

Shampoo, 'Risk Society' and Social Change

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Moving into the 21st century, 'modern society' and the dynamic integrated network of social interactions and institutions that form it, has been distinguished by contemporary sociologists such as Beck and Giddens as representing one of 'reflexive modernity', in which the rapid techno-economic development of industrial society, has caused it to become increasingly characterised by continually 'reflexive' focus upon the impact of 'human action' within the ever changing modern world (1994). Through the concept of 'risk society', Beck also contends that within this new epoch, the sites of 'power' and 'action' influencing 'social change' have shifted from traditionally 'state' institutional entities to 'sub-politics', in which 'reflexive choices' and the increasing calculability of 'risk' granted to rational actors in their 'everyday lives' and in constituting 'new social movements' (NSM's), increasingly shapes dominant discourses and political activity (Aiken, 2000).



Through taking the example a seemingly ordinary bottle of 'shampoo', changes within the composition of contemporary society can be viewed through the lens of sociological analysis, to reflect upon how such an 'everyday' consumer product impacts upon how we view ourselves, how wider society is constructed and allows us to question the extent to which 'consumer choice' can equate to 'social change' within 'reflexive modernity'.

Over the last century and exponentially since the fall of communism in 1991/'the end of history' alluded to by Fukuyama (hegemonic prevalence of capitalism), modern society has been inundated with a rise in consumer products, becoming one of the defining and unifying aspects of western cultural, economic and psychological relations (Fukuyama, 1992; Bauman, 2005). Buying a bottle of shampoo serves to exemplify these changes, as the plethora of 'choice' and 'brands' now available to consumers, over what was historically limited to a few products, is now extensive with often over 180 different shampoos available at the local super market, dis-including conditioner.

This has been attributed to the rise of a consumer oriented 'post-industrial' society in which the economic primacy/profitability of the tertiary 'service' sector has been contended by reflexive modernists such as Bell, to have surpassed the primary 'industrial' and secondary 'manufacturing' sectors (Bell, 1999). This in turn has been argued by Inglehart (in Nickens, 2004) to have led to profound changes in the 'essential' form that a product such as 'shampoo' takes within modern social inter-relations, as the 'post-materialist' value agendas that arise out of post-industrial 'consumer society', increasingly forms 'meta-physical' properties beyond the functionality of products, involving identity construction and a constant 'reflexive' re-affirmation of the self (1990; Beck & Giddens, 1994).

Moving beyond this, 'post-modernist' theorists such as Lyotard (1984) have also emphasised that subjectivised and individualised 'identity construction' has become so pluralised through 'consumptive choice' (rather than productive process), to have surpassed the hegemonic thought structures/'metanarratives' and power relations that characterised earlier stages of modernity (Lyotard, 1984). Furthermore, Gubrium & Holstein (1995) argue that in 'postmodern' life the notion of individual agency is centred on a self which has the capacity to effectively act upon the world, ostensibly dissolves, and is replaced by floating signifiers. Agency is thereby transformed into a passive cacophony of language games, in which "all that is solid melts into air". Hence to consume a bottle of shampoo is contended to not just be about 'cleaning hair' in contemporary society, but takes on these 'extraordinary' characteristics in how we shape ourselves and our 'identity' within the modern world. However in critiquing the 'post-modernist' position, Beck reaffirms that although to an extent this does occur within 'reflexive modernity' through the 'risk society' (perception of 'risk' in choosing identity) and increasing individualisation, that their position does not account for how agency within consumer 'choice' shapes 'social futures' through 'sub-politics' (1994; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Another ostensible feature of 'modernity' (reflexive) is that of 'globalisation', which as a congruent development of 'consumer society', has led not only to a profusion of international 'brands' and 'choices', but altered the prevalent forms and relations of production in the modern world, through the rise of transnational corporations (TNC's), transnational forms of 'global governance' (WTO, IMF) and increasingly international 'free' trade (Sklair, 2010). The effects of 'globalisation', again can be seen through the example of purchasing a bottle of shampoo, as the culturally diverse range of shampoo products available to the modern consumer, represents what Pieterse terms global and cultural 'hybridisation', in which increasingly the international diversification of 'markets' creates 'trans-local mélange cultures' that 'mix' consumable cultural facets from around the globe, into localised 'milieus', which in turn aids in creating diversity within 'identity construction' (celebrated by 'post-modernists') and/or leads to increasingly 'reflexive consumerism' (celebrated by reflexive modernists) (Sklair, 2010).

Furthermore, in analysing the new shampoo marketing strategies instigated by Indian transnational company 'Marico', Beck's notion of the 'risk society' can be exemplified in their adaptation/distribution of specified shampoo products to localised 'Middle-Eastern' markets that, (in reducing water-bound disease), have highly chlorinated water. The nature of this TNC's product adaption to 'risks' stemming from 'human action' and its subsequent problems, shows how the production of consumer products (e.g. Shampoo) in the globalised world often reflexively operates under Beck's theoretical premises, and as this issue came to the attention of 'Marico' by the lack of appropriate consumer 'choice' highlighted by individual activists and NSM's such as 'Narmada Bachao Andolan', it also exemplifies how transnational productive activity and global relationships are increasingly shaped by Beckian 'Sub-politics' in 'reflexive modernity' (Cody, 2012; Beck & Giddens, 1994).

