



23E58050 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR, RETAIL EXPERIENCE AND FASHION

**SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES,
THE BODY AND GENDER**

AGENDA

- Continuing the discussion on the sociology of fashion
- Age, body, gender
- The important concepts of Pierre Bourdieu

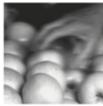
Article

Fashion, functionality, and the contemporary consumer

Nebahat Tokatli
The New School, USA

Abstract

Uniqlo has recently been challenging the paradigm behind the phenomenal *Zara*: while *Zara* has been all about fashion, *Uniqlo* claims to be functional. Here I examine this corporate narrative within a cultural sociology that brings to the fore the consumption (as a cultural practice) and shows



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The Lululemon Lifestyle: Millennials Seek More Than Just Comfort From Athleisure Wear



Jeff Fromm Contributor
CMO Network
Expert on Millennials, Generation Z and Innovation.



A customer looks at athletic apparel inside a Lululemon Athletica Inc. store in Hong Kong, China (Photographer: Xaume Olleros/Bloomberg)

From the gym to the office and from the office to happy hour, millennials can be seen decked out in the style called *athleisure*, documented by Merriam-Webster as “casual clothing designed to be worn both for exercising and for general use.”



REMINDER

The little black dress is the solution. But what's the problem?

Daniel Miller

Article

SEXUALITIES

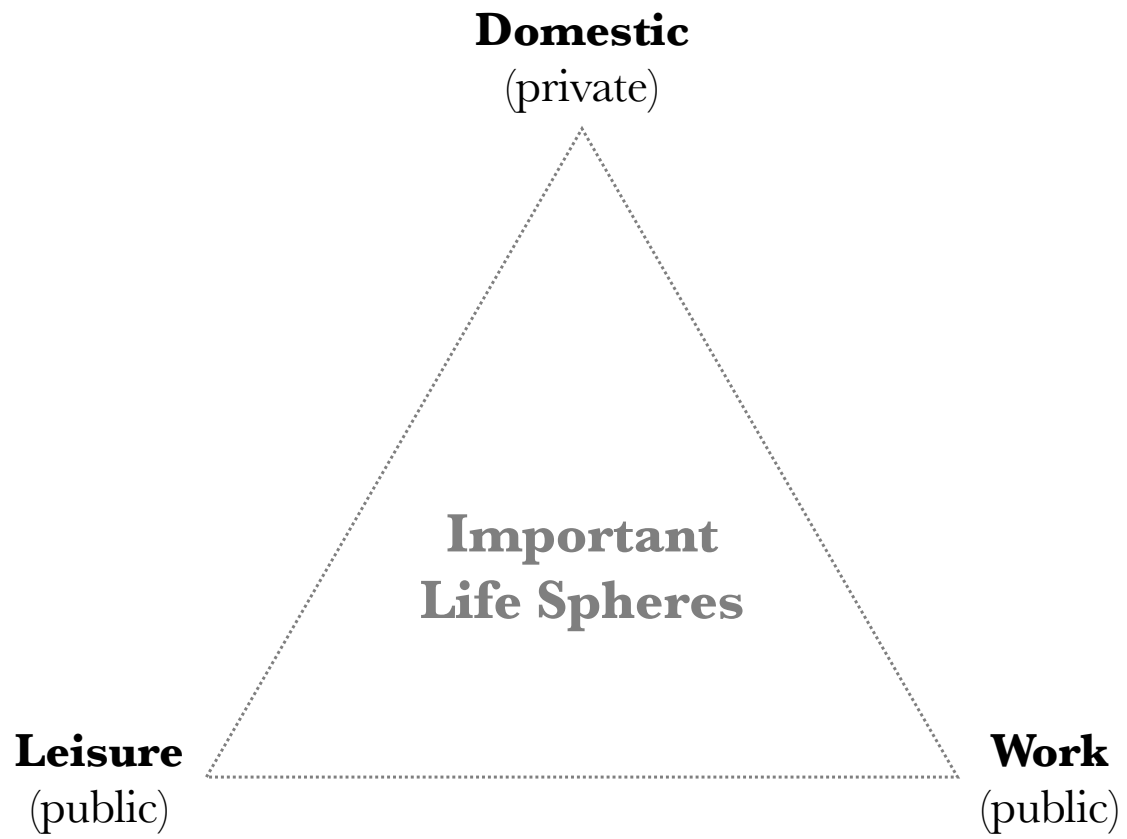
Abstract This article is based on empirical research using video diaries to explore the performance of sexual identities in work, domestic and social spaces. The diaries allow respondents to show the clothes they wear on different occasions, and to talk about the process of performance. The article focuses on the ways in which identity as a concept functions within ‘academic’, ‘political’ and ‘subcultural’ discourses of sexuality, and draws on diarists’ discussions of comfort and discomfort in performing their (differently inflected) identities in these spaces, linking this to theories of performativity and reflexivity.

