POPULAR CULTURE AND MEDIA

Learning Outcomes
At the end of this chapter you will be able to do the following.
- Define popular culture.
- Identify the three major theoretical views on popular culture: Functionalist, Critical and Interpretation.
- Define Interpretive Communities.
- Define Class distinction.
- Evaluate claims for Authenticity.
- Define the 'Sleeper Curve.'
- Define mass media.
- Apply theories of media to US society.
- Describe how perpetual discontent is used by advertisers.
- Describe editorial strategies used by the media.

WHAT IS POPULAR CULTURE?

The idea of popular culture is one that is undoubtedly very familiar to you. You probably consume lots of media content in the form of music, tv, movies and the internet. The sociologically fascinating part about this is the ubiquity (that is, it is everywhere) of the mass media and our popular culture. Everywhere you turn you will find ads, billboards, clothing, screens of various sizes to rest your eyes on. But how often have you critically analyzed this omnipresent socializing force in your life? What meanings do people attribute to popular culture? What are the patterns to these interpretations? What effect does this powerful institution serve? These are some of the topics we'll discuss below. But as we do, think about your favorite artist or TV show or movie and see how the concepts we'll go over help explain its appeal to you.

So, to start, we'll need a working definition of popular culture. **Popular culture** refers to *the aesthetic products created and sold by profit-seeking firms operating in the global entertainment market.*[1] You'll notice from this definition that culture itself is designed to be sold and consumed for profit globally. This is why summer blockbusters like Battleship or the latest Transformers movie follow predictable formats that often involve clearly defined enemies (good versus evil; human versus alien, etc.), minimal dialogue (for instance Arnold Schwarzenegger as the terminator only utters 147 words in Terminator), and lots of explosions, fights and car chases. Movies designed this way will attract the largest audiences possible because the content has been simplified and translates easier to any language for the overseas markets. One thing to remember when thinking about popular culture: it is ultimately (despite how we as audiences might perceive and consume it) designed to make money. To make the most money possible means to make the sure-fire hit, the blockbuster film with uncontroversial content. The end result of which is a

predictable and standardized formulaic product (this by the way is true of most popular culture content, not just movies).

HOW WE MAKE SENSE OF POPULAR CULTURE: THEORIES

There are usually two components to the study of any popular culture: the perspective of the culture creators (for profit mass media companies, individual auteurs, filmmakers and artists) and the perspective of the consumers (you and me and other audiences). Sociologists look at this issue from both perspectives and somewhere in between. Do musical notes, lighting schemes and articles of clothing carry meaning embedded within them? Or do we interpret them symbolically and derive meaning from our own experiences, backgrounds and selves? The **Critical Theorists** (who take their cue from Marx and conflict theory) say that *the mass media is an industry and designed to indoctrinate and subordinate the masses (audiences) into passivity and acceptance of the capitalist mode of consumption through our popular culture consumption*[2]. Why challenge the normative order when you've got an iphone to pacify your discontent? Sure unemployment rate is high and those in the middle and lower social classes are still reeling from the great recession but at least we have youtube and the like. The critical theorists maintain that we literally buy into our own domination through the popular culture we consumer which ultimately supports the status quo and capitalism itself.

According to the **Functionalists** however, the purpose (or, function) of culture is not so sinister and self-serving after all. Instead, they argue that popular culture serves the same purpose culture has always served in societies; *it is the social glue that binds together members of that social group and creates feeling of solidarity and group cohesion*[3]. In societies characterized by what Durkheim called mechanical solidarity this was easy; the numbers were low, the division of labor was less complex and the focus culturally was already on the society[4]. Where the functionalist's explanation is useful, is in using this same idea to explain the way large, diverse and heterogeneous societies like ours are held together. Think about the way contemporary collective rituals—high school football games, parades, pep rallies—serve to forge emotional bonds of recognition, identity, and trust within communities and social groups[5]. It is through these events that we (re)establish our connections to one another. Sharing the same popular culture allows strangers to communicate in public with one another. Have you ever struck up a conversation with a stranger simply because they were wearing your favorite team's jersey? Or you favorite band's logo on a t-shirt? Knowing the same logos and sharing the same norms allows us to feel connected to strangers and creating a unifying feeling amongst those who know.

This feeling of emotional connectedness to others manifests in what sociologists call emotional energy[6]. **Emotional energy** *is that warm and fuzzy feeling you get when hanging out with good friends or engaging in stimulating conversation with classmates or professors.* This is one of the reasons we maintain relationships with

others, including imagined others who also enjoy the same popular culture we do. Have you ever been to a Dodger, Lakers, or Kings game (any home team sporting event) and felt oddly connected to the total strangers around you? Maybe after the game-winning home run or three point at the buzzer to win the game you stood up, simultaneously with the tens of thousands of others attendees and cheered, high-fived and hugged those you (even the complete strangers)? Or have you been there, singing or chanting along with hundreds of other concert attendees to your favorite artist's favorite song? This intense form of emotional energy can only come from large groups of people with a shared focus (the athletes participating, the singer singing, etc.) and it is what Durkheim called Collective Effervescence[7]. Collective effervescence is the reason why we pay money to hear music we already have or attend the game we can watch for free on tv. Like all popular culture, it is inherently social and its meaning comes from others, not embedded magically in the celluloid of movies or the ones and zeroes of an mp3.

