

## Chapter 19

# Popular Culture Discourse and Representation of the Organizations' Dark Side

**Sule Erdem Tuzlukaya**  
*Atilim University, Turkey*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter attempts to investigate how mainstream popular cinema creates and represents the dark side of organizational life. By integrating popular culture and organizational studies, it deconstructs the dark side of organizations and using a number of films that on the working life of societies and suggests that such an examination makes room for complex inquiries regarding the idea of this hidden aspect of organizations.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a quite old field of study, popular culture experienced a dramatic change after the 1930s; yet there is still a shortage for common definition (Hall, 2009; Stuart, 2009; Miller, 2015; Lewis, 1978). Especially since the beginning of the 60s, there has been serious interest in popular culture from various disciplines (Mukerji & Schudson, 1986; Mukerji & Schudson, 1991; Storey, 2015; Miller, 2015). However, the opportunity to overlap this field with various existing or emerging disciplines has generally been missed (Coyle, 2014).

In the literature, one may find different approaches and explanations regarding popular culture. The possibility that popular culture can be a substantial source of learning about culture and society has already been proposed (Rhodes & Westwood, 2008). According to Storey (2015), basically culture is broadly supported and very much favored by people. Similarly, Miller (2015) defines popular culture as it is produced, consumed and enjoyed by many ordinary people. Apart from the popularity of popular culture among individuals in practical terms, theoretical contributions are also quite abundant (Rhodes & Westwood, 2008; Mukerji & Schudson, 1991; Storey, 2015). Many, like Takacs (2015) for example, point to the importance of the variety of theories and approaches towards the definition of popular culture.

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Accordingly, some theorists explain this as based on numbers and, still, there is a debate regarding how to measurement of popularity. Also, another mainstream popular culture studies have been considered under the heading of mass culture (Takacs, 2015) and evaluated by scholars critically since the beginning of the 1950s. One very good example is the MacDonald's (1957) comparison in terms of high and mass cultures, which may be called as one of the most influential contributions to the field.

Overall, popular culture can also be proposed as a subset of culture. Genuinely, in the majority of researches, the boundary between high culture and popular culture remains unmarked (DiMaggio, 1982; Takacs, 2015), and there are neither limitations nor borders. However, as Parker (2011) states, it might be accepted as source of pride for scholars in the field, that this notion cannot be easily identified. Popular culture, as a blurred field of study due to the discussions in terms of high and popular culture and unification attempts from other disciplines, also creates an opportunity for coming up with novel debates. Significantly, more than any other subjects, a main inquiry into popular culture has generally been whether it merits genuine thought by any means (Mukerji & Schudson, 1986; Mukerji & Schudson, 1991). Specifically, the combination of anthropology, sociology and critical perspectives inspire researchers to further elaborate on popular culture. Indeed, according to Hirsch (1977) a verifiable refinement among sociologists and anthropologists is that former have encountered extraordinary trouble in considering and characterizing culture, while latter experience issues are related to comparison with social structures. Sociologists, such as Marx, frequently imagine all culture as subordinate to social structure, while anthropologists frequently advance the reverse (Hirsch, 1977).

Popular culture offers organizational researchers a number of possibilities. It can sometimes provide access to arenas in life that academics (and others) might otherwise not think about or may have trouble entering into or experiencing. More importantly though, popular culture often opens up a critical space with respect to issues, behavior, structures and/or practices that most organization studies neglect, marginalize or miss out altogether. Further, the types of observations and critiques within popular culture are capable of creating new spaces for the theorization of work and organizations for such studies, either in juxtaposition to or fruitful interpenetration with existing theoretical formulations.

The representation of work and organization in popular culture has also been examined from many different perspectives, by focusing on the critical issues (Rhodes & Westwood, 2008; Rhodes & Parker, 2008; Rehn, 2008). In spite of this, mainstream organizational studies mainly overlook this dark side. Recently, a growing body of literature on this topic beginning to research the dark side or hidden side of organizations (Hassard & Holiday, 1998; Panayiotou, 2011).

The integration of popular culture into organizational and management studies may provide additional instruments – TV, music, films, etc -, for observing and interpreting workplace issues. Berg and Wilson (2016) emphasize importance of film, movies and television in popular culture. In terms of management and organizational studies, telling of and interpreting the events and facts through movies is not new (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2006; Panayiotou, 2011; Foreman & Thatchenkery, 1996). Throughout the history of management and organizational studies, one may witness many different types of movies and their usage as examples, case studies and discussions.

Accordingly, Rhodes and Westwood (2008) also mention that traditional organizational theory appreciatively examines how work and organizations have been conceptualized and critiqued in mass-mediated popular culture. From this point onward a significant number of studies within popular culture that we are both comfortable with and delighted by are intrinsically and explicitly critical of work and organization. For scholars whose interests, comprehensively characterized, rotate around a basic examination of the practices and culture of contemporary organizations, as stated is generally intriguing. As it is stated

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