

Week 1: Session 1 - Popular Culture Tasks

There are some questions below to guide your discussion(s) about what is popular culture. (You do not have to stick to these questions but they might help you think about some of the ideas highlighted.)

What are your popular cultural interests? Name at least three if possible and be prepared to share with the class.

Why is it important to study popular culture? Why/Why not?

How might popular culture influence our identity?

Definitions of Identity for discussion (Session 2: depending on time for session 1)

Definitions regarding group/social identity.

Chen and Li (2009:431) 'Social identity is commonly defined as a person's sense of self derived from perceived membership in social groups. When we belong to a group, we are likely to derive our sense of identity, at least in part, from that group.'

Chen and Li (2009:432) 'One insight from social identity theory is that the groups to which people belong mean something to them. Once a person sees herself as part of a group, she derives self-esteem from that group membership and adopts behaviours that are consistent with the stereotypes associated with the group identity.'

Question: What kind of group/social identities can you think of? How do these relate to popular culture?

Definitions regarding popular culture and identity

Finkelstein (2007: 24) 'Popular culture is not simply diversionary, it circulates ideas and brings complex questions to our attention.... Discourses on the nature of identity extend from one extreme where it is regarded as unstable and fragmented, subject to impulse and contradiction (am I the same person I was yesterday) to another position where it is seen as an obdurate core, homo clausus, an essence that verifies our difference from others. Lightweight and seemingly benign vehicles of popular entertainment such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Agony Aunt*, *Nip/Tuck*, *Extreme Makeover* and the diet competition *The Biggest Loser*, all address the question of identity.

How might the programmes mentioned relate to the question of identity?

What other specific popular cultural texts can you relate to identities?

Definitions of identity

Barker and Jane (2016: 260) '...identity is an essence that can be signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles. Identity is both personal and social. It marks us out as the same as and different from other kinds of people. We may agree that identity is concerned with sameness and difference, with the personal and the social as understood through forms of representation....'

Barker and Jane (2016:294) 'Identity concerns both self-identity and social identity. It is about the personal and the social. It is about ourselves and our relations with others. It has been argued that identity is wholly cultural in character and does not exist outside of its representation in cultural discourses. Identity is not a fixed thing that we possess but a becoming.'

How might identity being signified through:-

Taste:

Beliefs:

Attitudes:

Lifestyles :

How can these relate to our relations with others?

References

Barker, C. and Jane, E. A. (2016) *Cultural Studies. Theory and Practice*. London, Sage.

Chen, Y. and Li, S.X. (2009) Group Identity and Social Preferences. *The American Economic Review*. Vol. 99(1), pp.431-457.

Finkelstein, J. (2007) *The Art of Self-Invention: Image and Identity in Popular Visual Culture*. London, I.B. Tauris.