Finally, the **interactionists** *focus on the way that we use popular culture to make sense of ourselves but also emphasize how others shape our tastes, values and ultimately identity.* Have you ever noticed that your friends tend to like similar music, sports and tv shows as you do? Is this simply a coincidence? Interactionists would argue that it is not and that this is indeed evidence of the interaction between our individual tastes and our peers'. Depending on the popularity of your name when you born you may find many others with your name or very few. But what influenced your parents when they named you? Chances are those around your parents shaped your parents' attitudes towards particular names and away from others. We call these groups of people that tend to interpret, understand and enjoy popular culture in similar ways as interpretive communities. Therefore, **interpretive communities** *are consumers whose common social identities and cultural backgrounds (whether organized on the basis of nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, or age) inform their shared understandings of culture in patterned and predictable ways*[8].

One of the most important ways interpretive communities play out in everyday life is in determining taste and consumption. **Taste** can be defined *as a preference for particular fashion, movies, music etc.* Though we think taste, and therefore 'good taste' is universal, it is far from it. There are varied beliefs about what 'good music' is or isn't, what is fashionable and what is not depending on which interpretive community we come from (you'll notice all black clothing in the goth subculture is desirable but not so much in any other interpretive community). What we prefer then determines at least in part, our **consumption**, *how we receive and make sense of popular culture.* Do you suppose that what we prefer to consume has anything to do with what is available to us and also what those around us consume? Think about your favorite foods. It is likely that you grew up eating them or your friends eat them. We are heavily influenced by those around us.

Several decades ago the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu analyzed French culture in terms of how important distinction from other social classes was[9]. Since then

sociologists have used this analysis to understand social class and popular culture in America. In the early days of the United States there wasn't much distinction between people in terms of their social class. Indeed, since the U.S. was so new there wasn't yet an entrenched upper class and there was certainly no aristocracy like in Europe. No, these Americans mostly immigrated with little to their names. But it wasn't long before entrepreneurs and robber barons began to accumulate wealth they also sought ways to distinguish themselves from the lower social classes. This process is called boundary maintenance and it serves as a method to keep lower classes out and maintain the exclusivity of the upper classes. As would come to define the U.S. in the twentieth century and beyond, the main course this took was purchasing goods and services that those without money could simply not afford. Buying things to show that you can afford to spend money came to be known as **conspicuous consumption** (*status displays that show off one's wealth through the flagrant consumption of goods and services, particularly those considered wasteful or otherwise lacking in obvious utility*)[10]. Sometimes this meant purchasing a large mansion with a large guest house for the servants even though you had a family of four. Whatever form it took, its purpose was not utilitarian but rather status oriented.

Over time, these habits, tastes and values of a certain social class become entrenched as cultural capital. **Cultural capital** is *one's store of knowledge and proficiency with artistic and cultural styles that are valued by society, and confer prestige and honor upon those associated with them*. This knowledge is passed down generational and learned through socialization. Each social class develops skills and values that help their members survive in society. But, not all cultural capital is created equal. Are these the droids you're looking for? If not, you may not share that bit of cultural capital! So, the 'correct' social capital is important because it can literally be transmitted into social advantages and even financial wealth.

The interesting part about conspicuous consumption was that the upper classes took great pains to dissociate themselves from the lower classes while the lower classes tried desperately to emulate the wealthy through their buying patterns. For a brief time, average Americans came close to having similar standards of living as the upper classes. Fueled by television commercials extolling the virtues of consumption of commodity items to indicate status this could only last so long. The upper classes with their considerably larger bank accounts were able to afford things the middle and working classes could not.

The financial sector had the answer to this newfound dilemma in the form of consumer credit and credit cards. Consumerism became our way of life during the twentieth century fueled by easy access to credit so much so that by 2011, consumer debt had ballooned to $2.43 trillion and the average household carried an average credit card debt of $15,799[11].

THE SEARCH FOR AN AUTHENTIC IDENTITY

By the 1960s the consumer lifestyle was in full swing. For the first time in the nation's history there was material comfort and infrastructure for popular culture to flourish.   It came to the point however, for America's youth that middle class life and consumer goods seemed boring and bland and the desire for something new was growing stronger. Since middle class suburban existence seemed vanilla, subcultures offered an alternative; they offered a promise of the real deal. This drive for authenticity paradoxically helped to further fuel consumerism.   For those who didn't like the youth culture on tv or the radio could turn to alternative sources for youth culture that prided themselves on being authentic by their opposition to mainstream banality. So buying the right goods could distinguish one and foster a 'unique' identity. How unique can your store-bought identity ever be?

