Why are we so pleased to buy things for ourselves? Why is our culture bent on merchandise to make us feel happy and normal? They say money can't buy happiness, but it sure helps.

As the Beatles sing, "Money can't buy me love", our affections are earned with gifts and money. It may be true that real happiness doesn’t come in a package or isn’t money but why in our culture do we gain so much satisfaction from gift giving and receiving?

Ewen describes buying a product with the result of individuality. Could it be that the things we own end up owning us? Maybe not owning us but defining who we are. Dick hebdigde also redefines deviant behavior. It is a way of getting back at society.
defined that it is no longer individual? Hebdidge describes noise in the punk fashion, that it’s a way of lashing out to the real world. Do we crave attention? Is attention really given how we want to accept it?

We discussed the new fad of Apple products. It is true that they go out of date or service after a certain amount of time. I believe it is two years and then an upgrade is needed. I can make my phone last four to five years no problem. Its Apple’s way of saying yeah we know you want our stuff but you have to buy the newest version so we can keep improving ourselves. Money runs our desires. I almost went to tears when I got my smartphone for Christmas. I was so happy I could fit in now. I had internet, games, and other apps at my fingertips. Basically, this is a small computer. I love my phone and am now sad to say I couldn’t go back to the old phones, ever. I’m so used to the luxury of a smart phone now that I’m no longer impressed by it, only appreciative. We become desensitized as we buy more things. That would explain why rich people always have a void that can’t be filled. They buy and buy because they feel the need. Maybe they didn’t have a lot growing up so they compensate for it. Or maybe they’ve always had money so they keep buying as it is their lifestyle. I may never know what the feeling of being able to buy what I want ever feels like but I imagine there is a hefty price to be paid in the long run. To feel the need to keep buying and spending, only to find that there is more you don’t have or an upgrade to something you have. It’s a never ending process.

Marketing is the future of society. If the world is still intact there is always going to be a buyer and sellers’ market. Intent of dress and style are part of the market that defines us as individuals and a society. Advertisements are a way of making things available before they are available. The society we live in today is run by consumers. Buying things is a modern trait for us all.

Money rules modern society. Money may end up being our downfall but for now it is our savior to be connected with one another. Family and love will always hold stronger than money but it is money that helps keep us happy and helps make the world go round.

Consumerism: The Individual and the Mass Populace

Mass consumerism, is it good for this mass populace of the United States or is it turning the population into a mass populace that is both intellectually bankrupt and believes that each and every member of society is an individual by nature? From the time we are born, to the time of our deaths, the media bombards us with ads for products; the nature of these ads may have the power to influence the way a person acts, thinks, and feels. This possible influence can, rob us of the intelligence, creativity, and individual nature of a free thinking mind.

What is a free thinking mind? It would encompass a self-aware nature, such as: buying a product out of usefulness and practicality; to not purchase a product and follow commercial trends; the mental capacity to not let a commercial or ad sway the individual into buying it through means coinciding with their ideology or beliefs. There is also those who go against the grain because of the self-aware nature of the individual. What that entails would be that the individual, who is self-aware, would either try to stand out on purpose in the mass population in order to separate due to the belief that they are not like the mass populace. This could be considered a definition of what an individual actually is in a mass population. The honest truth is that only those who are actually individuals and those who are at the mast-head of the culture ocean.

There is a point that can be reached when members of the mass populace believe that they are free thinking individuals. These individuals are easily duped into buying products. “Within governmental and business rhetoric, consumption assumed an ideological veil of nationalism and democratic lingo.” (Ewen)

In business and governmental rhetoric, consumption under the guise of an ideology can be very detrimental to an individual. If the product that is being featured is pertinent to making someone more individualistic or appeals to their ideological bias. Then, it will be almost possible that members of the mass populace who agree with the statement of the ad will buy said
product, because this product is represented as a not just an item, but a figment of an ideal that they hold. “By defining himself and his desires in terms of the good of capitalist production, the worker would implicitly accept the foundations of modern industrial life.” (Ewen)

It is at this point that the individual ceases to be free thinking mind and becomes a consumer without even knowing what they are truly doing. Even though the members of the mass populace believe that they are free thinking and individuals by nature, a problem lies within the scope of these individuals. Does this mass populace believe what they actually believe or is this mass populace being told what to do as they are being the individuals they are said to be?