Keywords comfort, performance, sexual identity, video diaries

Ruth Holliday
Staffordshire University

The Comfort of Identity

“The participants were asked to dress in the clothes they would wear in each situation, describing them in detail and explaining why they thought these self-presentation strategies were appropriate. This technique was designed to make sure that participants were as explicit as possible about the presentation of their identities in different spaces – at work, rest and play.”

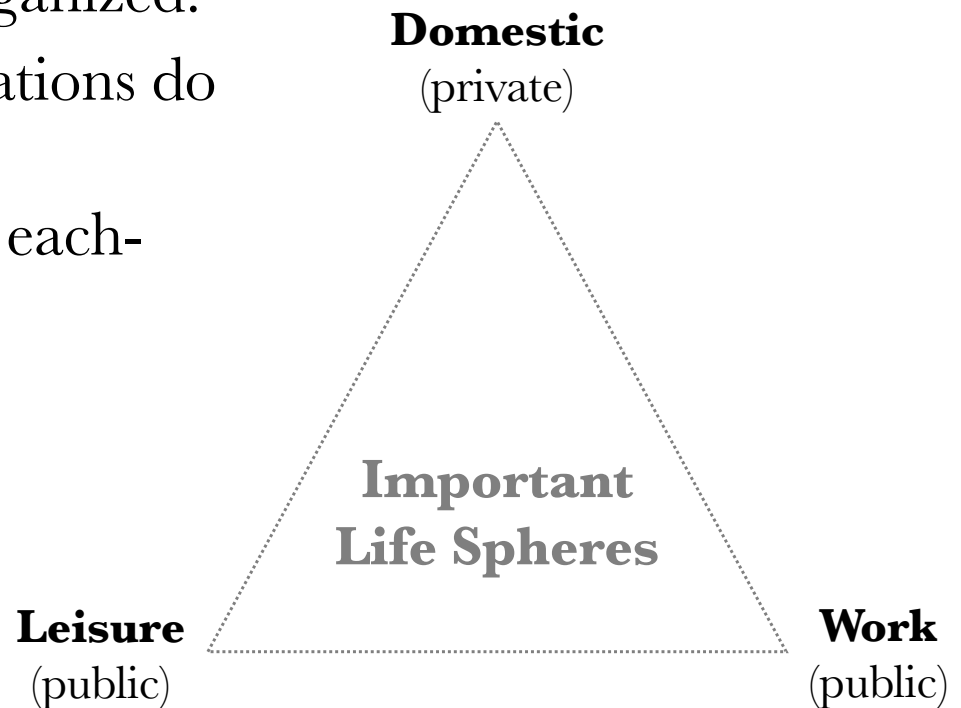


Discuss:

How are your “life spheres” organized?

What kind of fashion considerations do you make between them?

How do these spheres relate to each other?



Masking or marking (sexual) identity

Relations between life spheres

Social conformity, individuality, and personal comfort

Fashion as performance



Business Casual

Navigating the new rules of office style.



GQ RECOMMENDS



Wacko Maria camp-collar shirt



The North Face Black Series "City" pants



Marmot x Opening Ceremony "West Rib" parka



Captain Sunshine Gurkha Trousers



Jacquemus "Le Pantalon Moulin" trousers



Street Style

On-the-street snaps from every fashion week around the globe.