The other notable paradox inherent in the search for authenticity is its elusiveness. Authenticity can refer to a variety of desirable traits: credibility, originality, sincerity, naturalness, genuineness, innateness, purity, or realness[12]. The thing about authenticity is that it can never be truly authentic, instead must always be performed, staged, fabricated, crafted or otherwise imagined. The performance of authenticity always requires a close conformity to the expectations set by the cultural context in which it is situated. Once again we see others' perceptions as a crucial element in popular culture.

POPULAR CULTURE IS GOOD FOR YOU?

You've probably hear popular culture disparaged. Maybe you yourself have disparaged it. But is it all bad for us? Clearly popular culture comes in many varieties and flavors and some perhaps more so than others promote values some might find objectionable, but to what degree, if at all, is the popular culture of today making us smarter? According to Steven Johnson, author of The **Sleeper Curve**, popular culture is doing just that[13]. *Through increased storyline complexity (more multithreading, several storylines at once that pick up and subside for a time but always return later), decline of flashing arrows (obvious references designed to clue the viewer in to what's about to happen) and video games that provide a mental workout (not unlike a good math problem), the popular culture of today is forcing us to become more intelligent.* Of course, this says nothing about the coarse and sometimes off-putting content of popular culture (which again, is more a matter of taste and which interpretive community you belong to than some objective indicator of goodness), but as sociologists we're not trying to ascertain the essence or 'true meaning' of popular culture but instead how people interpret, understand and make sense of popular culture.

MASS MEDIA

In other chapters we have discussed the main agents of socialization. As you recall we discussed family, peers, schools and mass media. It is this last agent of socialization that we'll turn our attention to in this chapter. Traditionally the mass media has referred to television, newspapers, magazines, films, and now the internet and mobile devices. Unlike other agents of socialization, mass media's disseminators have a different motivation for influencing and socializing people. This of course is referring to the fact that commercial media, like all other business and corporations, seek to make profit. This is different than how we usually think of our favorite film studio or television channel or web site and what's more, is that this motive affects their operation and consequently our reception and consumption. Today, the mass media is heavily concentrated in the hands of a few multinational corporations[14].   Let's start with an example of someone you may know (or Jill's equivalent in your social network).

JILL, A TYPICAL COLLEGE STUDENT?

Jill's clock radio goes off at 6:15am. She listens carefully to the traffic and weather while she brushes her teeth. She unplugs her cell phone from the charger and text messages an alert to Leigh who drives her carpool. Sometimes Leigh sleeps in, so Jill sends a regular wake up text. Jill turns on the desktop computer and takes a quick shower. Once dressed she gets about five minutes to check her e-mails and instant messages from last night.

When Leigh honks the horn Jill grabs her heavy backpack and forwards all her personal unanswered e-mails to her university e-mail. She'll get to these during class. During the 15 minute commute she navigates with the GPS system in the car and pays close attention to the radio traffic and weather, letting Leigh know if there are any problems with breakdowns or accidents.

Jill gets out of Leigh's car on the corner and walks into the coffee shop where she works 5 days a week. Her first duty is to turn on the morning news on both of the shop's big screen TV's. She waves to the manager who's ordering supplies online while he sets up the Latte machine. Jill puts in her earphones, checks her cell phone for any critical texts, turns off her phone and starts stocking the supplies for the big rush of caffeine and carb-deprived customers that flows in and out of the coffee shop for the next 2-3 hours. Once the stocking is finished, Jill removes one ear piece and listens to a lecture from 2 days ago which was posted to the Web by her professor. During the last hour,

while she waits on customers, she jams to her music. When her shift ends, she puts the music away and answers text messages while she walks the 7 blocks to campus.

In her first class Jill sits in the very back row, then she silences her phone and turns on her notebook computer, capturing the campus-wide wireless Internet. She logs in. While the professor lectures she types actively on her computer, stopping occasionally to text on her cell phone. Her professor thinks she's taking copious notes. She's actually chatting live with her friends. The professor mentions a Website he heard about but can't remember the name of it, so Jill Googles it and raises her hand to share the URL with him. He thanks her. She smiles and watches the professor clumsily locate and then display the Website for the entire class to see.

There are 15 notebook computers in this classroom. Only one of the students in front of her is actually taking notes. Two have an ear piece in and are watching YouTube. The rest basically do what Jill is doing. Jill attends her two other classes then heads back to the coffee shop to clean up and get set up for the after work rush.