The conscious nature of an individual is easy to see, but what if the individual from the time of childhood is bombarded by ads telling it: what ideologies to follow, what products to buy; is the individual even an individual at this point or has the person become a consumer. It is also very hard to not become a consumer as well. Considering that “Advertisements are aimed at pockets of resistance. These pockets of resistance are subcultures that dwell within the mass populace.” (Ewen)

One such example is the metal head subculture, which arose during the 1970s and was spawned by fans of heavy metal music. These fans created their own subculture encompassing something that could be considered, “more than just appreciation of the style of music” and the subculture is a “subculture of alienation.” By definition of what a free thinking individual as described above, it could be considered that the members of subcultures are actually free thinking individuals that advertisements have been trying squash out and make them part of the mass consumer base. (Wikipedia, 2013)

This could be considered a difficult task considering that most subcultures are against the idea of conformity, such as the aforementioned example. However it is possible so that there is one-way mass consumerism, by making the subculture into a commodity. However, those components of the dominant ideology have found a solution: by making the subculture in a commodity that can be marketed and sold. Commodities in this day and age can be anything. Things like information, ideologies, thoughts, and people’s beliefs. It would be arrogant to assume these examples can be bought or sold, but in reality this is possible, because, “a commodity can change into something that can transcend sensuousness.” A material item transcends the status being just an item. (Marx, 1894)

Commoditizing subcultures and making their ideologies into products can destroy a subculture. Advertisements and marketing can make the subculture and its ideals into a thing to be bought or sold as an identity to the individual. Therefore an individual’s identity from said subculture may be irreverently altered into a member of the mass consumer base. In agreement with capitalist nature this should be considered as a normal occurrence, because this happens to many subcultures. With this being said, mass consumerism is a very harmful entity to those who exist in the subcultures, who see mass consumerism and the dominant ideology that it pushes as a problem.

Works Cited


Leave a comment

Appleing Jamie Hugh’s Idea to Spider-Man 3

In Jamie Hughe’s essay, “Who watches the watchmen’?: Ideology and ‘Real World’ Superhero’s”, she talks about why people go to comic book stores to get these stories. One of the things she talks about is the idea that “With each passing year superheros are becoming more involved in “real world” scenarios than mirror current social and political problems.” (Hugh)
describes the typical theme of comic books, in the case, the idea will be applied to one comic book movie in particular. In the case of "Spider-Man 3" the idea does apply. Although, is more of a personal problem than a social one; a theme not often found in comic books. That personal problem is revenge.

In the first movie in the series Peter’s Uncle, Ben, is supposedly killed by a Robber. (Spider-Man) Shortly after Parker catches up to him a building, the killer then falls backward tripping on a pipe, falls out of a window, and dies. (Spider-Man) In the second movie, Peter explains to his aunt what happened and how he ended up dead. (Spider-Man 2) In the third movie, it is discovered that the supposed killer was just an accomplice and the real killer was still at large. (Spider-Man 3)

The real guy that killed Parker’s uncle turned into a sandman. (Spider-Man 3) In the middle of the movie, Spider-Man has a battle with him in which he pushes the sandman into a water which dissolved him. (Spider-Man 3) When he told his aunt the news, Parker thought that she would be enthusiastic, but it turned out not to be so. She said that Uncle Ben wouldn’t want revenge in their hearts. (Spider-Man 3)

After the final battle, Parker talked with the sandman in his alter ego and he explained why he killed his uncle. (Spider-Man 3) In the end, Parker decided to forgive him. (Spider-Man 3)

In conclusion, the idea of characters becoming involved in real world scenarios does apply to spider-man. Even though it’s not as political as watchmen.

Bibliography


“in the last 40 years and now at an increasing rate...has passed the frontier of the selling of goods and services and has become involved with the teaching of social and personal values,” (pg. 20). In this case the value of the cigarette and the quality one can and should expect from the Lucky Strike brand. This technique is used by countless other cigarette companies.

Williams also explains the phenomenon of publicity and how it is “developed to sell persons, in a particular kind of culture,” (pg. 19). Williams writes that the persons involved with product advertising are typically film actors and that “the methods are often basically similar: the arranged incident, the ‘mention,’ the advice on branding, packaging and a good ‘selling line,’” (pg. 19). In a series of Camel cigarette advertisements, a number of celebrities—including Marguerite Piazza, Buddy Rogers, Eva Gabor, Robert Young and even some “doctors”—praise how mild the cigarettes are, and especially how easy they are on the throat; often this is followed by some kind of tagline. The marketing aim here is to sell not only the product, but also the chance to smoke a cigarette some of one’s favorite television, film and stage performers also enjoy. One could also say that they are doctor recommended, not for their health advantages, however, but for their rich, mild tobacco flavor.

