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ENGL 112

WA2 – Paper Proposal and Annotated Bib

10/25/2017

**Tentative Title:**

Sex, Money, and Food – Mass Consumption and Immediate Gratification in 1950s America

**Introduction:**

In my exposition I will be analyzing how the rise of the fast food industry, the creation and wide-spread adoption of the credit card, as well as the founding of the American men’s lifestyle and entertainment magazine, Playboy, in the 1950s influenced/contributed to the American culture-shift towards mass consumption, consumerism and immediate gratification.

Mass consumption, in a literal sense, is defined by Oxford Dictionaries, is “the use or purchase of goods or services by a large number of people.” As I will speak to mass consumption in my paper, is on a more connotative and analogical stance. Mass consumption is the tendency for people to want without end. If one feels they can, in a mass consumption society, then they shall. Mass consumption is greed. Often with greed comes urgency; a time frame. This is where the addition of immediate gratification comes into my argument. Immediate gratification is the “I want it now, so I’ll have it now,” attitude. These desires, to be satisfied instantly and on a mass scale, are what have shaped America into a more consumerist society.

This is an undefinably complex but worthy argument to analyze and interpret through a cohesive and inclusive essay. I find it very interesting because it still comes into effect today. The involvement of the credit card industry, the fast food industry, and the magazine Playboy, still play a role in bolstering the “consumer mindset” in modern day American society. I want to analyze these fields’ contributions, specifically during the decade of their foundation, to have a deeper mapping of how it is correlated across time periods and progressed to where we are today to what some might say now the epitome of American and world consumer-based culture. I plan to state my claims out-front in this explanatory, but succinct (tentative) thesis:

“Innovations within the industries of sex, money, and food in the 1950s contributed to the society-wide push towards mass consumption, immediate gratification, and consumerism in America—with specific reference to the founding of Playboy, the adoption of credit cards, and the rise of the fast food industry.”

**Literature Review:**

When discussing the American push towards consumerism and mass consumption, there is an assortment of reactions and viewpoints expressed from all sects of society; both positive and negative. The less discussed and popularized viewpoint is the negative interpretation. An example of such perspective is expressed within Jan Logemann’s article Different Paths to Mass Consumption. “To the critics, the focus on a credit-fueled material standard of life not only eclipsed public goods and a broader quality of life, but also threatened an older, "inner-directed" ethics of bourgeois individualism.” Another article that exemplifies this concern and adds upon it is Thomas Jundt’s Greening the Red, White, and Blue: the Bomb, Big Business, and Consumer Resistance in Postwar America. He discussed the “demoralizing potential of consumption” and the governments support on consumption, economic growth, and mass-production regardless of the environmental or cultural concerns with this shift. “The expanded industrial capacity financed by the government during the war required increased consumption afterward to sustain the massive systems of production. The government, in partnership with corporations and financial institutions, did its part to assure sufficient levels of consumption by doggedly pursuing easy credit and economic growth.” (Jundt)

In contrast to this concerned view of mass-consumption and consumerism, documented in Luke Corden’s exposition, Mass Consumption and Meaningful Democratic Politics, is an optimistic view of the possibilities held within a consumer culture. A consumer based culture allows people of society to have more of a say in the products they consume. “Mass consumption has changed American society at a more fundamental and structural level. So far it has been argued that society has gradually moved away from mass consumption as a civic duty to mass consumption as a personal act of self-expression and that the marketing industry has been successful in identifying values that has allowed mass production to successfully sell its products to an individuated mass market.” (Corden)

What credit and consumption represented and was valued as within American society during the post-war period of the mid-1940s to late 1960s was controversial in nature due to its importance across a wide variety of industries. The credit card, often regarded as the catalyst to the industry of mass-consumption, was started by a group called The Diners Club. As Lewis Mandell and Sarah Holmes wrote in their article, Diners Club Begins a New Industry, “Technological advances usually were borrowed from other industries rather than created specifically for credit card usage. For example, neither satellite transmission nor computer authorization codes were invented for the credit card industry but were put to good use by it. The credit card industry thus influenced technology by offering a new outlet for innovative products and methods.” (Mandell and Holmes)

This argument of cross-industrial interactions between credit and other industries was supported once again in Jan Logemann’s article, Different Paths to Mass Consumption. She relates the credit card and credit industry as a whole to democratic politics. She states that this industry is so key in our history due to the influence of consumer spending on economic stability. “After 1945,” she quotes, “a broad consensus among political and economic actors afforded consumer credit an even more central role in an economic growth strategy which was underpinned by a widely shared vision of credit as the key to broad democratic access to middle-class mass consumption and respectability.” (Logemann).