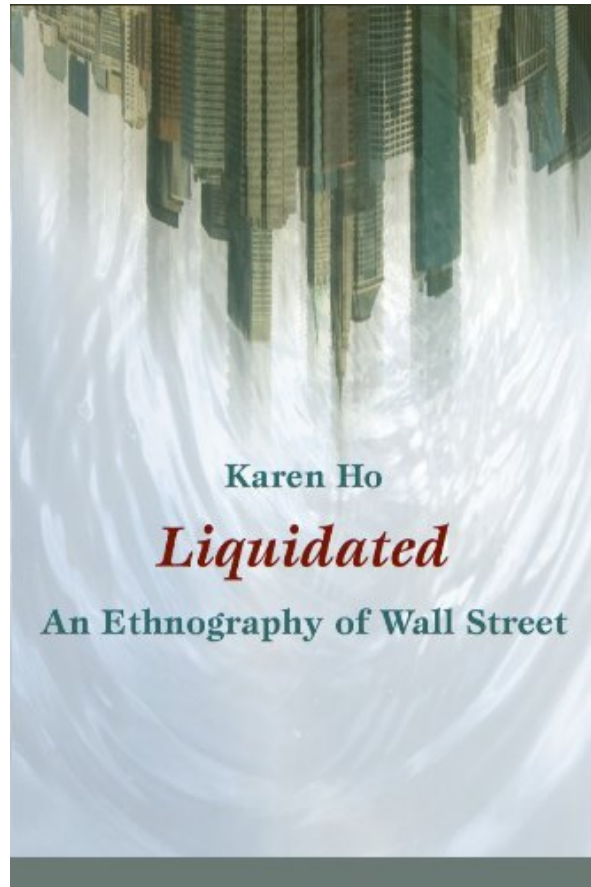


Music

Here's What Everyone Wore to see Dead & Company on Halloween

Mister Mort reports from the spookiest concert of the year.

33 PHOTOS | 3 DAYS AGO



Discuss:

What does it mean, fashion-wise, to be an “old man” or a “young girl”, or other age-related ideas?

How has your personal style changed as you have aged?



Re-Inquiries

The Politics of Consumption: A Re-Inquiry on Thompson and Haytko's (1997) "Speaking of Fashion"

JEFF B. MURRAY*

This article explores Thompson and Haytko's (1997) interpretation of fashion discourses by bringing together two opposing perspectives on consumers' use of objects as signs. The first perspective assumes that the consumer has free reign in the play of signs (i.e., the consumer is constituting). The second assumes that the consumer is imprisoned by the signs and codes of the historical moment (i.e., the consumer is constituted). The dialectical and discursive tension between these two perspectives is used as an orienting framework in the hermeneutic analyses of 14 phenomenological interviews. Thompson and Haytko's (1997) findings/claims remain pertinent in a professional, middle-class context. In addition, this research contributes to their lived hegemony premise by emphasizing the dominating tendencies of marketing systems.

Sign experimentation

Consumers use fashion to express symbolic meanings (belonging/difference) in a way that assumes that these meanings are negotiable, contestable, and self-selectable.

Sign domination

Consumers cannot escape or truly contest the symbolic meanings that surround them in any given context.

1. Fashion is intertextual consisting of countervailing discourses
2. Fashion statements align with cultural values and meanings
3. Fashion is an expression of life history or narrative
4. Fashion is used to negotiate cross-cultural differences
5. Fashion is used to forge identity
6. Fashion mediates tensions between personal autonomy and fitting in
7. Fashion mediates tensions resulting from class dynamics
8. Fashion mediates tensions between personalized and commodified experiences