In the early 60s Belair brand cigarettes ran a series of commercials featuring a theme song performed by a group of young, attractive people, first on a boat with an accordion, then on some sort of patio or deck with a piano, then finally at a lakeside picnic with a guitar. The song reiterates the fresh menthol taste of the cigarettes and ballyhoos the “modern recessed filter” that “puts a breath of fresh air between the filter and you.” Clean is used to describe this marvel, and throughout the song the word fresh is used over 10 times. This campaign harkens to Williams’s writings in that it is an advertisement not just for Belair cigarettes, but for a young, carefree lifestyle full of leisure, refreshment and song. Bob Barker himself stood by Belair cigarettes, explaining that with each pack a Raleigh coupon is included, “good for hundreds of wonderful, free gifts for every member of your family; every room in your home.” Bob also points out that four extra coupons are included with the purchase of a carton of Belair cigarettes: “that’s 14 in all.” This marketing ploy allows the clever consumer to enjoy a carton of cigarettes, as well as wonderful gifts that will make them the envy of their friends and neighbors.

In the late 1950s cigarettes were enjoyed and lauded by such lovable characters as Lucille Ball. In a banned commercial, Light One Up for Lucy, Lucy and Ricky Ricardo (Desi Arnaz) are lighting up Phillip Morris cigarettes. When Ricky notices that he’s taken the last cigarette, he tells Lucy to grab another pack. Lucy moves a painting to reveal a safe in which the cigarettes are stored and protected. During the pitch, Ricky mentions that the cigarettes are valuable—perhaps not so much as to be kept in a safe—and are “the finest king-size cigarette in America today.” Consumers are not purchasing just a carton of king-size cigarettes, but a guarantee and a precious commodity.

In the early 60s Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble also got in on the cigarette game. Both are featured in a series of Winston cigarette commercials which reiterate the smooth filter taste of Winston cigarettes. Fred is so happy by the end of these commercials that he can’t help but sing the Winston jingle. Advertising campaigns such as the use of The Flintstones is what began the unease of parents due to the targeting of their children. The campaign, measured against Williams’s ideas, suggests the purchase of nostalgia by older smokers. The cartoon gives smoking a jovial reverence that harkens to one’s youth.

Leaping to 2013, Dunhill cigarettes created and distributed a rather intriguing television commercial. The advertisement features a young man harpoon fishing. After building a campfire and preparing a knife set, the young man prepares some of the most delicious-looking fish I’ve ever seen. There are, however, no cigarettes or smoking featured in this commercial. This is not just a sign of the advertising times, but a direct link to the writings of Williams. Again he writes that “it is clear that we have a cultural pattern in which the objects are not enough but must be validated, if only in fantasy, by association with social and personal meanings,” a phenomenon which he describes as “magic,” (pg. 20). This advertisement is the embodiment of that idea. Much like the cologne commercial we viewed in class, this commercial heads one direction, then throws the product in with the tagline at the end, after the fire spinner, of course.

Cigarette advertisements throughout several decades have focused not on the physical tobacco products, but rather on marketing lifestyles, values and nostalgia to target demographics, often using celebrity testimonials. These companies do so in a way that Williams describes as a “highly organized and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions.” (pg. 20). The advertisement for Dunhill’s luxurious, fine cigarettes paves the way for future cigarette advertising.

Commercials Cited

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuR_CVcMztA

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Advertising controls the world. It's as simple as that.

As we’ve discussed in class, we live in an extremely materialistic society — one that marginalizes objects that we can’t put a market value on. What’s the point of having friends or a social life if you can’t connect with them through Facebook on your iPhone? Why bother playing basketball if you don’t have the newest pair of Lebron James–sponsored kicks?

Why don’t we find more value in our materialistic possessions? This question is brought up by Raymond Williams when prosing about our modern culture. Williams knows that we are quite materialistic, yet, he doesn’t think we are materialistic enough. Williams debates that we should find more sentimental value in our possessions that we use. (*Advertising: The Magic System*, Raymond Williams) Simply put, often times we only regard the market value of our belongings, and we easily discard them when something with higher value comes along. Williams says that our value for culture should be “like magic” – we need to validate other personalities of our objects, not just the money it cost to acquire.