Contributing to the growth in technology, economy, and the overall purchasing power of each shopper within the larger American consumer society, it is easy to argue the positives of mass-consumption and consumerism. However, it is important to reflect upon the negatives. The environmental and cultural concerns of a mass-consumption are irrefutable. Moreover, with more information on the cross-industrial interactions and the societal impacts of consumption, one can develop their own perspective on this shift within American society.

**Sub-Claims/Minor Claims:**

As I just stated, my 3 focuses will be credit cards, Playboy, and the fast-food/convenience food industry. I will then be able to explain how each of these three innovations influenced my sub-focuses; mass consumption, immediate gratification, and consumerism.

The use of credit cards and the concept of “buy now— pay later” brought upon a more solidified society-wide consumer mindset and encouraged immediate gratification by now giving the consumers the ability to purchase a product even if you didn’t possess the money to pay for it at that time. This also planted the seeds for future economic difficulties within American society that I will address; the increased widespread acceptance and normality of debt within American society redefined economic “stability” and success. This theme only is multiplied and dramatized through the decades. Credit cards brought about a new era of shopping and a new era of economics.

The public endorsement of Playboy and what it stood for on a societal level brought on new changes, positive and negative. The wider acceptance and meshing of sex/sexuality within society and the public sphere represented the huge shift towards modern promiscuity and a weakening of traditional modest ideals. The now wider availability of licentious material made indistinct what should and should not be displayed and also blurred where and when appropriate situations to view this material was. The overall takeaway of the founding and society-wide acceptance of Playboy Magazine, made known to all Americans that immediate gratification, the concept that you can get “what you want, when you want, wherever you want it,” was supported and easy— even with sexual entertainment.

The rise of the fast-food industry represented the growing dissociation with the traditional structured meal-time as well as the growing instability of familial and societal roles of the time. For example, if the mothers weren’t the meal-makers, who was? Better yet, who couldn’t be? The increased occurrences of families eating out and buying their food out-of-home directly influenced the exponential rise of the food industry, and moreover, its expansive employment opportunities for Americans across the country. Food got cheaper and “Family Sized.” More families could have a wider variety of options—a lot of families got “wider” as well because of it.

**Conclusion:**

In order to successfully, and cohesively discuss this trend in my paper, I will need to further research information on connections to other industries and time periods as the ones I will have already summarized. Due to this extensiveness of this topic and this paper, I will need an excess of information and data points to tie in to my claims in order to keep the focus of the reader as well as support said claims. However, I don’t want to overwhelm the reader with sources and information so I will need my anecdotes to be succinct and well-related. This will definitely be a challenge going forward. Nevertheless, I have already been able to gather a lot of different viewpoints and discussions relating across the decades and sub-points, so I am not too concerned.

**Annotated Bibliography**

Fraterrigo, Elizabeth. *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

In this peer-reviewed book, Elizabeth Fraterrigo provides a breadth of information and analysis into the 1950s founded, but still ever-popular magazine, Playboy. She discusses the magazines early days, as well as mentions and briefly elaborates upon the short airing Playboy TV show, “Playboy’s Penthouse.” Her main claims follow the general notion that Playboy redefined the successful—and “good life”— for men in America during the 1950s and for all succeeding generations as well. The portrayals in the magazine blurred the gender roles/authorities and helped establish the uneven, and inappropriately enforced hierarchy within society. Playboy displayed a world “in which expensive goods and sexually available women were plentiful, obligations were few, and if one worked hard enough, one could enjoy abundant leisure and consumption.” (Fraterrigo) The conclusions made in this book will help me to demonstrate my claims about the shift in the mindset to mass consumption and immediate gratification through the avenue of the advertisement of sex and leisure.

Jundt, Thomas. *Greening the Red, White, and Blue: the Bomb, Big Business, and Consumer Resistance in Postwar America*. Oxford University Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780199378562

Thomas Jundt illustrates the beginnings of Environmentalism and its roots in mid-20th century American citizen defiance against the emerging big-business/consumerist culture. The frequency of the federal government during the previous generations to put full confidence in economic growth as the nation’s primary goal regardless of environmental or human-health repercussions, compounded with the steady creeping rise of powerful corporations started to cause deep-rooted tensions to arise among some members of the population—thus forming the Environmentalists. Though my paper will not be focusing on the neglect of the environment by large companies and the government, it does center on the public’s reaction to the shift in consumer attitudes. These attitudes are the less popular of the advertised viewpoints because companies didn’t want to show people defying the new shift to consumerism. I will be able to apply the information provided in this exposition about the Environmentalists’ defiant viewpoint and reactions to and of big business and mass consumption.

