What you'll learn to do: contrast the various theoretical perspectives on culture and technology

There are three major theoretical approaches toward the interpretation of culture. A *functionalist*, or structural functionalist, perspective acknowledges that there are many parts of culture that work together as a system to fulfill society's needs and to promote stability. *Conflict theory* focuses on populations that may be systematically disadvantaged while other groups are advantaged. It focuses on power and inequality within a culture. A *symbolic interactionist* is primarily interested in culture as experienced in the daily interactions between individuals and the symbols that have meaning in a culture. If we think about technology as an overarching aspect of culture, we can utilize these theories to explain and even predict cultural patterns, including those regarding technology.

Music, fashion, technology, and values—all are products of culture. But what do they mean? How do sociologists perceive and interpret culture based on these material and nonmaterial items? Let's complete our analysis of culture by reviewing them in the context of the three theoretical perspectives.

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