Leigh eventually picks her up later on the same corner and she finds herself at home at about 6:15 pm. Jill turns on the TV, plugs in her cell phone, glances at the campus newspaper headlines then reads the personals. During dinner she texts, watches her shows, does an Internet assignment, and shops online for a half-priced textbook she needs for class. She opens her notebook computer because it has a built in web cam and gets Leigh online to ask her to see if her iPod fell out in the car during their commute home. Leigh already found it.

Jill e-mails her mother. She'd rather text but her mother prefers e-mail. She finishes her homework while watching reality TV. At 9:00 pm, Leigh honks the horn and Jill takes a small purse for her phone and heads out to the car. Leigh and two other friends are going dancing. Jill gets her iPod back and then texts their guy friends who said they were going to the same club, but who knows if they'll show up or not. Jill, Leigh, and their friends make a short video at the club and post it to their Facebook the next morning.

Does any of this sound familiar to you and your daily routine? Jill's day and use of technology and media are very common among college students. Junco and Mastrodicasa (2007) found that in a survey of over 7,000 college and university students 9 out of 10 owned a computer and cell phone; three out of four instant message and already have a Facebook account; six out of ten have a portable music player; 44% read blogs; and 34% use the Internet as their primary source for news.[15]

Never in the world's history has there been such a vast availability of media than today. Online newspapers, satellite TV, cell phones, e-books, satellite radio, Blue Rays, and e-zines are some newer media that people of all ages use to access news and information.   We are surrounded by and figuratively swim in mass media every day of our lives.

Mass media are *technological modes of communication in society*, especially electronic and print media. Media can be found in artifacts from lost civilizations thousands of years ago. Paintings on cave walls, pottery, or even field sculptures of stones all represent some of these ancient forms. Etchings on metal plates or writings on skin or paper scrolls were made at great expense in the past. They were rare then and only a few are still available today.

THE BIRTH OF MASS MEDIA

In the early 1400s Johannes Gutenberg, who was a goldsmith, invented the world's first mechanical press. The Gutenberg Bible was the first ever mass produced book and its introduction into society marked the beginning of printed media. Gutenberg not only invented a printing press, he facilitated the ability of the masses to learn how to read. He also created a logical cultural process in Western Civilization wherein most of us learned how to read, think, store, and process information. Top to bottom, left to right, punctuation, spelling, and grammar considerations all became part of the mainstream culture.

Many cultures have different rules about how to read and write, yet all follow a logical and linear pattern of reading and writing. This pattern remained in place, un-challenged until the Internet came onto the scene. Over the last 30 years, technology that lead up to the Internet as we know it today changed the rules of reading and gathering information through the media. The Internet currently connects over a billion online users worldwide. Whereas the paper form of media is bound by its physical mass, the Internet form of media is limitless because it is based on light and electricity, both of which travel very fast and facilitate information sharing in nearly limitless volumes and rates of speed.

In the 20th century, students had to ask a teacher or other authority figure for answers to questions they had. We had to pay for encyclopaedias and books that could teach and inform us. Today, one need only turn on the computer or handheld device and connect to the Internet. All the information in the world that is on the Internet can be obtained free, instantly, non-linearly, and without the direct involvement of an authority figure. It is fascinating how information for the masses has transformed in such a short amount of time.

The media fulfills a function for society. First, it disseminates information. Not all of that information is created equally. Some media is the focus of tremendous protest and outcry while other forms of media are less conspicuous and controversial. The media also mold and shape public opinion while reporting current events. Because media corporations have rather strict control over the stories they tell, we in the U.S. often don't even find out about many salient international issues. These issues may be crucial to non-U.S. citizens, but are not reported by U.S. media outlets. Often the U.S. is criticized for its narrow world view.

When the news media select a story, they monitor the opinions of those who watched it and the indicators which show public interest in it. If it proves to be of enough interest then they will provide more coverage. If not they let it go. Competition between news shows and outlets makes the coverage of specific news stories relevant from a business rather than an information dissemination point of view.

TELEVISION VIEWING

We in the U.S. love media in all its forms. Nielsen Media Research regularly reports on how much TV people in the U.S. typically watch. The average U.S. person in 2006 watched about four and a half hours per day of TV, including nearly two hours during prime time.[16] These 2006 data represent a 26 minute increase over 1995-1996 hours of TV viewed. Nielsen based its estimates on a very carefully selected sample of 10,000 viewers.

If they are pretty close on their estimate and each of us watches about four hours per day, then that's a great deal of TV in a lifetime. Multiply four hours by seven days then 52 weeks, you'll find that we watch an estimated 1,456 hours of TV per year. If we maintained that every year from Kindergarten through 12th grade we'd end up having watched about 17-19,000 hours of TV by the time we graduated high school (give or take a few hours per week). Interestingly, K-12 typically equals about 16-17,000 hours of at school learning by the time of graduation.[17] Not only do we watch TV shows but we also watch TV commercials-perhaps a quarter million by the time we graduate high school. Estimates vary but we also use the Internet, radio, cell phone, video games, and big screen movies as forms of daily media consumption.

