



## 25 Best Pop Culture Examples (A To Z List)

By Chris Drew (PhD) / December 14, 2022

**Pop culture is short for “popular culture”. It is the cultural activities, practices, and beliefs of the masses (and often targeted at youths) within a society. Pop culture is often spread through [mass media](#) such as television, cinema, radio, and social media.**

Examples of pop culture can be found in language, art, film, and particularly music. This can include Pop 40 music, Young Adult fiction like Harry Potter, and short-lived pop culture trends like flash mobs and clothing styles.



# POP CULTURE

Pop culture is short for “popular culture”. It is the cultural activities, practices, and beliefs of the masses (and often targeted at youths) within a society.

## COMPARISON

Pop culture is the opposite is **alternative culture or subculture**, which is culture that is practiced by pockets of people but hasn't broken through to the masses.

Occasionally, elements of subculture break through and briefly become popular culture, such as the rise of pop punk bands in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

## EXAMPLES

- 1 Boy bands
- 2 British rock
- 3 Children's collectibles
- 4 Comic books
- 5 Cosplay
- 6 Sitcoms

HELPFULPROFESSOR.COM

Pop culture is necessarily inoffensive content that can be consumed by a general audience. It is sometime derogatorily called “[low culture](#)”.

Its opposite is alternative culture or subculture, which is culture that is practiced by pockets of people but hasn't broken through to the masses. Occasionally, elements of subculture break through and briefly become popular culture, such as the rise of pop punk bands in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

**Contents** [ [show](#) ]

Related: [What is Culture? \(With Examples\)](#)

## Examples Of Pop Culture



This list is in alphabetical order. The brackets after each item indicate the broader popular culture category that the item fits into (including: Media, Toys, Music, Clothing, Literature, Sport, Dance, Food).

## 1. Boy Bands (Music)

Boy bands have come to popularity in waves. An earlier wave of boy bands in the 1960s and 70s saw bands like The Monkeys and The Beach Boys rise to popularity.

In the 1990s and 2000s, a new wave of boy bands like The Backstreet Boys came to popularity. The 2010s saw a new group emerge, such as One Direction and the Jonas Brothers.

A central feature of boy bands is that they are given a fun pop image designed to appeal to a wide audience. They often have choreographed dance moves and are primarily vocalists. They're usually young teen or early 20 males singing love songs to girls.

You Might Also Like: [19 Top High School Stereotypes](#)

## 2. British Rock (Music)

Rock music rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s and has enjoyed significant mainstream success intermittently since.

One of the earliest, largest, and more well-respected rock bands of all time was The Beatles. They took the UK and USA by storm, popularizing rock music.



Similar British Rock bands like The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, and The Who similarly rose to worldwide prominence in the mid-1960s, and before long this group of artists were nicknamed the “British Invasion” bands in the USA.

### **3. Children’s Collectibles (Toys)**

Every few years, a children’s collectible breaks into the popular zeitgeist. A popular example throughout history is Pogs, which started out as collectible milk caps in the 1920s. By the 1990s, they were being distributed in McDonald’s happy meals.

Other examples include Tamagotchis, Pokemon cards, and poly pockets.

### **4. Comic Books (Media)**

While today, comic books might not jump out as the most prominent example of pop culture, they were once a dominant form of entertainment before youth.

Popular comics included the DC and Marvel universe comics and in France the popular comic book Tin Tin.

With the rise of television, comic books sopped being a dominant form of consumption for youths and today it has receded to subculture status.

### **5. Cosplay (Clothing)**

Cosplay is a form of dress-up (it is a portmanteau of “costume play”) where people dress up like various characters from popular culture.



While cosplay enjoys subculture status year-round, it breaks out into pop culture at various times of the year. Most prominently, cosplay costumes are widely sold in the lead-up to Halloween.

Cosplay is also celebrated at many conventions around the world such as Comicon by more ardent adherents to the sub-culture.

## **6. Dance Styles (Dance)**

Dance styles rise to popularity within various cultures at different times. In the United States in the 1950s, swing dance style was widely popular.

By the 1990s and the popularity of grunge music, mosh-pits became popular. This was followed by the rise of rave culture and electronic dance music that also involved somewhat unstructured jumping to music.

In South America, however, tango style dance remains popular amongst the youth.

## **7. Daytime Television & Telenovelas (Media)**

Some long-running daytime television shows have also risen to pop culture status, if not for their quality then for their omnipresence in the background of our youths.

