, and the earlier ones in the Eastern European colour revolutions that had previously been inspired by Sharp's work.[18] A recent articulation of conflict theory is found in Canadian sociologist Alan Sears' book A Good Book, in Theory: A Guide to Theoretical Thinking (2008).[19] Societies are defined by inequality that produces conflict, rather than which produces order and consensus. This conflict based on inequality can only be overcome through a fundamental transformation of the existing relations in the society, and is productive of new social relations. The disadvantaged have structural interests that run counter to the status quo, which, once they are assumed, will lead to social change. Thus, they are viewed as agents of change rather than objects one should feel sympathy for. Human potential (e.g., capacity for creativity) is suppressed by conditions of exploitation and oppression, which are necessary in any society with an unequal division of labour. These and other qualities do not necessarily have to be studied due to the requirements of the so-called "civilizing process," or "functional necessity": creativity is actually an engine for economic development and change. The role of theory is in realizing human potential and transforming society, rather than maintaining the power structure. The opposite aim of theory would be the objectivity and detachment associated with positivism, where theory is a neutral, explanatory tool. Consensus is a euphemism for ideology. Genuine consensus is not achieved, rather the more powerful in societies are able to impose their conceptions on others and have them accept their discourses. Consensus does not preserve social order, it entrenches stratification, a tool of the current social order. The State serves the particular interests of the most powerful while claiming to represent the interests of all. Representation of disadvantaged groups in State processes may cultivate the notion of full participation, but this is an illusion/ideology. Inequality on a global level is characterized by the purposeful underdevelopment of Third World countries, both during colonization and after national independence. The global system (i.e., development agencies such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund) benefits the most powerful countries and multi-national corporations, rather than the subjects of development, through economic, political, and military actions. Although Sears associates the conflict theory approach with Marxism, he argues that it is the foundation for such "feminist, post-modernist, anti-racist, and lesbian-gay liberationist theories." [20] Conflict theory has three assumptions:[21] Humans are self-interested. Societies operate under perpetual scarcity of resources. Conflict is pervasive and unavoidable within social groups and between social groups. Conflict theory is most commonly associated with Marxism, but as a reaction to functionalism and the positivist method, it may also be associated with a number of other perspectives, including: Critical theory Feminist theory: An approach that recognizes women's political, social, and economic equality to men. Postmodern theory: An approach that is critical of modernism, with a mistrust of grand theories and ideologies.[22] Post-structural theory Postcolonial theory Queer theory: A growing body of research findings that challenges the heterosexual bias in Western society.[23] World systems theory Race–conflict approach: A point of view that focuses on inequality and conflicts between people of different racial and ethnic categories.[22] Critical realism (philosophy of the social sciences) Conflict theory has been criticised for being too politicised by its association with Marx and its widespread use by advocates in numerous causes and movements. Critics also argue it downplays unity in society while taking a negative view of society.[23] Society portalPsychology portal Conflict management Game theory One-upmanship Pure sociology Redlining Security dilemma Social defeat Sociology of peace, war, and social conflict Sociomics ~ Brown, Eric (2017). "Plato's Ethics and Politics in The Republic". The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. Retrieved 14 September 2023. ^ Turner, J. H. (1 June 1975). "Marx and Simmel Revisited: Reassessing the Foundations of Conflict Theory". Social Forces. 53 (4): 618–627. doi:10.1093/sf/53.4.618. Retrieved 14 September 2023. ^ Simmel, Georg; Hughes, Everett C.; Simmel, Georg (1964). Conflict (First Free Press paperback ed.). New York: The Free Press. ISBN 0029288401.  {{cite book}}: ISBN / Date incompatibility (help) ^ Fifty Key Sociologists: The Formative Theorists, John Scott Irving, 2007, pg 59 ^ "Communicating Ideas: The Politics of Scholarly Publishing", Irving Louis Horowitz, 1986, pg 281 ^ "Outlines of Sociology", pg 196 ^ Bourricaud, F. "The Sociology of Talcott Parsons" Chicago University Press. ISBN 0-226-06756-4. p. 94 ^ Durkheim, E. (1938). The Rules of Sociological Method. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. p. 67. ^ Durkheim, (1938), pp. 70–81. ^ Livesay, C. Social Inequality: Theories: Weber. Sociology Central. A-Level Sociology Teaching Notes. Retrieved on: 2010-06-20. ^ Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto, introduction by Martin Malia (New York: Penguin Group, 1998), pg. 35 ISBN 0-451-52710-0 ^ "Transforming Leadership", James MacGregor Burns, 2004, pg 189 ^ "German Realpolitik and American Sociology: an Inquiry Into the Sources and Political Significance of the Sociology of Conflict", James Alfred Aho, 1975, ch. 6 ^ Lester F. Ward's Sociology of Conflict " a b c Knapp, P. (1994). One World - Many Worlds: Contemporary Sociological Theory (2nd Ed.). Harpercollins College Div. pp. 228–246. Online summary ISBN 978-0-96-501218-7 ^ "Gene Sharp: Author of the nonviolent revolution rulebook" BBC News. 21 February 2011. ^ Gene Sharp biography at Albert Einstein Institution web site. Archived 12 January 2010 at the Wayback Machine ^ Weber, Thomas (2004). Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 9780511264184. [page needed] ^ "Shy U.S. Intellectual Created Playbook Used in a Revolution". The New York Times. 16 February 2011. ^ Sears, Alan. (2008) A Good Book, In Theory: A Guide to Theoretical Thinking. North York: Higher Education University of Toronto Press, pg. 34-6. ISBN 1-55111-536-0. ^ Sears, pg. 36. ^ Hamon, Raean R. "Conflict Theory." Encyclopedia of Family Studies (2016): 1-5. ^ a b c Maconis, J., and Gerber, L. (2010). Sociology, 7th edition ^ Stolley, Kathy S. (2005). The Basics of Sociology. Greenwood Publishing Group. p. 27. Library resources about Conflict theories Resources in your library Stark, Rodney (2007). Sociology (10th ed.). Thomson Higher Education. ISBN 978-0-495-09344-2. Lenski, Gerhard E. (1966). Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification. McGraw-Hill. ISBN 978-0-07-037165-1. Collins, Randall (1994). Four Sociological Traditions: Selected Readings. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-508702-4. Thio, Alex (2008). Sociology: A Brief Introduction (7th ed.). Pearson. ISBN 978-0-205-40785-9. Theory of cooperation Retrieved from " Women in Me too demonstration Tassii / E+ / Getty Images Used under Getty Images license Conflict theory in sociology describes society's tendency to change and develop due to perpetual conflict between classes. It is one of the four paradigms of sociology, which include functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and feminism. Examples of social conflict theory can be found in a variety of situations. The 19th-century philosopher and revolutionary Karl Marx saw society broken into two classes: the proletariat (working class) and bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production). To Marx, societal conflicts arise due to competition for limited resources in an economy, leading to an eventual revolution and/or war. Ruling classes kept working classes in states of oppression with hegemony, which imposed dominance with social rules that all obeyed. Political economist Max Weber extended this definition to include multidimensional class levels, such as those based on race, gender, and religion. He believed that political revolution, social conflict and change can result from discourse and the exchange of ideas. Patterns of class conflict theory occur when one class of people is systematically empowered over another. The less empowered class demands a share of resources that the more fortunate class has in abundance, leading to social conflict. Here are some real-life examples of conflict theory in both economic and societal situations. Part of the backlash following the 2008 economic crisis, Occupy Wall Street was a two-month political protest on Wall Street, New York. Its slogan, "We Are the 99%", referred to the increasing wealth and income discrepancy between the wealthiest 1% of the population and the rest of the country. Time Magazine named "The Protester," both international protesters and those involved with Occupy Wall Street, as its 2011 Person of the Year. Inherent tracking systems in the public education system create their own class stratification. Gifted and advanced students (who are more likely to be from families with time and financial resources that aid educational success) receive skills that prepare them for college and future careers. Average-performing students and struggling students do not receive these same opportunities in their classes, which are often more focused on remediation and learning trades. If these students are able to make it to college, they will be economically disadvantaged due to student loans. This conflict has led to a national conversation about the affordability of college and the feasibility of canceling student loan debt. Crimes committed by members of wealthier classes, such as powerful CEOs or celebrities, often receive less punishment than crimes committed by people of minority races or lower socioeconomic status. Marx maintained that because the definition of crime and criminality is dictated by those with societal power, the criminal justice system is another way to subjugate the working class while elevating the higher class. Another way for ruling classes to oppress others is to abuse the power they hold over women and men in subordinate careers. The MeToo movement, which began in 2016 and had a social media resurgence in 2017 as #metoo, identified how widespread the issue of workplace sexual abuse and harassment had become. This type of social revolution reflects the sociological perspective, by civilizations Huntington implies an ethno-religious and cultural division of the world into 7 (sometimes 8) spheres - the Western ( Anglo-Saxon now world and Western Europe), the Orthodox ( eastern Europe and Russia), the Sinitic ( China and South-East Asia), the