Television viewing is not completely without affect upon the viewer. George Gerbner (1919-2005) was a professor of communications who founded the **Cultivation Theory** which claims that *the types of TV viewing we watch accumulate within us and impact our world view*. In other words, if we only watched crime, detective, and forensic shows we would have the additive effect of these shows on our perception of how the world really is. The types of TV we watch passively, yet persistently shape our world view.

The **Mean World Syndrome** is *the tendency to view society as being meaner and more violent than it really is because of the violent and harsh TV shows one has watched over the years*.[18] If someone limited his daily TV viewing to soap operas then Gerbner would say that that person would have a world focus that

overemphasized soap opera-melodramatic themes. The same could be said of anyone who watches mostly police shows, pornography, sports, news, or reality TV.

Keep in mind that TV is not produced by people who simply want to entertain us. So, what is the main purpose of media in our day? Money, Entertainment, access to information, advertising, and or attitude shifting is at the core of most media-based ventures. Companies pay money for the commercial time or product placement. What they really want is for you to watch the shows and see the advertisements and buy a product or service because you were watching. The online Television Advertising Bureau (TAB)[19] reported that US TV stations sold more than $1 billion in interactive sales in 2008.[20] This report also noted the continuing gain of TV and website ads over printed newspaper ads as part of the explanation for the death of the local and national newspaper that is being witnessed in today's mass media marketplace.

The TAB report also noted that most people pay for television, but non-cable providers had as much as 32% of that market in 2008.[21] Most importantly as we focus on the for-profit advertising issue, in 1970, over $3.59 billion was spent on US television advertising alone. In 2007 that was up to $70.84 billion. In total, between 1970 and 2007 there was $1.1 trillion spent on all forms of TV advertising.[22]

ADVERTISINGS' NEGATIVE EFFECTS

One has to focus on the impact media can have with that level of revenue at stake. **Perpetual discontent** is *a two-pronged advertising theme which emphasizes 1. how broken and flawed we are and 2. how we can buy hope in the form of a product being sold*. Women in the U.S. are bombarded daily with advertising images that point out their flaws. They are constantly having it brought to their attention how they are too: thin, fat, short, tall, round, wrinkled, blond, brunette, red, dark, light, pale, freckled, etc. This trend is exceptionally cruel for teen and young adult women, but men are not exempt from the abuse of perpetual discontent. In fact, most argue the media has created an unrealistic feminine ideal resulting in the desire to fulfill this impossible standard. This media-created ideal has commonly been blamed for the skyrocketing numbers of eating disorders as well as the rising numbers of cosmetic surgical procedures in the U.S. (especially among young women).

Many argue that this has lead not only to discontent with our body images, but also discontent with every aspect of our spending life (products, houses, cars, computers, clothes, etc.). One ironic note is the fact that many millions of people don't get enough food to eat every day while we in the United States have become so conscious of the self we portray to others that we self-limit our food intake and resort to drastic measures in diet, exercise, and surgery. Every year millions pay vast sums of money to acquire surgical beauty enhancements.

Figure 1 shows data from the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS) for the 11 years between 1997 and 2007. There were nearly 12 million clients of aesthetic plastic surgery in the U.S. in 2004 and only slightly less for 2005 through 2007. Figure 2 shows that nearly 13 billion dollars were spent for the six years between 2002 and 2007. The ASAPS also reported that their most common client is a White female between the ages of 20 and 50.

