

Harry Potter and the Functions of Popular Culture

Dustin Kidd

“For Sociology really to be a science of things, the generality of phenomena must be taken as the criterion of their normality.” (Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* 104)

Heavy metal music has been described as a threat to “our” children and rap is touted as a threat to "our" society (Binder). Music videos provide a framework that justifies rape and other forms of sexual violence (Jhally). The reproduction of artwork in mass-produced books has destroyed the special "aura" of art (Benjamin), and finally, Horkheimer and Adorno have asserted that television has made cultural consumers passive (28). Sociological analyses have produced a lengthy list of critiques of popular culture such that we must wonder why we bother with popular culture at all. What could be more pathological than a social element that threatens a society and its members while also reducing the good life to a commodity and reducing persons to consumers?

Works Cited

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical
Reproduction." Illuminations. Ed. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn.
New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

Binder, Amy. "Constructing Racial Rhetoric: Media Depictions of Harm in
Rap and Heavy Metal." American Sociological Review 58 (1993):
753-67. ProQuest Research Library. ProQuest. Glendale College Lib.,
Glendale, CA. 25 Jun. 2007 <<http://proquest.umi.com>>

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction." Power
and Ideology in Education. Eds. Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey.
New York: Oxford UP, 1977. 487-511.

Durkheim, Emile. Suicide: A Study in Sociology. Ed. George Simpson, Trans.
John A. Spaulding and George Simpson. New York: Free Press, 1951.
. The Rules of Sociological Method. Ed. Steven Lukes, Trans. W. D.
Halls. New York: Free Press, 1982.

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno. Dialectic of Enlightenment. New
York: Herder and Herder, 1992.

Jhally, Sut. Dreamworlds 2. video-recording. Media Education Foundation,
1995.