Perhaps it’s our insecurities as a country that allows advertisers to point us in their direction. We all have this ideal in our minds that we must have what’s best for us because it’s what we deserve. Williams uses the argument that something as simple as a beer should be good enough for us. We know that we like it, and we’re going to buy it despite what advertisements are thrown in our faces. Yet, countless advertisements need to remind us that drinking a full, hearty beer will make us younger, manlier, and give us a stronger sense of male camaraderie. Or take cell phone commercials as an example. In the past year, there have been several cell phone commercials that feature one individual who has a slower data coverage, and then you’ll see another person who has a slightly faster speed. The advertisers are trying to appeal to our new, fast approach to social activity by telling us that we need the fastest and best that’s available. (Class Lecture) This has become the new culture that defines us; and it’s up to the advertisers to continue to sell us our culture at whatever cost possible.

Another way advertisers are able to sell to us would be the use of those we look up to. What better way to sell someone a cell phone by having Seth Rogen, Paul Rudd, and Bob Odenkirk promote it? Well, it worked on me, so advertisers clearly have some idea of what they are doing. American culture revolves around a paparazzi lifestyle and making sure we keep up with the Kardashians. Magazine stands and the internet are littered with celebrity endorsements. Advertisers attempt to create a personal relationship between the celebrity and consumer, hoping to invent a false sense of closeness between the two. Take the social media phenomenon Twitter for example. There are literally 140 characters separating your average stay-at-home mom and John Stamos. As consumers, we believe that if we reach out to these idols of ours, that they’ll listen and maybe one day they’ll extend their arm back out to us. This is why when we see Taylor Swift telling us to buy Covergirl makeup or Ron Burgundy’s showing off the new Dodge Durango/gumball machine, we are more inclined to run out and make our purchases as soon as we possibly can.

Advertisements even pop up in our favorite television shows and movies. The NBC cult-favorite *Community* even made fast-food chains Kentucky Fried Chicken and Subway integral plot points in past episodes. However, the episode “Digital...
"Exploration of Interior Design" parodied the extremes of corporate integration. The episode featured a character known as a newly-legal "corpo-humanoid" that can become a student at Greendale Community College under the identity of "Subway." Throughout the episode, "Subway" brilliantly displays the effects of advertisement upon society by following the restaurant's strict and distinct mission statement and image. This is an effective method for advertisers as we watch hours and hours of television and film as a culture. In the era of DVRs and the AdHopper, we have the ability to skip hundreds of advertisements per week. But, we can’t avoid them if advertisers force their client’s products into the plot of our favorite TV show.

But, how do advertisers reach the so-called “punks” or “hipsters” that are addressed by Dick Hebdige? Hebdige argues that this subculture of “punks” represent an anti-establishment aspect of our culture. When it comes to the commodity of advertisement, it’s often viewed as “selling out” and taking the easy buck; this goes against the ideology of being one of these punks. (Selections From Subculture, Dick Hebdige) Nowadays, Hebdige’s “punks” are casually referred to as “hipsters.” But, if these hipsters go against the grain and refuse to conform to the norms of society’s culture, how do advertisers appeal to them? Advertisers can gain just as much money off of these individuals as the rest of society with even less straight-up, traditional advertising. Two examples I will use can prove how companies advertise to these unique individuals. First off, Converse’s Chuck Taylor All-Star shoes are a trademark of the common “hipster look.” By using visual clues on how to be hip, or how to better fit in with this secluded group, we can observe their dressing habits. Converse needs to do a minimal amount of advertising for these shoes because they know that people will purchase them regardless. Another product that I will use as an example is the now-obsolete Zune MP3 player. I know of several individuals who purchased a Zune simply because it was not manufactured by Apple. In a world where nearly everyone has an iPod or iPhone, the Zune benefitted from a market that liked to rebel against the norm. While, Zune eventually became non-existent, it garnered a considerable amount of verbal advertising from those who were purely against the iPod and Apple.

Advertising will forever continue to be a moving cog of our materialistic culture. Instead of trying to swim against its current, our culture needs to understand a better way to regulate advertising’s affect on our society if we want to be in control.

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**Essay #2**

Posted on November 2, 2013

By: Cassie Scott

Word Count: 1,171

As the modes of communication and media evolve, our world is taking on a new form of social values. The ads we see and the products being sold are now dictating how individuals purchase products. Models are seen in commercials, in magazines, in television shows and even on billboards. The Victoria’s Secret store and online website sell clothing, sleepwear, swimwear, shoes, scents/perfumes, lingerie, accessories, makeup, and other products. The company has dozens of tan, skinny, and beautiful models in its advertisements. After reading many of the course materials, I’ve come to realize that Victoria’s Secret isn’t just selling commodities or products; it is selling much more than that, a lifestyle.