Examples include Days of Our Lives, The Young and the Restless, and (in the UK) Coronation Street.

South America also has its own widely popular television shows called telenovelas, which are popular for their dramatic and over-the-top plotlines.



## **8. Dolls And Action Figures (Toys)**

Children's toys similarly rise to popularity within cultures at various times. The Barbie doll trend has enjoyed perhaps the most sustained popularity over time. Others that came and went include Easy Bake Ovens, Furbies, Cabbage Patch Dolls, Bratz Dolls, and Buzz Lightyear.

## **9. English Premier League (Sports)**

Some sports also rise to the status of popular culture. Throughout the world (and particularly Europe), association football (aka soccer) is the dominant sport in culture.

Even within football, English Premier League has mainstream status throughout the world. People worldwide have their preferred team – Manchester United, Chelsea FC, Liverpool, Arsenal, etc.

Elsewhere in the world, other sports have increased prominence and are captured in the popular zeitgeist. In India, for example, cricket, and particularly the Indian Premier League, are central in the national culture.

A sign that a sport has become a part of pop culture is the prominence of particular star players. David Beckham and Christian Ronaldo, for example, are recognizable around the world.

## **10. Food And Drink Trends (Food)**



Popular culture can also be seen in the food and drink trends of a society. In the United States, popcorn and soda at the cinema is a prominent cultural trope enjoyed by the masses. Ice cream at the beach in summer may also be seen as a popular trend.

In the United Kingdom, fish and chips and Indian curries are dishes that have risen to pop culture status (these dishes often being called the 'national dishes'). In Canada, poutine is celebrated as a food that's popular in the national zeitgeist. In Australia, meat pies also rise to such prominence.

## **11. Flash Mobs (Dance)**

Flash mobs became a very popular part of Western culture in 2003 and remained prominent for about 3 years.

A flash mob is a group of people who do choreographed performances in public spaces that are designed to appear spontaneous to passers-by. The members of the mob blend in with the crowd until their performance begins then dissipate into the crowd shortly after.

While impressive, they're also seen as potentially disruptive and dangerous to public order and have therefore been seen as a nuisance by governments and police forces.

Below is an example of a flash mob performance:

## Grease, Centraal Station Antwerpen



### **12. Hip Hop And Rap (Music)**

Hip hop started out as an African American subcultural music genre. It rose to prominence in the early 1990s with bands such as NWA, Snoop Dogg, Tupac, and Biggie.

By the 2010s, hip hop and rap had become dominant forms of music in American popular culture. The Childish Gambino song This is America swamped the radio stations, while rappers like Jay Z and Kendrick Lamar topped charts with each new album.

### **13. Jeans Styles (Clothing)**

Styles of jeans circulate in and out of mainstream popularity. The 1970s were popular for their flare jeans, the 1990s had loose-fitting jeans, the 2000s had side pocket jeans, and the 2010s had skinny jeans.



Often, styles will go out of fashion for several decades before being revived by the grandchildren of those who used to wear them.



## **14. K-Pop (Music)**

K-Pop, an abbreviation of “Korean Pop”, is popular music from South Korea. The genre has also broken out into popular culture in the West as well, particularly after the rise of the hit song Gangnam Style.

K-Pop also has its own dress and makeup styles. Those who dress in the outfits and embrace the identity of K-Pop may be considered part of a K-Pop subculture, while some songs still break out into mainstream Western popular culture.

## **15. Manga (Media)**

Manga comics started out as a Japanese comic style that was mainstream in Japan but a subculture in the West. With the rise of Manga-style cartoons like Sailor Moon, Manga slowly became a dominant form of comic art in the West as well.

Today, Manga continues to enjoy popular consumption among youths and many Western Saturday morning cartoons are created using this artistic style.

## **16. Pop Punk (Music)**

While punk music started out as a counterculture designed to resist the corporate capitalist takeover of pop music, it wasn't long before punk was mainstreamed.



The mainstreaming of punk reached its peak with the emergence of pop punk megabands in the 1990s. The epitome of this was the band Green Day. Many older punks used the phrase “pop punk” as a term of derision at punk music that had “sold out” to corporate interests in order to enjoy mainstream fame.

## **17. Reality TV (Media)**

Reality TV becomes popular culture thanks to its widespread distribution on television. Famous reality TV programs that have entered the popular zeitgeist include Survivor, Big Brother, and American Idol.

With the rise of streaming platforms like Netflix and polarization of network consumption, television arguably doesn’t unite the masses as much as it used to. Nevertheless, platforms like Netflix are creating their own Reality TV programs like The Circle.