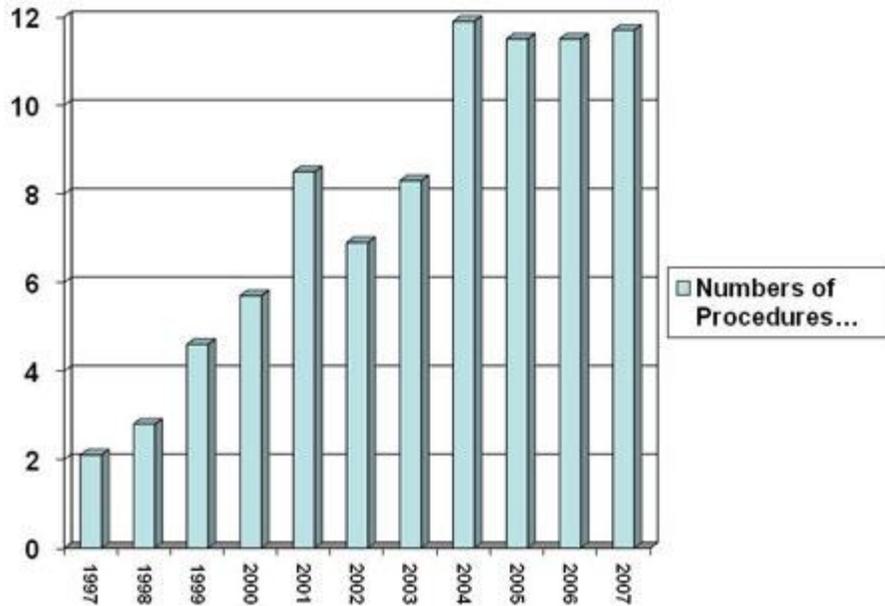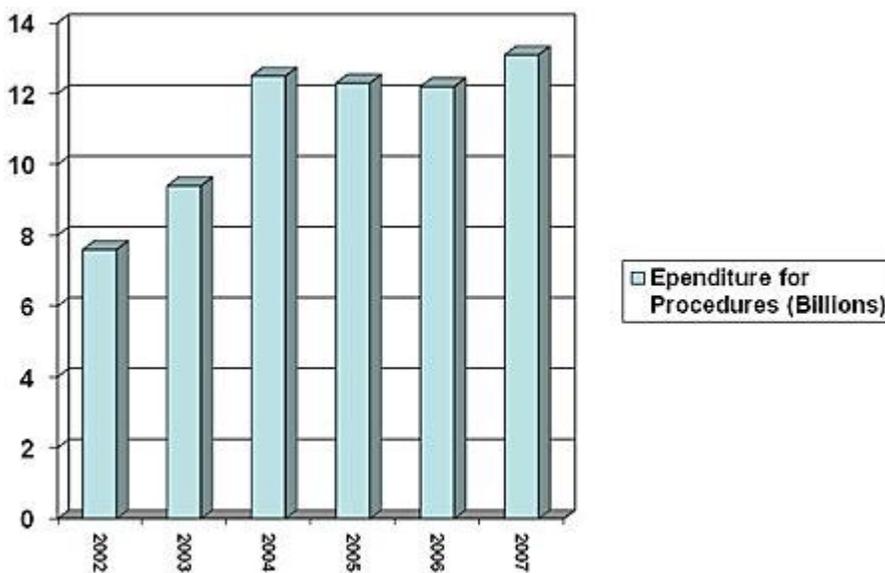Figure 1. Numbers in Millions of Plastic Surgery Procedures between 1997-2007.[23]

Figure 2. Expenditures in Billions for Plastic Surgery Procedures between 2002-2007.[24]

The media is perhaps one of the most underestimated elements of society. At the personal level people think of it in terms of convenience and entertainment rather than political influence, power, and control. The media is mostly controlled by wealthy people and at the national and world level is tightly controlled in terms of the political ideologies of those who decide what we get to watch, hear, and read. The owners and managers seek profits while promoting their own political agenda, selecting and shaping advertisement, and providing exposure to political and special interest groups they favor. This means we (the masses) are exposed to not only *what* the owners want us to see, but also *how* we see it.

THE POWER ELITE IN THE MEDIA

Do you personally know someone who owns a TV station, radio station, newspaper, or magazine? Most of us don't unless we happen to fall into a wealthy income category. C. Wright Mills recognized that wealth and power are unevenly distributed in society and that it is the relatively wealthy privileged few (the **power elite**) that control the power. The other argument (contrary to Mills' power elite) is called **pluralism**, which claims that *power is diffused among many diverse interest groups and that not all wealthy elite people unite on the same side of most issues*. The accurate description of today's society-level power structures is that there is a large, unconnected category of powerful people, each exerting their own wills upon others, either against or in cooperation with other powerful people. In Figure 3 you can see that the top ten percent of society's members are the wealthy elite and own or control the corporations, military, and political offices. The next 20% are also relatively wealthy and connected to the power elite. This class runs the government, political scene, and interest groups. They often are given coverage in the media and are considered among our "famous" members of society.

Then there's us. We are among the 70% of the common people who comprise the masses. Most of us enjoy politics and other newsworthy topics but rarely understand the reality of their day-to-day functioning and influence on our lives. We are uneducated about the power elite's actions that often harm us in the long-run (take the recent mortgage and financial market schemes that have made the top two classes very wealthy at the expense of the bottom 70% for an example). Mills also described **false consciousness**, which is *when members of groups which are relatively powerless in society accept beliefs that work against their self-interests*. Typically our ignorance is played upon and erroneous information is provided in a calculated manner by the power elite for the further gain of their goals.

You can learn a great deal about the power of media by studying societies outside of the United States. A **totalitarian government** is *a political system where a small power elite controls virtually every aspect of the personal and larger social levels of society*. Some examples include Nazi Germany, North Korea, Russia in Stalin's era, and a few eastern European countries that were once part of the former Soviet

union. In these systems the media was strictly controlled and some systems failed once media control was lost.