	Undergraduate college students (quotes from Thompson and Haytko 1997)	Professional, middle-class consumers (quotes from re-inquiry)
1.	Rather than present a unified, hegemonic (or culturally dominant) viewpoint on fashion, these cultural discourses present a multitude of countervailing interpretative positions that, in the sense discussed by Williams (1994), reflect the historical legacy of an ongoing social dialogue over the societal consequences of fashion phenomena (p. 15).	Thus fashion results from a combination of subject positions with meaning resulting from the play of differences in the context of identity performance. Personae become meaningful on the basis of cultural practices, improvisation, and the antagonism created by opposing styles.
2.	In all these cases, fashion discourses became a means by which consumers aligned themselves with certain cultural viewpoints while resisting or subverting others (p. 18).	The key here is that style reflects a subject position, which signifies a vision of how society should be organized. Symbolic consumption is, therefore, political.
3.	Our general analysis will show how consumers appropriate (i.e., adapt, combine, and transform) culturally shared fashion discourses to fit the circumstances of their immediate social settings and their sense of personal history, interests, and life goals (p. 18).	Consumer narratives provide insight into what is motivating the body project. If just one dimension of the disciplined body (e.g., thinness) is analyzed, in aggregate, the researcher misses important contextual information.
4.	In the first passage from Sarah, fashion styles provide a means to understand both cultural differences between college life in her home country (Korea) and her current U.S. social context and generational differences that she sees as emerging in her home country (p. 25).	Surendra's style can, therefore, be summarized as a combination of objects, meanings, and discourses that have evolved as a way of mediating complex cultural oppositions.
5.	One prominent use of fashion discourse by consumers is to develop a sense of personal identity through a contrast between their perceived fashion orientation and that of others in their social setting (p. 21).	The experience of style projects involves identification with others, the commercial and creative use of stylistic effects, and situated performances. Style is a local site of tension where issues related to competing subject positions, difference, and identity politics are marked and experienced.
6.	The next passage reveals how fashion metonyms can become implicated in a tension between fashion meanings emphasizing autonomy and individuality and those that emphasize the importance of fitting in (e.g., social conformity; p. 24).	The consumption codes regulating activities such as weight lifting, golf, and social drinking are instrumental in helping Miguel enact a style that mediates his experience, interests, and motivations (autonomy) with the values of the organization (fitting in).
7.	Her use of fashion meanings appropriates the common cultural belief that fashion, when placed in the service of skillful impression management, can serve as a democratizing force that can overcome barriers to success posed by one's background (p. 29).	Anna's "dressing up" persona is used to mediate the potential stigma of being from Mountain Home with the desire to be accepted in what Anna perceives as a more sophisticated reference group.
8.	The social stigma that Gabrielle understands as being attached to anyone who is a "walking name-brand" and the importance that she places on appropriately mixing brand names is a narrative strategy of decommmodification that allows her to experience a sense of uniqueness and self-directedness in her fashion style (p. 27).	When the consumer's appropriation of countervailing meanings is done in the context of distinction, then commercialization of the style creates a staged authenticity, and the consumer may move on to something new. This makes the construction of a distinctive style a continuous struggle involving a tug-of-war between life worlds and social systems.

Society: Be yourself.
Society: No. Not like that.