Islamic, the Eastern ( India and Japan), the African, and the Americas. In America was systemic - and that an individual racist was not needed to maintain the discriminatory system. Black Lives Matter is a social movement that protests violence against black people. It began in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. The movement's supporters continue to demonstrate when black people are killed in situations that are perceived to be non-threatening. Like the civil rights movement that came more than 60 years before, Black Lives Matter is another example of a social revolution after years of unequal treatment. The fight for gay rights culminated in American politics in 2008 when Proposition 8 passed in California. It defined marriage as between a man and a woman. The proposition gained international attention as its passage seemed to indicate that the gap between gay and straight marriage rights would remain. But, proponents of gay marriage protested political donors and boycotted businesses, indicating that the conflict between the two classes was too strong. The California Supreme Court later overturned the proposition, and the U.S. Supreme Court followed suit in 2015, making same-sex marriage legal in the United States. The conflict redefined the status quo in American politics. Though conflict theory is the basis of several subsequent theories in sociology, including race conflict theory and critical theory, it has its share of criticism. Modern criticisms of conflict theory include: It focuses on conflict to the exclusion of stable economies and societies.Scientific research on interpersonal conflict is lacking.There is a limited ability to extend conflict theory into a microeconomic scale, including family systems.It often excludes intersectionality, which describes the network of attributes that make up a person's identity.Conflict theory discounts positive societal trends, such as humanitarianism and acts of peace.It does not include individuals who move into upper social classes through means of merit or skill (e.g., educational advancement, sports careers, career promotion, etc.). Like other sociological perspectives, conflict theory is based on historical and societal patterns. It's not the only way to explain the world that society words. If you'd like to learn about many ways to see society and human behavior, take a look at other influential ideologies from around the world. Boost your knowledge of society further with a list of key sociology terms and concepts too. Conflict theory is the theory that resources and power in society are limited and therefore conflict will take place between groups in society to obtain control over resources. It is one of three paradigms in sociology. As a result of the conflicts between social groups who seek power and control, society becomes stratified into groups like the workers vs the capitalist, black vs white, various social castes, and nation vs nation. The theory was designed by key sociologists like Karl Marx and C. Wright Mills. Examples of conflict theory include worker-capitalist conflict, the clash of civilizations theory, and worker vs tenant disputes. Marx was primarily concerned with the conflict between workers and the owners of capital. According to Marx, the owners of capital oppressed the workers in order to prevent them from obtaining access to resources. For Marx, the solution was to enter conflict in the form of a revolution. If the workers gained political power, they could oppress the capitalist class and take the capital to be used for the good of the workers. Thus, Marxism and communism are fundamentally based on the theory that societies are always in a state of class conflict where one class or the other denies access to economic resources. For some education theorists, conflict theory can be seen in the modern-day education system (Chernoff, 2013). Schools tend to teach people how to be good and docile workers. Very rarely do young people leave their compulsory schooling with the aspiration to be an entrepreneur or self-employed. This focus in public schools on educating the "future workforce" rather than future businesspeople keeps the masses more docile and focused on serving the capitalist class who will continue to control powers through control of capital. See also: Conflict Theory Criticisms Clash of Civilizations is a hypothesis by the American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington (1927 - 2008) in which he proposes that major global conflicts in the era of globalization would no longer be based upon nation-states but between civilizations. The crisis was mitigated by unethical lending practices of banks and hedge funds that led to several large banking and financial institutions going bankrupt. This set off a domino effect due to the high degree of interconnectedness and interdependence of global financial institutions the world over, in which the effects of the actions of a few powerful institutions were felt by a large segment of the most vulnerable the world over. Whereas governments the world over stepped in to protect banks and bankers, there was precious little in the form of a safety net for the poor working classes, highlighting the unequal distribution of power between financial institutions and the working classes. Here, we can see how limited resources were distributed to the powerful while the powerless were given very little. It was also