Figure 3. C. Wright Mills' Power Elite Model.[25]
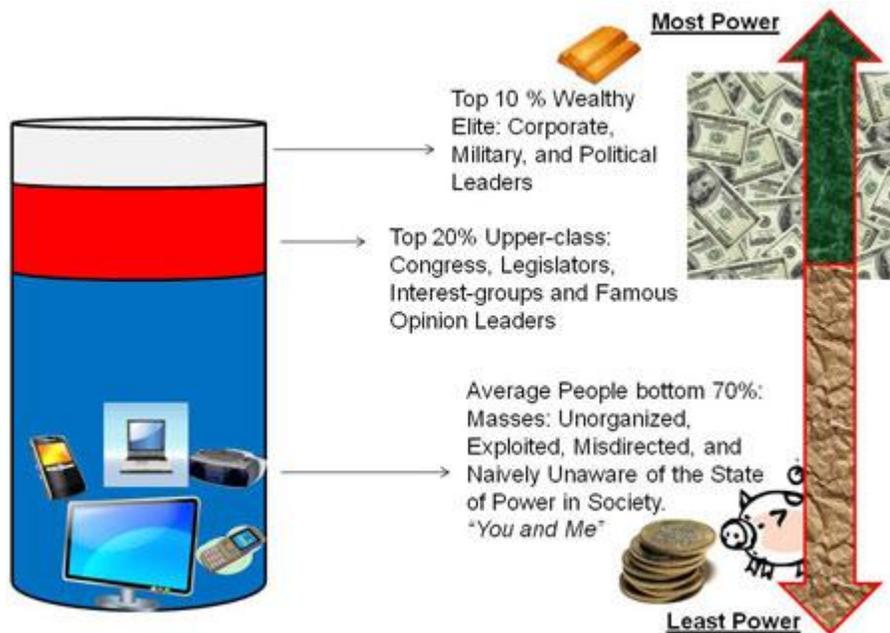
The media have tremendous political power, especially in the national election coverage they provide. The journalists who provide our media have distinct goals and values which motivate them to typically take a more negative position towards a candidate than the candidate would prefer. Many sources officially give or withhold their support for a candidate while other news and media sources continue to work in a more objective manner. In the 2008 Presidential campaign, literally hundreds of polls were taken and reported on via TV, radio, Internet, and printed news. The very presence of poll results can actually influence the choices made by voters who are undecided and others who have made their choice, but might be influenced to change their minds. Many feel that their candidates were treated with bias by the media.

The media have editorial strategies which easily coincide with the goals of the power elite. **Framing** involves *placing the news story into a pre-existing frame of reference for the public so that they understand it as journalists would have it be understood*. The protestors were freedom fighters, martyrs, or courageous. Even though two people died, the frame changes them from terrorists to saints. **Formatting** is *the design and construction of the news story*. One might see a story that includes an introduction about the sacrifices made by the protesters which runs for 45 seconds. This story might end with a 15 second summary of their protest actions as being martyr-like.

Sequencing is *ordering news stories in such a way as to present a thematic message*. An example of this would be to run the story about the protesters right after the story about the military occupants who were allegedly guilty of raping and torturing inmates. **Agenda setting** is *the process of selecting and screening topics which will be presented to the general public*. An example of this might be the omission of successes on the battlefield and the inclusion of crimes by soldiers, losses by civilians, and outcry by the country's political enemies.

THE COFFEE FILTER, POWER ELITE METAPHOR

Figure 4 shows the coffee filter metaphor of the power elite as it has broken into two semi-oppositional schools of thought often referred to as the left and right. If you consider the power elite model over the pluralism model of power in society, you can see how the elite who control media, military, and corporations shape politics and laws. Mill's model fits just as well now as it did in his day, but there is a twist on the polarized culture between left and right wing influences in society. Figure 4 shows how the elite form a type of filter that shapes the flow of political and legal outcomes in the form of laws, treaties, and legal precedence. Although not formally unified into one centralized political social movement, the left and right shakers and movers each influence this filtering process for their own interests and goals.