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ARTICLE

Fields of Fashion

Critical insights into Bourdieu's sociology of culture

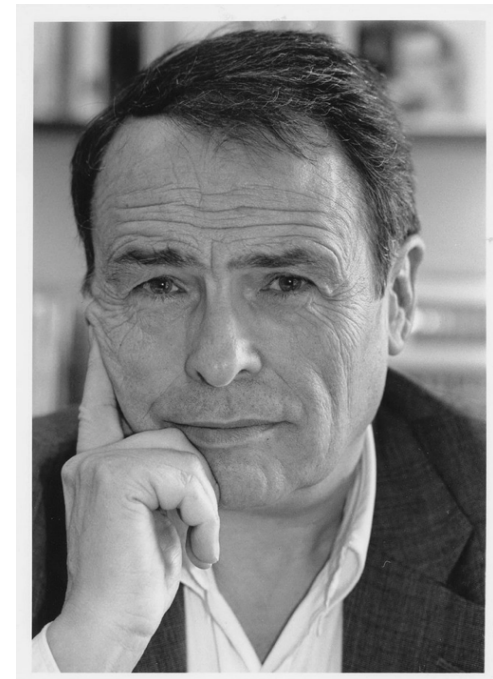
AGNÈS ROCAMORA

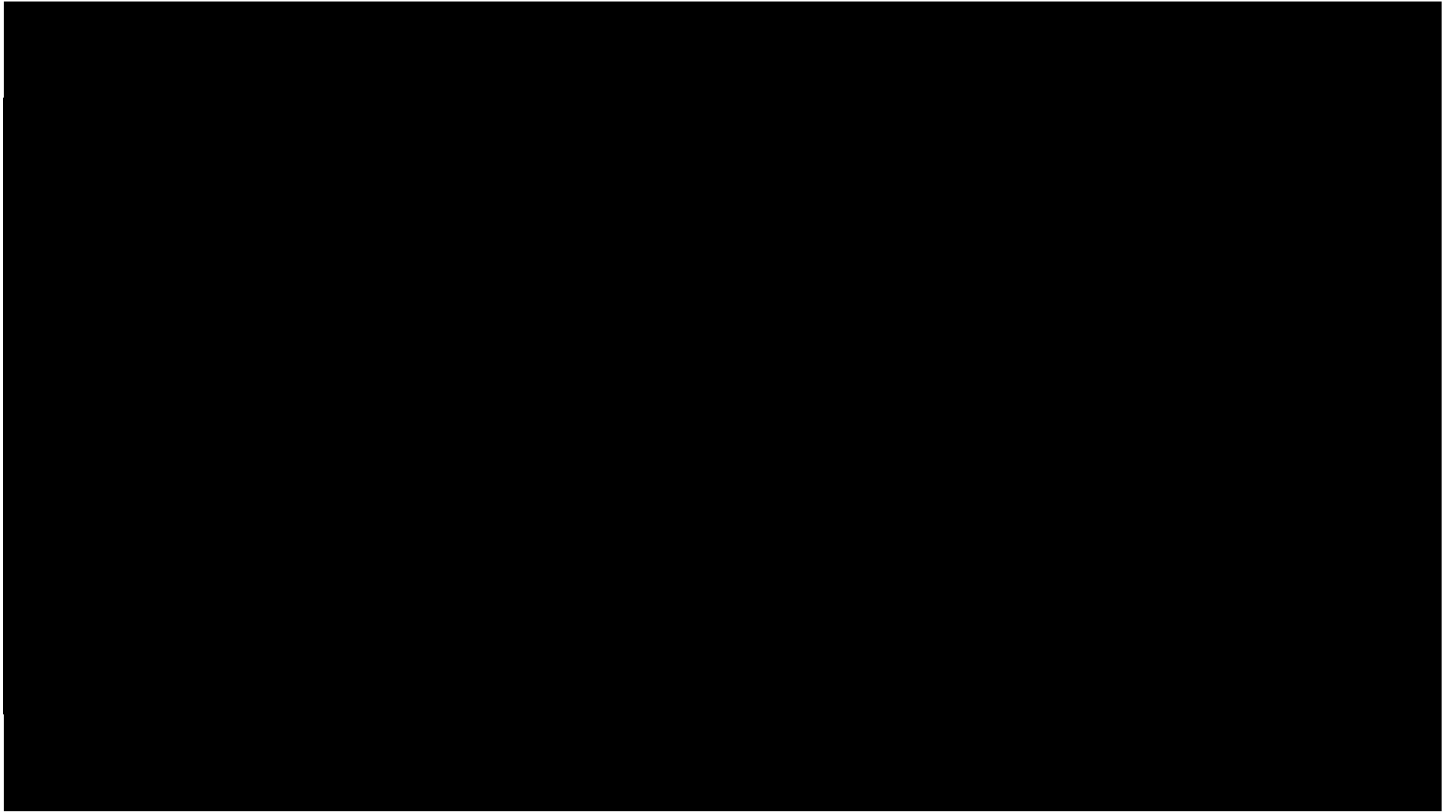
Goldsmiths College, University of London

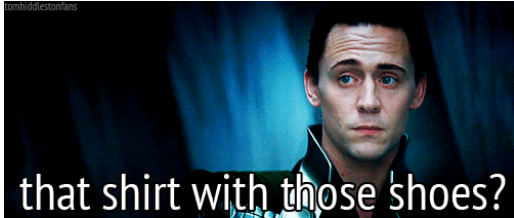
Abstract. Bourdieu's sociology of culture has been central to studies of consumption. However, although it offers rich insights into his sociology of cultural production and consumption, his work in the field of fashion has been little discussed. This article explores some of Bourdieu's main ideas, namely the notions of field and subfield, the concept of transsubstantiation, that of symbolic production, and the idea of a dialectic of distinction–pretension. It is argued that Bourdieu does not pay enough attention to the materiality of material culture whose meaningfulness he discusses only as symbolic. He also fails to reflect on the significance of mass fashion – whether symbolic or sensual – and the influence it has had on the field of high fashion, hence ignoring the theoretical implications of such influence. In his work, the discrepancies between empirical reality and his conceptual framework are minimized.

