

# Hegemony and Media

The Influence of Mass Media and  
Popular Culture on Popular Ideology

# Why study popular culture as an academic endeavor?

- Common (negative) responses:
  - 1) Movies and TV are just entertainment, not worthy of scholarly study.
  - 2) Pop culture doesn't really affect us as individuals or as groups (another variant of "it's not that important").
  - 3) I participate in pop culture to escape reality/turn off my brain/etc.
  - 4) The study of pop culture is so PC (politically correct).
  - 5) I don't want to feel guilty about what I do for fun.

# Why study popular culture as an academic endeavor?

- Responses to those responses:

- 1) Movies and TV are just entertainment, not worthy of scholarly study.

Yes, popular culture is entertaining. But that doesn't mean it can't also be useful, even critical, as a way of understanding a society on a larger level, particularly in trying to understand what a society thinks is important, funny, dramatic....and normal/natural.

- 2) Pop culture doesn't really affect us as individuals or as groups (another variant of "it's not really that important").
- 3) I participate in pop culture to escape reality/turn off my brain/etc.

Turning off one's brain isn't really a thing. Whether we're doing it consciously or not, we're picking up on and responding to messages that are embedded in pop culture. If those messages agree with how we see the world, then we probably won't notice them as messages. But if those messages *disagree* with how we see the world, then we'll definitely notice!

# Why study popular culture as an academic endeavor?

- Responses to those responses:
  - 4) The study of pop culture is so PC (politically correct).

“Politically correct” has itself become a politically charged buzzphrase that many people use to manipulate the feelings of others. Different people have different definitions for this phrase. For some, it means, “I can’t say whatever I want anymore without accidentally offending someone.” For others, it means, “Yes, we do need to watch what we do and say because chances are that some of those things have been hurting individuals and groups for a long time, and those individuals/groups aren’t going to put up with it anymore.”

**In short, we’re not going to use this phrase. We ARE going to pay attention to the ways in which certain words and actions in popular culture may be seen as not simply offensive but actually oppressive to certain groups in a society, especially when they are used over and over again.**

# Why study popular culture as an academic endeavor?

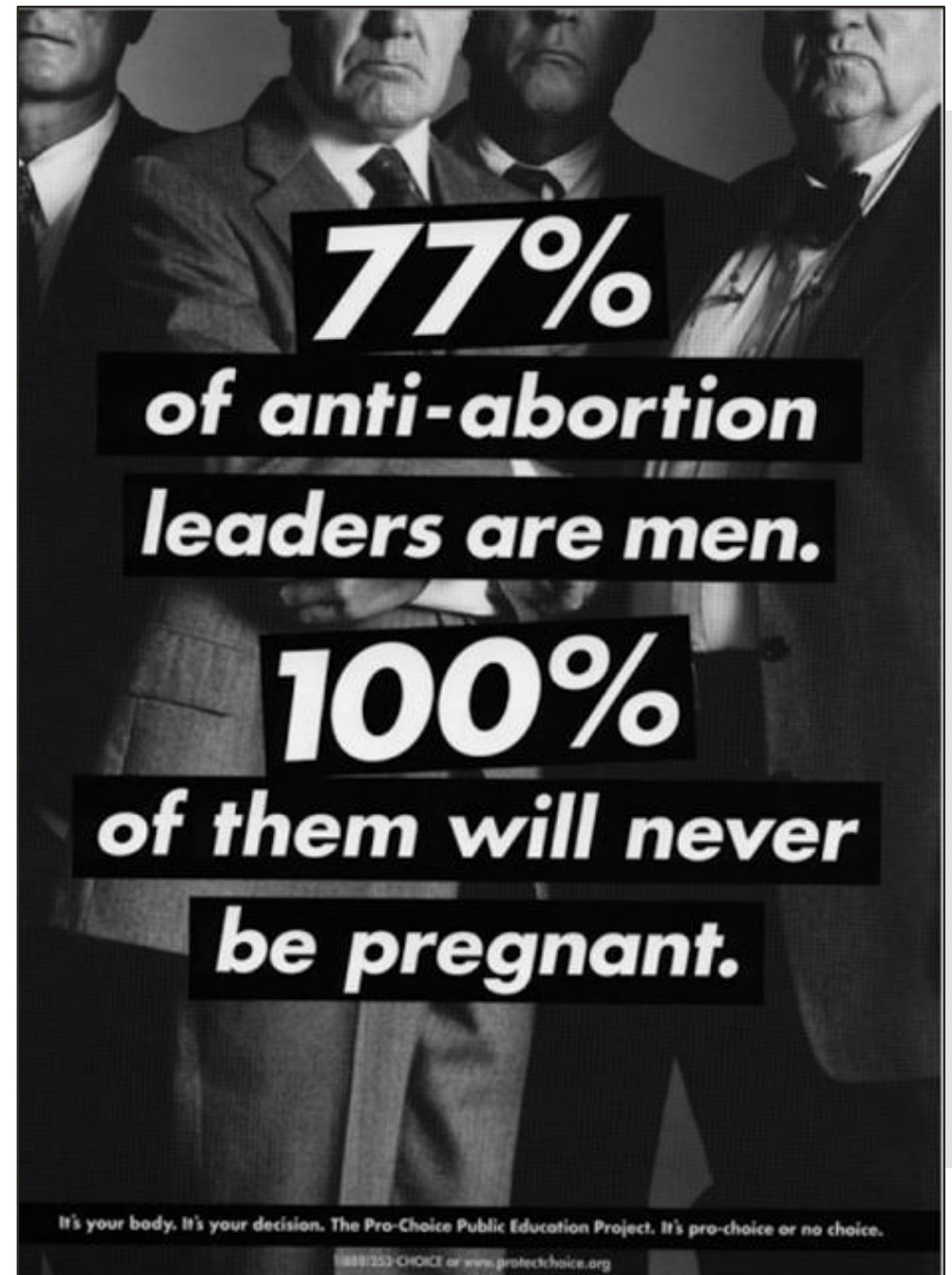
- Responses to those responses:

- 5) I don't want to feel guilty about what I do for fun.

