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# The Acknowledgement Of Social Class And Its Relation To Popular Culture

In this assignment, I am going to be discussing the acknowledgement of social class and its relation to popular culture. Firstly, to begin with according to Augustyn (2019), "Social class, also called class, a group of people within a society who possess the same socioeconomic status". This is encapsulated with the universal, traditional classes: the upper class (also known as the bourgeoisie, in Marxian terms who own the means of production) and the working-class, (also known as the proletariat whose labour is exploited for profit). In our modern and contemporary society, there is a 'new class' called the precariat, introduced by Guy Standing (2011) argued to be lower than the working-class. Furthermore, the term 'popular culture' "refers in general to the traditions and material culture of a particular society" (Crossman, 2019). In contemporary society, popular culture is significant such as by keeping up with the latest trends, music, clothes, language and so on, through the power of social media. This keeps individuals in society caught up with the mainstream culture. In addition, I am going to discuss sociological theories such as Marxism. Marx says that the class that owns the means of production also produce the creation of ideologies through the illustration of the base and superstructure (which will be further discussed) and non-sociological theories such as cultural and material deprivation.

A) To begin with, some ideas how social class has been understood sociologically include Marxism, introduced by Marx who explores the differences between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. He argues that class is defined by a person's relationship to the means of production. The base is the foundation that shapes the superstructure. It is made up of everything related to production which are owned by the bourgeoisie. Whilst the superstructure maintains the base, it is made up of major institutions such as education, religion, media and more. In a similar vein, Weber, (also considered a Marxist) took some ideas of Marx, except revealed that a person is not defined by their class, but their market position, through their qualifications, skills and so on that they gain. Weber accounted for economic and non-economic factors in relation to power and inequality. To support this, according to Longhurst et al, "Weber's concept of status... opens the way for considering overlaps... between class and status" (2017:109). Similarly, Gramsci's idea of hegemony reiterates the way the ruling class remain their power, through the way of consent (often through force). Consent is won ideologically by getting the masses to accept ideas, thus retaining their rule. Likewise, social class has also been understood sociologically through a non-theoretical approach, using the ideas of cultural and material deprivation. Cultural deprivation (Thompson, 2014), refers to this; in the education system, working-class pupils often lack basic cultural equipment such as language, self-discipline or reasoning skills, whilst material deprivation (Thompson, 2014) refers to poverty and the lack of basic material necessities such as adequate income and housing.

B) Furthermore, social class also relates to popular culture in a variety of ways. The sociological ideas of both Marx and Weber relate to popular culture because it is simply due to the differences in power, class and status. For instance, due to the bourgeoisie owning the means of production this means they are able to shape the superstructure, which is made up of the major institutions such as the mass media, family and more. An example of this is the idea of 'pester power', that is advertisements on the television (through media) encourage children to

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want what they do not need, leading to 'pestering' parents. As a result, parents are almost forced to buy the product, benefiting those in power. This further relates to popular culture as children often want those products so that they do not feel left out of what the latest trends are. This is heavily dependent on social media. For example, many young people look up at reality television stars, such as Kim Kardashian, in the hope of being, dressing and acting like them. In addition, relating back to Gramsci's idea of hegemony, that the bourgeoisie are able to retain their power through consent, mostly forced relates to popular culture because of, (according to an article by McAdams), in the *Origins of American Pop Culture*, "new means of mass production... gave larger numbers of people the income necessary to consume them" (McAdams, 2014). In the US, the rise of a media culture, including films, popular music, radio, TV and other forms allowed the popular culture to become industrialised in manufacture and commercialised in intent. Such as leisure time and activity became significant and overpowered by culture industries such as TV which are controlled by large corporations.

Similarly, according to a study conducted by the university in Frankfurt, The Frankfurt School (Longhurst et al., 2017:106), found that in 1933, many Jews fled Germany to the US, some had later returned to Germany in 1949. As a result of the media, Hitler was able to become so much in power, mainly due to the working-class and the middle-class both having access to media, thus, relating back to the words of McAdams. Perhaps to some extent, another relation between social class and popular culture is due to race and gender. That is due to popular culture such as the media and other tabloids, there is the misrepresentation that 'black males' come from a disadvantaged and working-class background, causing control agents such as the police to hold stereotypes and typifications against these "working-class black boys". For example, according to an article it reveals, "Poverty and deprivation (of life chances and opportunity) can drive boys and young men into violent criminal activity" (Lee, 2019). Therefore, revealing the way social class is relatable to popular culture. It is mainly due to the accessibility to the media. This relates to the view of cultural and material deprivation, for example, cultural deprivation theorists argue that many 'black families' are dysfunctional. According to Sewell, "absence of fathers as role models" leads to 'black boys' looking for that nurturing role amongst other boys by joining gangs (Thompson, 2017). Illustrating the misrepresentation that 'black boys' come from a working-class background and how many people believe this ideology due to what they see in the media, through 'popular culture'. Therefore, showing how the relation between social class and popular culture is also gender and race.

C) To further emphasise the relationship between social class and popular culture is through the illustration of examples. Firstly, in contemporary society, a visualisation of the working-class group is seen as made up of mainly ethnic minority groups. For example, according to the government statistics, it reveals; "the lowest employment rate was in the combined Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic group, at 57%" in comparison to the 77% of white people who were employed (Ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk, 2019). This relates to the popular culture because social class is also related to race, that is the media misrepresent ethnic minority groups, such as black individuals and Asian communities as working-class and prone to crime. This is evident through an article titled, "Ethnic minorities most likely to be both victims and suspects of crime, UK race report finds" (Bulman, 2017). This means, social class relates to popular culture considering that society identifies most ethnic groups with the lower class. Another example as to how social class is related to popular culture is the idea of social media. Social media today is seen as an influencing tool. For many people in the working-class, social media allows them to keep up with the latest trends, in order to feel part of the mainstream society. In a similar stance, another example how social class is related to popular culture is the

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idea of films. Middle-class people tend to “view more ‘art’ films, as well as more ‘classic’ films”, in comparison to lower-class people who “view more films on television” (Barnett and Allen, 2000). The difference between the way the two social classes view television portray who is more controlled, by the popular culture.

Overall, the main view as to how social class is related to popular culture is simply due to the media, including what they choose to show such as advertisements or what tabloids see as ‘news worthy’ and the influence of social media. This is due to the media now being accessible to everyone regardless of what class they’re from, because it is accessible, the media portray advertisements such as products that encourage those in the lower class to obtain it. Thus, benefitting the upper class. Popular culture ensures that individuals keep up with the latest trends. As Marx himself had stated “the ruling classes used their control of social institutions to gain ideological dominance, or control over the way people think in society” (Thompson, 2015). This means that the bourgeoisie also control the ideas of members of society by controlling the popular culture, the media to which the working-class individuals are victims to, they are taught to accept their exploitation by following social media “stars”.