

The Commodification of Identity

Research Proposal:

- 5 topics total
- citation
- just to get you thinking about the project

Key Questions

1. What is the relationship between consumer society and identity?
 - a. Advertisers and critics alike say there is a strong connection
2. What kind of agency do people have in formulating their identities in a consumer society?
 - a. Are consumers just dupes controlled by markets? Or do they have agency to decide how they want to form their identities? Or even whether or not they want to reject commercialism? And is there any political potential in this rejection? Is there a distinction between consumer and producer? Do consumers derive their own meanings from good?
3. What happens to the political potential of identity politics and social movements when they are co-opted/reflected by marketers?

Industrialization

- Mass Produced Goods
- The “impersonality of scale” --- everyone gets the same stuff, which means it’s cheaper to produce the goods, they’re not necessarily getting this from people they know
- The rise of advertising agencies
- Early ad agencies worker for publishers and placed the ads...
- They soon discovered that they could sell more goods with strategic campaigns

Breaking through the “Protestant work ethic” --- *you don’t have to work hard to earn the things that you want, you can just go in debt*

- chain stores and rise of branding
- “Debt” becomes “credit”
- Planned obsolescence

Making Social Ills Problematic: Problematize Behaviors

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- Solved with new technology
- Not just selling products, but creates/emphasizes insecurities and offers to fix them

Hopes and Anxieties of Consumers

- Ads went from merely informational (featuring products) to more personal as time shifted (and relevant to our society) --- i.e. Aunt Jemima

Similarities between contemporary and early advertisers

- both seeking to simulate authentic, personal relationship with consumer "simulated intimacy"
- Advertisers "understand" you and speak to you on a personal level
 - o Mass personalization/Niche Marketing

Torches of Freedom --- The Cooptation of Social Movement (female empowerment etc)

Modernity Postmodernity

- Mass marketing Niche marketing
- Post industrialization – The rise of consumer society

Klein: No Logo

- Globalization and the commodification of identity
 - o Global youth culture (huge market) --- *this because they have a large amount of disposable income and they're more likely to try different products*
 - o Homogenization --- i.e. opening up a vegetarian mcdonalds in India --- have to have relevance to the particular place in which you're marketing
 - o Youth in developed and developing nations targeted

Key Concept

- The Cooptation of identity politics and representation
 - o *In the 80s/90s, Klein was mostly concerned about poor representation in the media of oppressed groups (i.e. homosexuals, black etc) --- visible minorities weren't represented as much in the media, or if they were they were poorly portrayed*

Identity Politics: Mobilization of essentialized identity categories, generally by traditionally marginalized groups

- Hall describes as a "temporary attachment"
- "may be evoked as a resource"
- Spivak: Strategic Essentialism

"...identity politics weren't fighting the system, or subverting it. When it came to the cast new industry of corporate branding, they were feeding it" (p. 113) (Klein: No Logo)

In focusing on issues of representation, what does Klein say she and her peers left out?

“Counter-advertising”

- self-referential humor
- advertising parodies itself
- gives the consumer a sense of control and simulated intimacy

Critics of Consumer Society

- “Consumption becomes a means of articulating a sense of identity and, perhaps even more crucially, *distinction* from others” (Discourse and Identity citing Bourdieu, pg. 167)
- Bourdieu – cultural capital – differentiate or distinguish yourself and signify social position
- Veblen: consumption used to achieve social differentiation and status

Upward Social Mobility

- or at least looking like it

Sign Value and Post-Modern Experience

- Baudrillard – “we have become what we consume”
 - o We have simulated feelings
 - o The sign value of products is privileged over use value
 - o Hyperreality: reality has been replaced with symbols and signs. “The real” is now a reproduction, or simulacra (copy without original).

Critics of Consumer Society

ID and consumption – you can configure your identity with products, services and goods. Even those things considered subversive

The Frankfurt School

- Commodification
- Ideology
- Hegemony – Gramsci
- Interpellation – Althusser

Ideology:

- Production of common sense or creation of a world view or social norms
- Fundamentally connected with identity
- Creation of knowledge systems
- Conceptual framework “...through which men interpret, make sense of, experience and ‘live’ the material conditions in which they find themselves” (Hall, 1980, p. 33)

Hegemony:

- process through which ruling classes secure the consent of disadvantaged groups
- Voluntarily entered into by subjects, although it may contain elements of coercion

- Antonio Gramsci asked why workers (proletariats) in oppressive, hegemonic situations did not rebel
- Elites achieve and maintain hegemony by reproducing dominant ideology through social institutions
- Elites have a vested interest in reproducing the status quo and maintaining the social order

Hegemony Reproduced through Ideology

- Dominant ideology: implies maintenance of the status quo and social preference for the benefit of elites and control over less privileged groups
- Reproduced through social institutions (education, the mass media, etc)
 - o Althusser: language/culture/economic base construct world experience
 - o Other Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) also play a powerful role
(*reproduce the same thing that makes it seem like it's common sense*)
- "People believe themselves to be the arbiters of an experience that is in fact constructed by ideological codes" (MediaMaking, p. 20)
- "...the discursive production of the social subject" (p. 30)
- One is "hailed" by the discursive order.

Interpellation (*people think it's their own idea... i.e. I signify my identity through wearing a CU sweater*)

Tuow: The Personalized Store

- How are consumer identities segmented and commodified?
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