Then don't! It is possible to both enjoy an artifact of popular culture AND be critical of its problematic elements. It doesn't make YOU less of a person if you still enjoy that artifact of pop culture. But, if you're able to note where the artifact could be doing better for a society, then it only makes you look better when you can recognize and point it out!

# Hegemony

- “Hegemony is the power or dominance that one social group holds over others” (Lull 35).



**77%**  
**of anti-abortion  
leaders are men.**

**100%**  
**of them will never  
be pregnant.**

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# Hegemonic Institutions and Ideology

- In order to create a more equal society, it is critical to understand how ideals held by dominant groups are perpetuated through our social institutions, which are generally run by the hegemonic social group in order to maintain control and power.
  - Example: One of our social institutions is our political system. Take a look at the Congress of the United States. What is the percentage of members who are white? Who are male? How long have these groups dominated this social institution? And what does it mean for our whole society when these dominant groups have the most control in making decisions for even those who aren't part of those groups?
- Ideology: "a systematic body of concepts [ideas, beliefs] especially about human life or culture" (Merriam-Webster)
  - In lay terms, ideology is a group of ideas and beliefs that we have as a society about how the world works. What is "normal" or "natural." Of all the aspects of culture, ideas and values are the toughest to change.
  - Example: We can change laws in order to try and avoid violence against certain non-dominant groups in our society, such as the LGBTQ+ community. But if we don't also address negative ideas and beliefs about this community, then violence will continue whether we have laws or not.
- Ideology is perpetuated through our social institutions, one of which is MEDIA.
  - Gramsci: "Mass media are tools that ruling elites use to 'perpetuate their power, wealth, and status [by popularizing] their own philosophy, culture, and morality'" (Lull 35).

# How Mass Media Work in/around Hegemony

- (Re-)production of cultural norms – ideas already present in society, and thus seen as “normal” or “natural,” are less likely to be rejected or resisted
  - Relationships between men and women
  - Relationships between men and men/women and women
  - Stereotyping of social groups both dominant and non-dominant





# How Mass Media Work in/around Hegemony

- Entertainment media has long been driven by profit, of course. More recently, news media also has a profit motive. But even when either type is not explicitly driven by profit, the goal of media is to be seen/heard/used/circulated.
- The best way to make sure that media is seen/heard/used/circulated is to make sure that its ideologies – either on the surface or embedded – will generate that circulation. This is more easily accomplished when people agree with the messages within media (though controversial messages can also be spread in various ways).

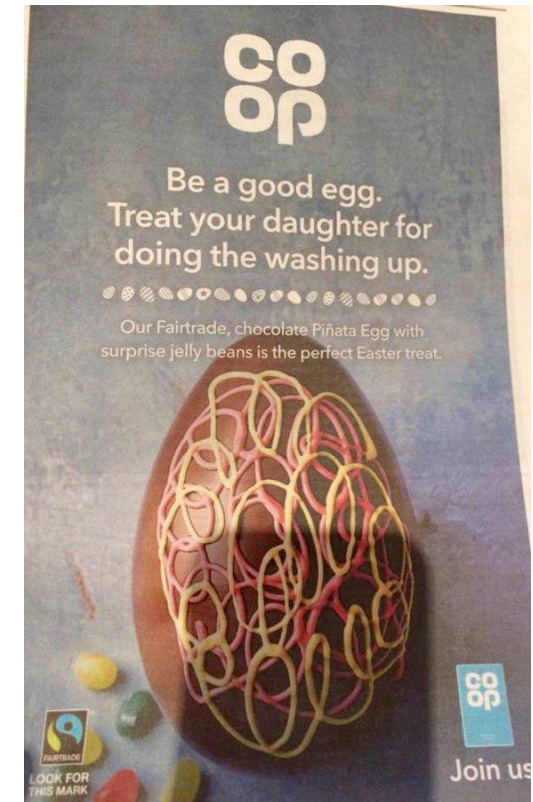
“Dominant ideological streams must be subsequently reproduced in the activities of our most basic social units – families, workplace networks, and friendship groups in the many sites and undertakings of everyday life...**Hegemony requires that ideological assertions become self-evident cultural assumptions.** Its effectiveness depends on subordinated peoples accepting the dominant ideology as ‘normal reality or common sense’” (Lull 36).

TL;DR – In order to stay dominant, the dominant ideas/groups need to make it seem as if this positioning is just the way it is and/or the way it’s always been.



(2012)

Ad depicts a man holding a frightened-looking woman. The implication is that she is resisting a sexual encounter with him.



(2017)

Ad assumes that the daughter is doing the “naturally” feminine duties of domestic chores.

# Resistance to Hegemony

Hegemony is fragile . “It requires renewal and modification through the assertion and reassertion of power” (Lull 37).

Resistance to hegemony is ongoing and happens in both blatant and subtle ways. **It is possible for an artifact of popular culture to reflect dominant ideologies and attempt to resist them simultaneously!**



Justice League... depantsed!





Folk resistance: gender-bending Avengers cosplay

Avenger butts!