Ewen states, “Through advertising, then, consumption took on a clearly cultural tone.” After ads were thrust upon the masses, their purpose was to increase sales, but soon after they didn’t focus on selling a product, they were geared to sell a lifestyle where the product would hold more worth.

Advertising offered “mass produced visions of individualism by which people could extricate themselves from the mass,” said Ewen. An ad has the potential to make their product appear to be rare and unique, which elevates the want element when a person sees that a product can give them that sense of individuality.

People may buy products to accomplish their own personal look, but they may also buy Victoria’s Secret products for social aspect of being associated with the brand. Through the use of the products one might become a success because of the products they associate themselves with. When referring to Victoria’s Secret, their target audience is mostly women, although they can target men who want the women in their lives to be associated with that specific brand. People are brainwashed by ads in that when they purchase a brand name product they perceive themselves to be a specific standard.
The idea of wearing something from Victoria’s Secret makes the piece worth more. It is valuable and has a high-end name, Victoria’s Secret is a brand. Many women, and yes, some men buy items from the company just because of the name brand product. The cost of the item isn’t just the labor time and the materials, Victoria’s Secret makes its customers pay for the name brand.

“Advertising offered the next best thing- a commodity self. Within the vision offered by such ads, not only were social grace and success attainable; they were also defined through the use of specific products,” said Ewen. Advertising attempts to create a worldview that products can help a person achieve social status and success.

Williams states that humans aren’t materialistic enough because we want items for more than their use. Women don’t just buy clothing and lingerie from Victoria’s Secret because they can, but they also buy it because they want what the model in the ad has, everything- looks, grace, sexiness etc. Williams said, “In ads, brands have the power to solve our problems.” Individuals may feel the need to buy the items because they can make them feel worthy and beautiful. Companies sell an idea, and make the product seem to be more than it actually is.

Ewen also said, “Speaking often to women, ads offered daintiness, beauty, romance, grace, security and husbands through the use of certain products.” When products can give people these things, they feel justified when they exchange money for the products. Williams said, “You do not only buy an object: you buy social respect, discrimination, health, beauty, success, power to control your environment.” The act of buying an object is more to the consumer than just buying the product, they buy the image associated with the ad hoping to achieve the ads potential.

Williams talks about a magical approach to advertising. He means that people think the ad sells more than just the product. This approach would also make the individual see that the product will reward them with the sense of social respect. We buy products for more than their material value. People buy items from Victoria’s Secret for the name and lifestyle the product appears to offer.

Williams said, “since consumption is within its limits a satisfactory activity, it can be plausibly offered as a commanding social purpose.” People buy Victoria’s Secret for the purpose of filling a void for social activity.

Ewen suggests that ads instruct us on how to act. Many of the Victoria’s Secrets ads try to sell a product to the consumer, but while they are also selling the idea, the consumers of the products may interact as they perceive they should be wearing the product. It is the notion that if women wear the Victoria’s Secret products and clothing, they can look like the models they see in the commercials. The company sells mostly to women, although they do target men who want their women to look more like the models they see in the ads.

Since the company is very well know and is associated with sexiness, a person wearing their products may feel that their social image is increased. They would be more willing to think that when they apply the Victoria’s Secret lip gloss, or put on a Victoria’s Secret swimsuit that they will become more like the models they see in the ads. Most women don’t have the model type of body and therefore think that the products sold at Victoria’s Secret will get them closer to attaining what they see in the ads. The products would give the individuals wearing them more popular and part of a higher part of society and class.

In addition to ads selling more than a product, the brand being worth more than the production and material costs, individuals usually want the next best thing. People want to be in style, not out of date. Strasser notes that when things come out people are encouraged to get the newest of materials. This is how companies work their consumers into spending money and paying for their products. When Victoria’s Secret has a new model of bra, the advertisements make it so that consumers feel obligated to get them. They create the illusion that if people don’t have what they are selling, they aren’t part of the in crowd.

Ads in today’s society give consumers something to fix their problem. Victoria’s Secret focuses on targeting the female body, on being beautiful, smooth, young, sexy and carefree.

Whether advertisements are ethical or not is another question. Since most advertisements sell a lifestyle, notion, or image they pretend to sell more than just the product. That brings up the question to weather the ad is ethical or not, since the product sells the lifestyle, although the consumer only gets the product. Most consumers won’t live up to the potential the ad sells and whether people think that is ethical or not may be a matter of personal opinion. Regardless, those who give into the advertisements selling more than the product is what Williams would say “is a true part of the culture of a confused society.”