Furthermore, even shows on Netflix like Tiger King can even become popular enough to be considered popular culture.

## **18. Saturday Morning Cartoons (Media)**

Another popular media that captures the nation (and particularly children of a nation) are morning cartoons.

These cartoons form the backdrop of many schoolyard conversations and children’s games.

Examples of popular Saturday morning cartoons throughout history include Scooby-Doo, Bugs Bunny, Road Runner, X-Men, and Pokemon.

## 19. Sit-Coms (Media)



The heyday of sit-coms was the 1990s. During this era, sit-coms ('situation comedies') were on television nightly and united a nation.

Sit-coms like *Frasier*, *Friends*, and *Seinfeld* enjoyed widespread popularity. The actors on the shows were celebrated in magazines, followed by paparazzi, and paid enormous sums of money. Their dating lives were plastered all over the news.

When television viewership declined with the rise of streaming platforms, sit-coms became less and less common through the late 2010s and 2020s.

## 20. Slang And Youth Language (Language)

Language can also be a part of popular culture. Each generation develops their own ways of speaking and their own phrases and idioms.

For example, Millennials and Gen Z have developed slang based around internet usage. Phrases like "surfing the web", "break the internet", and "don't at me" each refer to actions that can be taken on the internet.

## 21. Superhero Movies (Media)

Superhero movies are released annually to be consumed by the masses at the cinema. Famous superheroes such as Spiderman, Superman, and Batman are depicted heroically saving the day (and often getting the girl in the process!)

These films are widely enjoyed but also heavily criticized for their predictable plot lines, gender conformity, and lack of depth.

## 22. Top 40 Music (Media)



Top 40 music is one of the most prominent ways pop culture can be identified.

Top 40 charts of each year are memorialized on the internet to help people reflect on what music captured the spirit of the year.

Often, top 40 music is called the “pop charts” to demonstrate that this music is the music of the masses.

This music is also often derided by people who claim to know what “good” music is. And indeed, pop music is regularly highly fabricated with a strong beat and predictable lyrics.

## 23. Video Games (Media)

Some video games have risen to the level of popular culture, to the extent that they have featured spinoffs like movies and action figures.

A hugely popular video game series of the 1980s and 1990s was the Mario series. To this day, people dress as characters from the video games like Mario, Toad, and Princess to cosplay events.

Similarly, video games like Tomb Raider, Halo, and Doom have had spinoff films. Tomb Raider, in particular, became a huge cinema success.

## 24. Viral Social Media Challenges (Media)

With the rise of social media in the 2010s, “challenges” became a widespread part of popular culture. Challenges that got large enough even had Prime

Ministers and politicians participate in the hope of tapping into the popular zeitgeist.



Perhaps the most popular of these was the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge of 2014. The challenge raised \$220 million for ALS (aka motor neurone disease) charities.

Famous people who did the ice bucket challenge include Tom Cruise, Leonardo Di Caprio, Vin Diesel, and Justin Trudeau.

Here's a compilation of famous people taking up the challenge:

## **25. Young Adult Fiction (Literature)**

Many young adult fiction books break through into the popular imagination and become a large part of popular culture. Harry Potter is possibly the most evident

example of this. However, others have also broken through, such as Twilight, Divergent, The Hunger Games, and historically, Narnia.



When young adult books become extremely popular, they enter pop culture through spinoff media and merchandise, such as cartoons, franchised movies, and action figures.

## FAQs

### What Are Some Criticisms Of Pop Culture?

Pop culture is criticized for being too money focused (with the culture being driving by capitalism and consumerism), promoted by the elites for the masses to mindlessly consume, and promoting gender, race, and social class norms that maintain subjugation of the disempowered.

- **Marxist critique** – Marxist scholars see pop culture as being a way to distract the working class from the fact they are being subjugated. Much like religion, popular culture is seen as the “opiate of the masses”.
- **Critical Theory Critique** – Critical theorists see pop culture as being chosen and promoted by the elite classes rather than the working-class.
- **Consumerism Critique** – Mass media theories highlight how cultural tropes are produced and circulated to keep people buying new things.
- **Feminist Critique** – Feminists highlight how pop culture centralizes the experiences of white men at the expense of women, while also often framing women as weak and in need of men to save the day.
- **Nationalism Critique** – Some cultural scholars believe pop culture promotes myths about nations and nationalism. This can be both good

and bad. (For more, see the concept of [Imagined Communities](#))



- **Americanization Critique** – The power of the United States in producing entertainment media for the world has led to a critique the American pop culture has spread throughout the world and undermined traditional cultures of nations and ethnic groups.