PIERRE BOURDIEU

- French sociologist, and extremely influential and seminal figure in the sociology of consumption
- Has theorized on fashion – or at least on topics with high relevance to fashion
- Key concepts relating to fashion: field theory, the forms of capital, status competition, and the habitus
- Highly influential in consumer research, esp. lifestyles and taste
- Emphasized the role of primary socialization and upbringing for cultivation of tastes







Cultural capital

- “What you know”
- Embodied knowledge of what is important in the field
- “This-over-that” tacit intuition



Social capital

- “Who you know”
- Field connections
- Name recognition in field

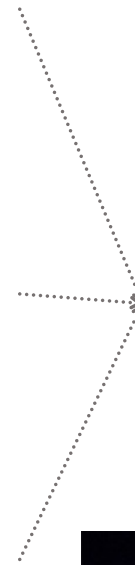


Economic capital

- “What you own”
- Money, possession of valued field artifacts

Symbolic capital

- Particular forms of social/cultural/economic capital can become legitimate markers of prestige, respect, or authority in the field





Capital

Distinction

Position

Struggle





Higher endowments of field-related capital give more authority to shape where the field is going, **become a "taste-maker"**

Higher endowments also allow "field elites" to insulate themselves and deem the taste mimicry of those in a lesser standing as **illegitimate** or **"you're doing it wrong"**

Higher endowments also make it easier to predict and adapt to changes in field, e.g., **reacting when one senses something is "going out of fashion"** by **innovating the field, creating new tastes**

"... fashion is the latest fashion, the latest difference. An emblem of class (in all senses) withers once it loses its distinctive power. When the miniskirt reaches the mining villages of northern France, it's time to start all over again." (Bourdieu 1995)

Entertainment & Arts

New York Fashion Week: How Philipp Plein became the industry's bad boy

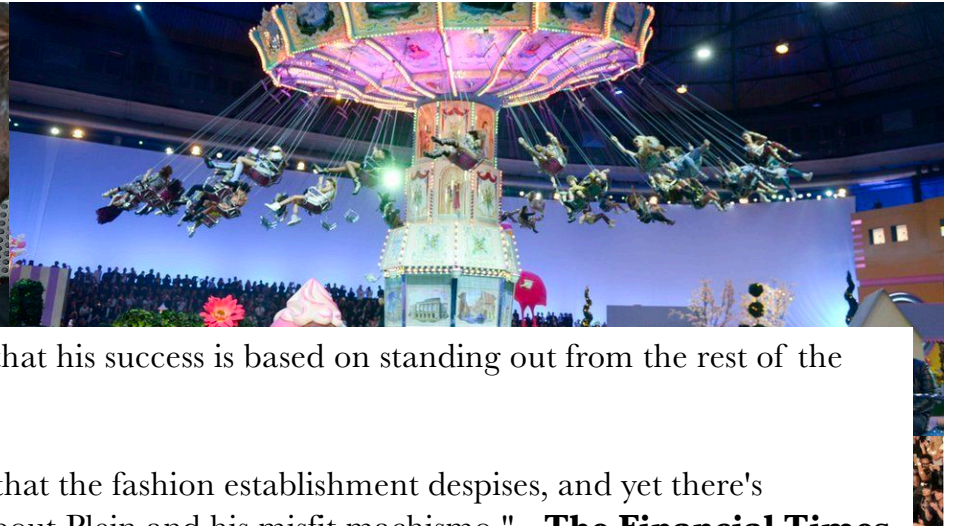
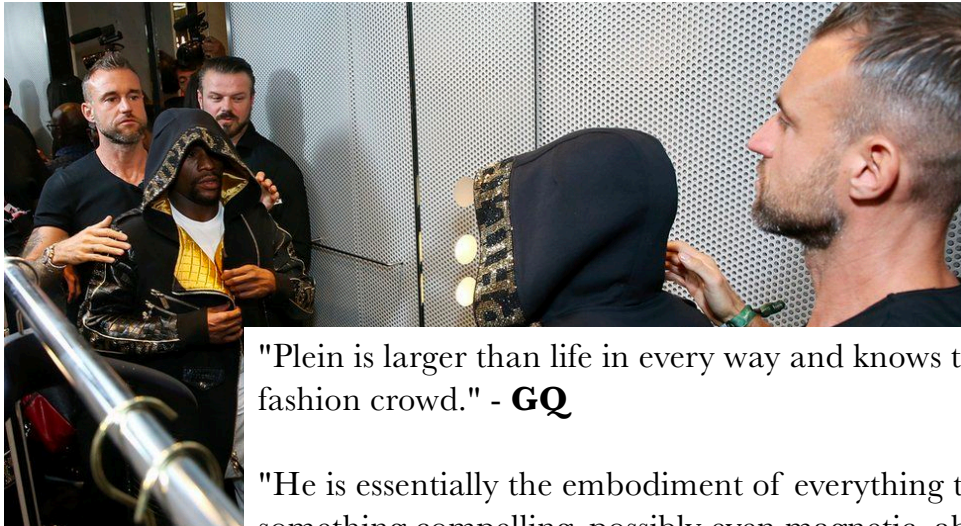
By Steven McIntosh
Entertainment reporter