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“By now we all know the immense transformative power of a boy band to turn a butter-wouldn’t-melt teenage girl into a rabid, knicker-wetting banshee who will tear off her own ears in hysterical fervor when presented with the objects of her fascinations” (Romano), ridiculed one GQ writer in a recent article about female fans of the popular boy band One Direction. This kind of media furor elicited by teenage fans is one historically reserved for more infamous subcultures. Media theorist and sociologist Dick Hebdige defines a subculture as being a “subversion to normalcy.” Subcultures act as a kind of “noise” in the system that represents an intentional miscommunication. Members of subcultures are described by some as “unnatural” and youth subcultures in particular have the distinction of being “freaks” and “animals …. Who find courage, like rats, in hunting in packs” (Hebdige). Subcultures often act by repositioning and recontextualizing commodities, relocating objects and giving them new meaning. Youths in particular are perceived as “dissenters, struggling against moral order” (Williams, 2001). When considering subcultures, Hebdige stresses punks as the most subversive and most criticized subculture in recent history. From their music styles to their recontextualization of the swastika, punks have often garnered the most media panic and public criticism. However, it could be argued that another subculture usurps even punks as the most ridiculed and looked down upon: the “teenybopper”. Throughout history teenage girls, and their love of pop music and boy bands, have represented not passive media consumers, but rather an actively defiant and highly criticized subculture.

At first glance, teenage girls may not seem to warrant being labeled a subculture. Indeed, according to Hebdige, subcultures are a form of intentional miscommunication. They are made to signify disorder and choose to direct attention to themselves by subverting conventional styles with oppositional readings. It would seem that teenage girls are not possessed of such revolutionary nature. After all, a major criticism of the pop music genre is the rampant mainstream commercialization and commodification of the music and those who make it. Some argue that all boy bands are just one in a long line of fabricated, inauthentic money making schemes for teenage girls who will mindlessly consume and idolize (Baker, 2003). Young women are simply taken over by their hormones and unthinkingly devour whatever new sensation is put before them. However, teenage girls do practice an active subversion of their own and pop music “is a key vehicle for the expression and contestation of cultural identities” (Baker, 2001). Garber and McRobbie suggest that teenybopper culture allows girls to differentiate themselves from their older and younger counterparts. The potentially awkward and anonymous age and space they occupy is “transformed into a site of active feminine identity” (1977). Teenybopper membership is relatively unthreatening, carries no strict rules and “requires no special commitment to internally generated ideas of ‘cool’” (Garber & McRobbie, 1977).
Additionally, the subculture offers a safe space for burgeoning sexual expression among teenage girls. Feminist examinations of Beatlemania, a similar historical phenomenon, focus on the physicality of the screaming teenage girl, arguing that their energy is “in form, if not in conscious intent, to protest the sexual repressiveness, the rigid double standard of female teen culture” (Ehrenreich, Hess & Jacobs, 1992). Physicality, like dancing and screaming, are a form of expression and release. They are reclaiming control of their own bodies, actively invalidating the traditional modesty and policing imposed on young women, and using them for “defiance, celebration, and excitement” (Baker, 2003). Boy band frenzy is not simply something that happens to young girls. They are actively choosing this subversion.

Moreover, this kind of behavior rests at the core of the ideological form of this particular subculture’s incorporation within dominant society. Teenage girls have been labeled as an Other, which allows them to be “trivialized, naturalized and domesticated” (Hebdige). Girls in particular have been labeled “hysterical”, a term traditionally linked to feminized mental illness and used to explain why women were weak, impressionable and prone to nervous attacks (Baker, 2003). Similar traits “form the basis for the stereotyping of young girls’ consumption of cultural commodities, including popular music” (Baker, 2003). This stereotyping existed long before GQ mockingly characterized One Direction fans as “hormone bombs”. For example, one journalist described the female crowd’s reaction to a 1956 Elvis concert as not just a case of “a few girls sighing and going swoony or stamping and shouting. I saw him send 5,000 of them into a fit of screaming hysterics” (Crane, 1996). Such derogatory terms are used to trivialize, devalue and make a joke out of teenybopper music and the girls who identify with it. Also, the hyperbolic nature of media attention directed at teenage girls further solidifies it as an active subculture. As a subculture grows, it develops its own visual and verbal vocabulary and becomes more familiar, the “referential context to which it can be most conveniently assigned is made increasingly apparent” (Hebdige). The subculture of teenage girls is categorized in a context of superficiality and irritation.