However, whilst the 'positive-globalist' element of these theories stresses greater mutual development and positive 'progress', the role of globalised 'anti-reflexive' entities and the processes of 'capitalist based' neo-liberal globalisation are highlighted by Sklair (2010) as in fact reinforcing and maintaining 'global inequality' due to the unequal distribution of economic and 'hegemonic' (American) power relations existing within inter-state trans-national capitalist expansionism. More specifically, Dunlap and McCright (2010) highlight how predominantly American 'anti-reflexive' groups such as 'the heartland institute', 'CEI' and 'CATO institute' actively engage in countering the legitimacy of 'impact sciences' (aimed at countering waste 'risk' etc) through suppressing critical scientific research, manipulating political policy (invoking

non-decision making) and utilizing 'media balance' to create bias in favour of unsustainable 'production sciences' (Nuclear, Coal, Gas), which in turn favours American capital expansion and hinders 'social change' under the Beckian model of positive 'sub-political' progress within 'reflexive modernisation' (2010). Hence whilst the effects that both 'globalisation' and the 'risk society' are contended to have upon the nature of production through the example of 'shampoo' has been demonstrated, a conflicting interpretation of existing power relations and the extent that 'social change' can be validly equated into consumer 'choice' within Beckian 'sub-political' action has also been identified.

The issues surrounding the rise of both 'consumer society' and 'globalisation', leads onto further critical reflection about the nature/dimensions of 'power' in 'reflexive modernity'. Foucault (1980) theorises power as existing 'everywhere', distancing himself from conceptions viewing power as being 'possessed' and 'embodied' by individual actors or social institutions for the cohesion or domination of another subject. Alternatively, Foucault (1980) contends that 'power' is 'omni-present', 'diffused', 'dis-cursive' and embodied in 'regimes of truth/knowledge', shaping power relationships only in relation to the power of other actors within forming 'hegemonic discourses'. Applying Foucault to 'choice' of shampoo, 'power', "rather than existing somewhere in consumer culture, among some people or group,... produces social reality 'in actu' by inscribing itself into knowledge as discourse", and wherein 'choice' serves to reaffirm the self as a subject, but does so within the set boundaries of what is therefore deemed appropriate consumer 'choices' (Yngfalk, 2012, p.24).



agency' in objectively shaping 'social change' as stressed by Beck in 'sub-political' models of 'reflexive modernity' and the 'risk society' (Foucault, 1980; Lyotard, 1984; Beck & Giddens, 1994).

In further analysing this dichotomy, a second more 'realist' dimension of 'power' can also be reflected upon, for even if social actors have objective 'agency' in shaping 'social change' through 'sub-political' action (e.g. buying a bottle of shampoo), the extent to which the scope of 'discourse' and 'choice' is controlled/limited by external forces has also been highlighted. For as Lukes (2005, p.37) contends, Foucault's conception of power often negates the dualistic relationship of how "A exercises power over B [Limiting the scope of decision making], when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's [Subjective/Economic] interests". This 'anti-reflexive' argument is what is highlighted by Dunlap and McCright (2010), and when combined with that of Sklair (2010) provides a strong 'modernist' negation towards the validity of theories of power in both the miso form of 'reflexive' as well as that of 'post' modernity. Hence, purchasing a bottle of shampoo in contemporary 'reality' serves to highlight not just how we shape ourselves and the world around us, but also provides an insight into the power contestations existing around the nature of the 'human condition' in 'contemporary society' and the extent of effective 'choice' individuals inhibit within shaping 'social futures'.

Hence Foucault's theoretical framework of 'power', whilst essentially accounting for 'choice' prohibits an account for 'social change' and 'effective agency' within this (contrary to Beck) as Foucault identifies himself, "I chose to confine myself to describing the transformations themselves, thinking that this would be an indispensable step if, one day, a theory of . . . change and epistemological causality was to be constructed" (1966, quoted in: Fitzhugh & Leckie, 2001, p.64). However, Foucault's theory of power as a productive force, does conceive of 'resistance' as well as of 'subordination' to discourse (1980). This concept of 'resistance' whilst still providing a negation for the Beckian model of sub-political 'change' does serve to explain the resistant discourses that emerge from 'consumer society' including those expounded by Sklair (2010) and emphasised by Beck (2010; 1994). This hence serves to identify the first ontological debate this critical reflection highlights, that of whether consumer 'choice' (e.g. purchasing a bottle of shampoo) serves only as a subjective act in re-affirming the self within 'dominant' discourses as stressed by both the Foucaultian framework of 'power' and by 'post-modernist' theorists (Lyotard), or whether through our consumer 'choices' we have 'effective

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Picture 1:

<http://www.norinse.co.uk/No-Rinse-Waterless-Dry-Shampoo-Cap.html>

Picture 2:

http://www.fiduciarytechnologiesinc.com/risk_of_trusts.html