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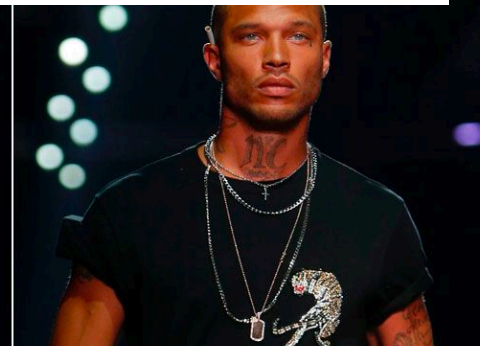
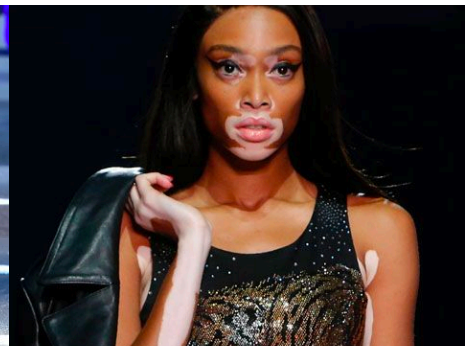
Plein fans include Paris Hilton, Naomi Campbell and Nicki Minaj (pictured at one of his shows)



"Plein is larger than life in every way and knows that his success is based on standing out from the rest of the fashion crowd." - **GQ**

"He is essentially the embodiment of everything that the fashion establishment despises, and yet there's something compelling, possibly even magnetic, about Plein and his misfit machismo." - **The Financial Times**

"Plein genuinely goes his own way. And even though that way absolutely isn't my way - no way! - his personal blend of braggadocio and balls, plus a taste level so unabashedly trashy it's almost genius, has seen him carve out a niche it is hard not to admire." - **Luke Leitch, Vogue**



. . . the life of the artist, the cut ear of Van Gogh and the suicide of Modigliani are as much part of the work of these painters as their canvases which owe them a part of their value. (Bourdieu, 1975: 28)

Similarly, in the field of fashion, the way designers decorate their houses, their life and lifestyle, as depicted by fashion magazines, enter the objects of material production to invest them with symbolic value and become an integral part of the fashion these designers produce (Rocamora 2002, pp. 10–11).

High fashion

(autonomous production)

“Bourdieu reduces high fashion’s relation to popular fashion to a relation of emulation of the former by the latter, as further discussed later in this article, hence failing to explore the many ways through which they ‘exist through each other’.” (Rocamora 2002)

Popular fashion

(mass production)

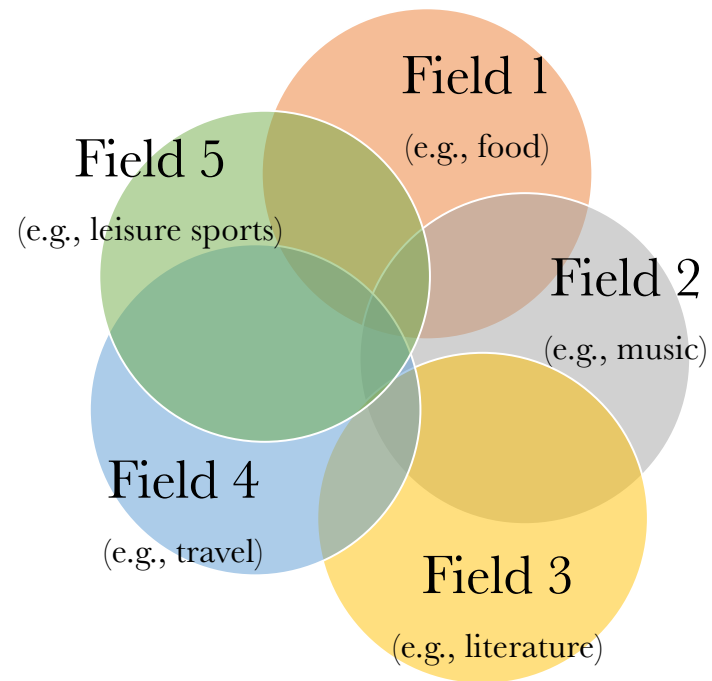
“Thus fashion designers do transgress the line between high fashion and mass fashion. And this is where Bourdieu’s analogy with sport encounters some limits; players in the field of fashion, unlike players in the field of sport, do move between fields. They are not ascribed one specific position or role, but participate in many simultaneous games whose rules might be different, though not necessarily incompatible.” (Rocamora 2002)