While teenage girls may initially appear to be, as Adorno refers to women, “cultural dupes” who are particularly susceptible to “passive consumption and the power of the culture industry”, they are actually an active subculture. They use pop music to construct their self-identity and situate themselves in a wider cultural context. Their stereotypically negative practices of screaming, crying and fainting in the face of their boy band idols are in reality their acts of opposition. Young women partake in physical expression as a way of denying society’s traditional claim over the definition of their bodies and their sexuality. They maintain this celebration of their identity even in the face of ideological criticism from the media and the dominant society at large. Even when journalists try turn them into a spectacle to be mocked, teenage girls continue to buy out concert venues and deliver ear piercing screams, creating their own noise in the system.

Word Count: 988

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Holidays and Consumer Culture

It's the holiday season once again. Families gather to spend time together carving pumpkins, eating turkey around the dinner table, and exchanging gifts beside the Christmas tree. It is a time of peace and thankfulness, of fun and appreciation. A time of religious reflection and rest. A well deserved break to prepare for the long winter ahead... at least that is what the holidays used to be. There is no question that the holiday season has turned from it's humble, traditional ways. Halloween seems to have become a giant, erotic, fantastical party focused on who wears the most elaborate or revealing costumes, or who's house has the scariest decorations and biggest candies. Christmas has become one of the most stressful times of the year, with parents desperate to appease their child’s wish lists or throw the most rockin’ office party. Thanksgiving has probably taken the most drastic turn of them all. From being a time of thankfulness for what we have, Thanksgiving is now the starting gate for a vicious stampede of consumers clawing at the doors of Wal-Mart to get the best deals. This shift in holiday meaning isn’t necessarily a negative thing, but holidays are significant enough in culture that we can infer from them and understand other aspects of our society, so such a drastic change needs to be acknowledged and analyzed to understand where we are and where we are going as a society. So why is it that the holidays have gotten to this point? When did the shift start? What does the future look like? The answers to these questions are found by looking back into the past to when we first became a consumer culture, and realizing just how much of an impact it has had on society.

How far back can we trace the shift? Susan Strasser, an American historian, says that, for the United States, the shift began between 1890 and 1920, when mass production and mass distribution amplified industrialization and industrial culture (Strasser 27). Many people were now able to buy what they used to have to make themselves. Things like food, clothes, utensils and furniture were being mass produced, and people no longer needed to knit their own sweaters or build their own furniture. People no longer had to take the time to whittle a little duck out of wood and give it to their son as a Christmas gift. Now there were machines for that. It is at that point where the change began. Even the whole idea of “work” changed. Work became something people did to earn leisure time, and buy things to do during this new found time. Karl Marx, a German philosopher, explained this process in his essay, “Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret.” Because of the way work has changed, our “products of labor have become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible and social.” (Marx 332). He goes on to talk about commodity fetishism, which is the domination of society by intangible as well as tangible things. Simply put, society has become obsessed with things that really had no value until we decided it had value. A log is a log until we sit on it and decide it’s a chair. A chair is then a log in its commodity form. The commodity form has value, and value has a price. That is just an extreme example, but it helps explain what was really going on during this period between 1890 and 1920. Most holidays were celebrated long before this industrial change, but have drastically changed alongside it.

The consumer society needs things to consume. Very quickly, people started giving value to more and more things, creating more stuff for society to consume. Technology kept evolving and things got easier and easier and more and more stuff was being made. That leads us to today. A consumer society seemingly overflowing with things. So many things that it’s starting to tear old tradition away. That little wooden duck, made with time and love, now replaced by a cold, metal, robotic duck equipped with lasers in its eyes. It almost seems that the more stuff there is to value, the less true value anything seems to retain. It is this effect that seems to be changing Christmas, Thanksgiving, and just about every other holiday. People need to buy more and more to get the value they desperately feel they deserve, when back before all the things, a little wooden duck had all the value in the world.

So what does the future look like? With Karl Marx's predictions already coming true, what lies beyond the consumer’s veil?
Well, if we simply follow patterns, then it appears as though the original purpose of the holidays will be forgotten completely. We see this already during Halloween, and how its original Celtic roots are barely mentioned at all. What began as a pagan holiday, where the souls of the dead were said to roam, searching for human sacrifices, has now been changed into a candy crazed weekend of costumes and booze. Admittedly, in this day and age, not too many people would really believe such a thing, but it does not change the fact that the holiday has been shaped by the consumer society. The old Halloween roots have been commercialized, pretty much only being brought back to sell movies. It is not hard to believe that in a few years, the commercial aspect of other holidays will have eclipsed all original meaning. Old values and traditions just can’t seem to last in the consumer society, where everything centers around the word new.