as an aftereffect of the 2008 financial crisis that cryptocurrencies, as a means of bypassing the banking system that were first introduced. However, once again governments the world over are locked in a tussle to regulate cryptocurrencies as they believe their unregulated use could bring instability to the global financial system. This represents the next step in the struggle between the two sides. The American student debt crisis refers to the USD 1.6 Trillion in outstanding student loans owed to universities and banks collectively by some 44 million Americans with more than 10% of the debtors defaulting on their loans. The debt is similarly high in several other developed nations including the UK, leading to widespread protests and urgent calls for policy reform (Hess, 2020). A student loan is provided by a bank in anticipation of the student successfully graduating from the university and becoming gainfully employed. However, this system breaks down when a university education can no longer guarantee employment or employment at incomes high enough to pay back the loan with interest. Universities and banks however have an incentive to continue dispensing as many loans as possible without taking any guarantee for employment security. They possess the resources to be able to creatively market and package their offerings so as to make them appear attractive to prospective students. Most students on the other hand make their decisions in an environment of information asymmetry. It is difficult for them to be able to predict whether the course they are opting for would equip them to earn a decent living 5 years down the line. Their decisions are also influenced by the prevailing ( albeit of recent origin) cultural environment which presents a university education as a prerequisite to a successful career, and the social and cultural capital commanded by several institutes of higher education, irrespective of their ability to guarantee stable and gainful employment. Thus a situation of conflict arises in which students find themselves pitted against universities and loan dispersing institutions, with the latter having the resources to influence decision making in their favor. The prisoner's dilemma is a hypothetical game theory set up which offers a psychological explanation for why actors prefer not to cooperate even when mutual cooperation seems to offer greater rewards. Two prisoners accused of having jointly committed a crime are being held in isolation in two separate wards and being interrogated. The following are the possible outcomes: If each prisoner betrays the other, both will be convicted. If only one prisoner betrays the other, he/she will be set free while the other would be convicted. If both remain silent, both would be set free. It is obvious from the above that the best possible outcome is the two last - i.e. both prisoners mutually cooperate and refuse to betray the other. However, according to game theory, the course most likely to be adopted by actors in such a situation is either the first or the second. This is because rational, self-interested actors operate in an informational vacuum in which they can neither know the intentions of the other prisoner nor trust the other's intention to do the right thing. Therefore, the only course left to them is the one that offers the most immediate relief. In this case, it is to betray their partner and secure their own release. The prisoner's dilemma offers a mathematical model to back the sociological conflict theory, explaining why conflict is perennial in society despite the greater, and evident benefits of mutual cooperation. Siege mentality is the perception of a group that they are perennially under siege or threat from external forces, leading to collective actions that display urgency and belligerence even in the absence of any real threat. While siege mentality may result from the experience of a group of people being persecuted in the past, it continues to manifest itself in their actions long after the real threat has passed (Christie, 2011). Siege mentality can most commonly be witnessed in the realm of international relations where certain states are predisposed to react with disproportionate force to even the slightest real or perceived threats, for instance Israel vs Palestine and Russia vs Ukraine. A related concept found in the domain of literature and cinema is garrison mentality. The phrase was specifically coined to describe the themes of survivalism commonly found in Canadian literature and cinema by the critic Northrop Frye and the novelist Margaret Atwood. According to Frye and Atwood, this preoccupation with survivalism stems from a history of battling harsh forces of nature, and external enemies during the formative years of the modern Canadian nation (Atwood, 1972). Marx's belief that society involves endless conflict over limited resources can explain a wide range of conflicts - from workplace disputes to global wars. The above examples are just a shortlist of countless situations where conflict replays itself throughout history. Read more Examples of Theories Here Atwood, M. (1972) Survival: A thematic guide to Canadian literature. Los Angeles: Anansi. Chernoff, C. (2013). Conflict theory of education. In J. Ainsworth (Ed.), Sociology of education: An a-to-z guide (Vol. 1, pp. 146-147). SAGE Publications, Inc. ^ Christie, D.J. 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