## How Does Pop Culture Impact Our Lives?

Pop culture acts as the backdrop to our lives. It is the music, food, and entertainment we consume. Many people critique pop culture as having too much of an influence on how the masses think. It normalizes dominant [social identities](#) and marginalizes non-normative identities.

Some people who dislike pop culture choose to participate in countercultures, which are cultural groupings that are defiant of consumerism and normative lifestyles.

## What Are The 6 Sources Of Pop Culture?

The 6 sources of pop culture are:

- **Radio** – While not as popular as it once was, radio has a strong influence on people’s musical tastes. ‘Shock jock’ radio personalities also promote political views to the masses.
- **Film** – Popular films introduce young people to new heroes to emulate and celebrate.
- **Television** – Popular TV shows can be influential on fashion trends and social beliefs.



- **Literature** – Books can influence people’s views and beliefs and create popular characters (e.g. Harry Potter) that enter the zeitgeist.
- **News** – The news media can influence what is popular or not.
- **Social Media** – Undoubtedly the biggest influence on pop culture trends in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is [new media](#), and in particular social media. It enables the masses to share information and make it ‘go viral’ without the stringent mass **media gatekeepers** of the past. This can be good and bad (e.g. it leads to a lot of fake news).

## Pop Culture Vs Subculture Vs Counterculture

Pop culture is the [dominant culture](#) in a society designed to appeal to the masses. Subcultures are cultures that exist within a society but are not dominant. Countercultures are subcultures that intentionally rebel against pop culture and are framed as critiques of the mainstream lifestyle.

- [Examples of subcultures](#) include skater culture, emo culture, and goth culture.
- [Examples of countercultures](#) include the hippies and anarchists.

Generally, pop culture is more palatable to the masses, while subcultures and countercultures can be more controversial and rebellious.

For subcultures and countercultures to become popular culture, they often have to strip themselves of the image of rebellion or difference. For examples, pop punk took the beat and sound of punk music and stripped it of its anti-consumer mentality.



# Pop Culture Vs Traditional Culture



Traditional culture is the culture of a group of people, while pop culture is usually the culture of the youth. Traditional cultures include traditional dress (often worn at religious or ethnic ceremonies), clothing, and family belief systems that have been passed down for generations.

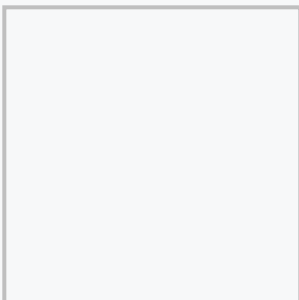
Pop culture is often seen with fear by older generations who see it as a threat to the traditional culture. For more, read about the concept of [moral panic](#).

## Conclusion

The above examples of pop culture are just a few of the many that you could come up with. Think about the food, dress, media, and trends that act as the backdrop to the life of a society. Generally, you will also need to be able to differentiate between subcultures (celebrated by small pockets of a population) and pop culture which is the dominant cultural form at any one point in time within a society.

### [Chris Drew \(PhD\)](#)

[Website](#) | [+ posts](#)



Dr. Chris Drew is the founder of the Helpful Professor. He holds a PhD in education and has published over 20 articles in scholarly journals. He is the former editor of the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education.



## Leave A Comment

Logged in as Staff Writer. [Edit your profile.](#) [Log out?](#) Required fields are marked \*

Type here..

[Post Comment »](#)



This Article was Last Expert Reviewed on December 14, 2022 by Chris Drew, PhD

We cite peer reviewed academic articles wherever possible and reference our sources at the end of our articles. All articles are edited by a PhD level academic. [Learn more about our academic and editorial standards.](#)

### Cite this Article in your Essay (APA Style)

Drew, C. (November 2, 2021). *25 Best Pop Culture Examples (A to Z List)*. Helpful Professor. <https://helpfulprofessor.com/pop-culture-examples/>

Search for a Study Guide

Search



[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms and Conditions](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

[Accessibility Statement](#)

[Video Transcripts](#)

As an Amazon Associate I earn from qualifying purchases.

[About The Helpful Professor](#)

Copyright © 2023 Helpful Professor

All the advice on this site is general in nature. Seek professional input on your specific circumstances. Students should always cross-check any information on this site with their course teacher.