Figure 4. The Coffee Filter Metaphor of the Power Elite's Influence over Politics and Laws.[26]
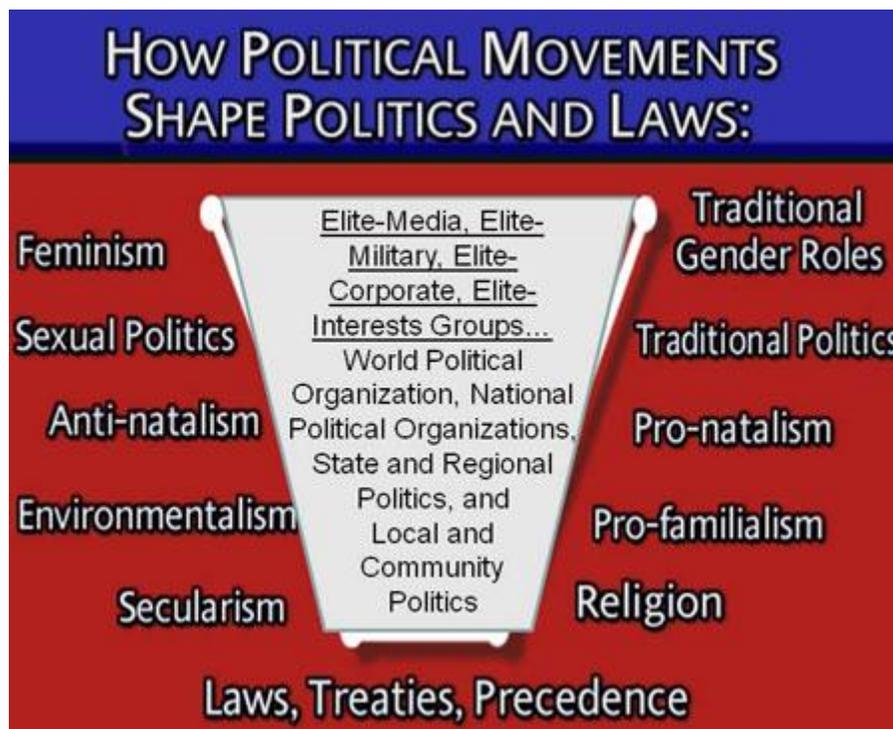
On the left side of the spectrum, feminism, sexual politics (same-sex, trans-gendered, and bisexual), anti-natalism, environmental protection, and general secularism share many overlapping values that prove to be mutually beneficial if mutual support is given. For example, a protest at the United Nations building in New York City against a less-developed country's refusal to let their girls and women receive formal education could also be supported by **antinatalists** (the more education a woman gets the fewer the babies she has), environmentalists (the fewer the babies the less pressure on the physical environment), and secularists (the more education a woman gets the less religious she tends to be).

On the right hand side of the cultural continuum lobbying for a continuation of tax breaks for parents and marrieds would serve all interest groups in multiple ways. One of the premier social movements to illustrate this has been the battle over the legalization of same-sex or gay marriage. It's been on the referendum ballots of a number of states. It's been considered for discussion at the federal legislation level, but returned to the state-level since states have the right to legally sanction marriages and divorces. It's been considered in a few state supreme courts with pre-emptive strikes by states which went ahead and codified marriage as being exclusively between a man and a woman. Other state supreme courts have preemptively ruled in favor of same-sex marriages. Billions of dollars, millions of volunteer hours, and countless and immeasurable levels of personal frustration are involved in this social issue. What both the left and right have understood and utilized for decades is to use their elite contacts to accomplish their goal-driven political and legal changes. The media will continue to play a central role in this and other heated political issues.

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[9] Bourdieu, P. 1984. Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

[10] Veblen, T. 1994 [1899]. The Theory of the Leisure Class. Penguin twentieth-century classics. introduction by Robert Lekachman. New York: Penguin Books.

[11] http://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g19/

[12] Grazian, D. 2010. Mix it Up: Mass Media, Popular Culture and Society. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

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[15] Retrieved 16 April, 2009 from http://www.outsourcemarketing.com/articles/OM_article_gen-y.pdf "Generation Y-Why Worry?" in Outsource Quarterly

[16] Retrieved 16 April from
http://www.nielsenmedia.com/nc/portal/site/Public/menuitem.55dc65b4a7d5adff3f65936147a062a0/?vgnextoid=4156527aacccd010VgnVCM100000ac0a260aRCRD

[17] Go to http://www.nielsenmedia.com/nc/portal/site/Public/ for much more information on ratings and statistics

[18] See George Gerbner's (1994) "Reclaiming Our Cultural Mythology." In The Ecology of Justice (IC#38), Spring page 40, Context Institute retrieved 16 April 2009 from
http://www.context.org/ICLIB/IC38/Gerbner.htm

[19] http://www.tvb.org/nav/build_frameset.asp?url=/docs/homepage.asp

[20] Retrieved 16 April, 2009 from
http://www.tvb.org/nav/build_frameset.asp?url=/docs/homepage.asp

[21] See http://www.tvb.org/nav/build_frameset.asp?url=/docs/homepage.asp

[22] Retrieved 16 April 2009 from
http://www.tvb.org/nav/build_frameset.asp?url=/docs/homepage.asp

[23] Data courtesy of American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery www.surgery.org Taken 1 May, 2008

[24] Data courtesy of American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery www.surgery.org Taken 1 May, 2008

[25] See C. Wright Mills (1956). The Power Elite. Oxford Press, NY.

[26] © 2009 Ron J. Hammond, Ph.D.