Liebman, Roy. "Food Retail Industry." *Salem Press Encyclopedia*, January 2015. EBSCO*host*, http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=ac5728f4-032e-4d53-a277-f87dc052507f%40sessionmgr4010&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=89088160&db=ers.

Roy Liebman summarizes the history, significance, and impact of the retail food industry over time spanning from as early as 1859 to present time. He notes prominent retailers and their influence on the industry and America as a whole. Liebman specifically references several important data figures showing the magnitude of American citizen employment the food industry constituted. Accumulating this information into my argument, my readers will have the ability to better understand the persuasion of the American government and big business to support the spread of the food retail business. I will use primarily the data figures and historical context provided in this article as supporting information and background, instead of using it for specific claims referring to mass consumption/immediate gratification.

Logemann, Jan. “Different Paths to Mass Consumption: Consumer Credit in the United States and West Germany during the 1950s and '60s.” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2008, pp. 525–559. EBSCO*host*, eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=3&sid=a7cbe8e2-cb3f-4321-bcd5-00e2480db11d%40sessionmgr4010&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=31639604&db=a9h.

The topic of mass consumption is referred to but not as frequently specifically addressed within articles and books discussing shifts in American culture over time. Jan Logemann defies these standards in her peer-reviwed article, “Different Paths to Mass Consumption: Consumer Credit in the United States and West Germany during the 1950s and '60s.” She connects her claims of the exponential rise of mass consumption with the development of consumer credit as well as some of the keynote major events in the 1950s and 1960s. The article reiterates my argument on an incremental scale, seeing as it analyzes the effects of credit, but does not include the influence of the food industry or the exploitation of sex in Playboy. Logemann, in her argument, also describes the push to consumerism and consumption within West Germany in her paper, however I will be focusing only on the US and its influences.

Mandell, Lewis, and Sarah Holmes. “Diners Club Begins a New Industry.” *Salem Press Encyclopedia*, Jan. 2017. *EBSCOhost*, eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=e3ccafde-7df3-419e-b303-e3bb32f02e7d%40sessionmgr102&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#db=ers&AN=89314354.

Lewis Mandell and Sarah Holmes explicate the origins of the modern day credit card. They also detail how it impacted the decade of its founding, the 1950s, as well as the following decades. It discusses the concepts roots in the dining industry in addition to its speedy adoption throughout other industries such as clothing, entertainment, and electronic amenities. They provide consistent documentation of their all their sources from all well-known/reliable publishers. Some of which included (but were not limited to) the Ann Arbor Institute for Social Research, Forbes, MIT Press, and Consumer Reports. The information provided in this article will help me to illustrate the beginnings of, what some might call, the Card of Consumerism –a concept essential for an exposition describing the consumer culture and mass consumption in America.

Mock, Erin Lee. “Getting Comfortable: Sex, Reading, and Postwar Adjustment in 1950s Playboy.” *Journal of Popular Culture*, Apr. 2017, pp. 363–388., doi:10.1111/jpcu.12542.

The introduction of the explicit material within Playboy brought up several controversies of the appropriateness of its place within day-to-day society. People were now casually viewing advertisements that were flashing women who were literally flashing the camera—this phenomenon was bizarre and unparalleled in society up to the time Playboy was released. Erin Lee Mock discusses this transformation of acceptance and appropriateness of explicit material within the post-war society of the 1950s in this peer reviewed journal article. She focuses her argument on soldiers returning from home and their re-entrance into this shifting atmosphere that was modern mid-20th century America. For the purpose of supporting my argument, I will be analyzing her claims about the demand for the content within Playboy and how this influenced the backing of immediate gratification and free-will mass consumption of whatever one might want, including sex and casual pleasure, which was new to this era.

Scholliers, Peter. "Convenience Foods. What, Why, and When." *Appetite*, vol. 94, Nov. 2015, pp. 2-6. EBSCO*host*, doi:10.1016/j.appet.2015.02.017.

Peter Scholliers highlights the past and present studies of convenience foods—an umbrella term which comprises eating in, the meal, as well as industrially manufactured food— in this cohesive article. He uses Google Scholar to map the usage of several convenience-food related key terms and phrases since the conception of convenience dining around the 1950s. This article is prepared on behalf of FOST, the Social and Cultural Food Studies unit out of Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), a group which “studies all aspects of food since the late eighteenth century and up to today.” (Scholliers) Taking this into account, I feel confident using this source as a primary resource for a lot of my fast-food historical information.