So that is the case. The holidays, rooted in our culture, have changed alongside it. As society becomes more driven by material wealth and temporary, mass produced value, the holidays will become tools to exercise our culture.

Sources:
Marx, Karl. (1867). “The Fetishism Of The Commodity And Its Secret” pg. 332
Strasser, Susan. “The Alien Past: Consumer Culture in Historical Perpective” pg. 27

The Art of Persuasion

Every member of our often referred to as, materialistic society is labeled a ‘consumer.’ This is generally thought of to mean we buy and make use of products in everyday life. If that is the case, why are we not just called users? Raymond Williams states in his essay entitled Advertising: The Magic System, ‘If we were truly materialistic, then we would just want material goods for their pure material function, their inherent ‘use value.’ For example, we would want a car simply for the purpose of transportation. However many consumers desire vehicles that will represent a social status and be a reflection of the owner. Advertising is no longer about just distribution of information, as it was in Victorian times with the use of a town crier. When advertising is presented to masses of citizens it can affect the ideology and culture of a society. Advertisement in the modern world does not only sell products, but also stereotypes, success, confidence, health, respect, etc., and the members of society are there to consume those ideals.

Why Raymond Williams refers to our society as ‘not materialistic enough,’ is simply because as consumers we are purchasing ‘material to solve non-materialistic problems.’ (Williams 14) We want these items for more than their original commodity purposes. Why do we believe these products can fix our problems? Well because that is what the ads tell us they will do! In a commercial for Acuvue contact lenses, Demi Lovato, celebrity spokesperson in this particular example, tells us that she ‘never felt like herself in glasses’ and that Acuvue contact lenses ‘give her the confident to look and perform her best.’ Using a young star like Demi Lovato who has a large following of teenage fans is strategic because advertisers want the consumers to feel like they can relate to the spokesperson. ‘Ask your parents for Acuvue moist contact lenses’ is even stated towards the end of the commercial proving that the ad is directed towards an audience of young adults. Teenagers with glasses will view this ad and believe that Acuvue contact lenses will give them the same confident that they gave Demi Lovato. Essentially the consumer is buying confidence to ‘look and perform’ their best. The quality of sight one will achieve from the use of the contact lenses, the material purpose of the product, is never mentioned in the ad.

Stuart Ewen discusses in his work entitled Advertising: Civilizing the Self, how societies are studied and with those results advertisers are then able to better establish ads that will affect the consumers. If studies show that X amount of men in
a culture are self-conscious about their balding advertisers will then use those emotions to convince balding men to buy a product that can ‘fix it.’ However when men who are perfectly content with their baldness see the ad giving them ways to enhance hair growth, they will feel as if their baldness is inadequate. In this way advertisements will shape what is viewed as acceptable and what is not. Through advertising social values will be taught and as ‘consumers’ we will let those ideals soak right in. In a commercial for Maybelline foundation phrases such as ‘flawless skin’ and ‘poreless perfection’ are used to make woman consume the idea that visible pores and anything less than perfect skin is unacceptable. This taught belief will not only get woman to buy their product but is bringing attention to and arguably creating ‘problems’ that consumers need to fix.

Why do advertisers want to make us believe that we are flawed and need to fix ourselves? Or that we need to create a certain atmosphere, act a certain way, or give into a certain stereotype? Well they might not actually, but it is the technique that works and will give them an edge in the competitive advertising industry. Numerous commercials and ads have given the reasons or done experiments to show that their products is more efficient, works better, or more reasonably priced than whatever it is up against. As consumers we begin to relate to phrases just as ‘Snap! Crackle! Pop!’, ‘I’m lovin it!’, ‘Easy, breezy, beautiful, Covergirl’ and many others that subconsciously make us trust them and believe their products will do more than the original commodity purpose. Advertisers need to sell us more than just the product to beat their competitors. Would you rather buy a vehicle that can give you transportation or a vehicle that will give you transportation, style, status, and success?

Are all consumers blinded by advertiser’s methods of persuasion? No, however every consumer is affected by the social ideals created in a society where we hear advertisements on the radio, see them on television, billboards, newspapers, and almost everywhere else. Believing what is being constantly told to us is not a consumer flaw. Instead it is an advertising tactic that brainwashes us into needing their products for non-materialistic reasons and creates a culture that not until then depends on materials to solve problems.

Works Sited


Acuvue Contact Lenses Ad  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEnz0WkNOJQ

Maybelline Foundation Ad  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTgeUVOxI8E

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