“The materiality of the fashion object is lost in Bourdieu’s account of class consumption. The body is a mere carrier of clothes as expression of distinction or pretension, as if body and clothes were two separate entities whose convergence never creates a sensually meaningful whole.” (Rocamora 2002)

Field-related
capitals have
different levels of
transferability or
convertibility within
fields...

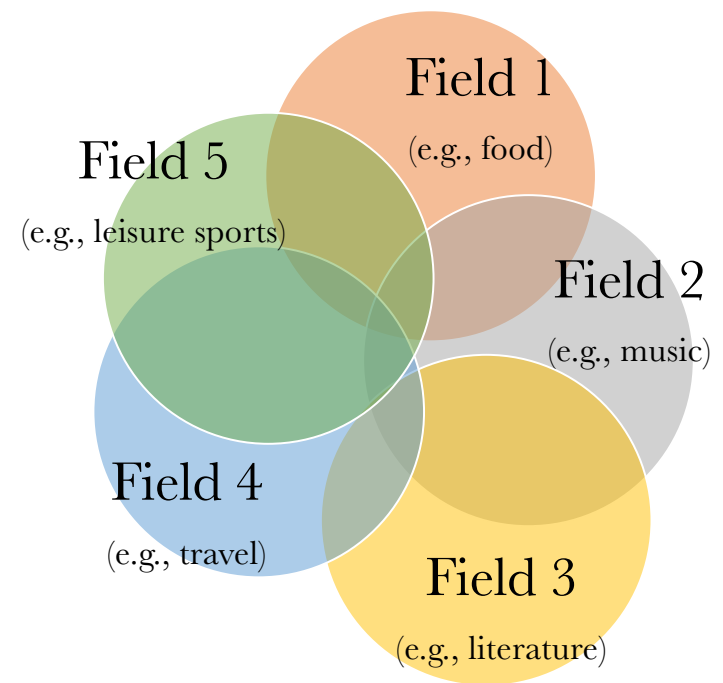
... and across fields

***What does
this mean?***



“[...] imagine a high cultural capital (HCC) consumer whose daily routine unfolds across a constellation of social spaces that are geared to his/her habituated tastes, preferences, and interests, such as a cultural creative occupational field, cosmopolitan leisure fields, and a gentrified neighborhood replete with ethnic restaurants, upscale boutiques, and arts-oriented third spaces. [...] These homologous forms of field-dependent capital would also likely provide status value across these status congruent fields (i.e., a consumer’s knowledge about the latest natural food trend would likely be a topic of shared interests among those in her/his Bikram yoga class).”

(Coskuner-Balli & Thompson 2013)





Consumers and capital endowments

What is
social class?

Social class:

How a society is hierarchically stratified into (more or less) distinct groups of people that share similarities in terms of power, prestige, resources, opportunities, and consumption lifestyles





“Democracies of Taste Ruled by the Law of Jante? Rudiments of a Nordic Sociology of Consumption”
HENRI A. WEIJO

“Bourdieu saw these capital endowments accruing gradually through one’s upbringing and resulting in socialized dispositions that make people with similar capital stocks prefer certain consumption fields over others. In other words, children of similar class backgrounds acquire habituated skills and aesthetic preferences through immersion into similar hobbies, vacation plans, and educational paths all the way up to higher education.”



The habitus

The set of dispositions and naturalized skills that one has developed through their upbringing in a certain cultural milieu.

The habitus structures our taste preferences, making certain fields more “naturally interesting” for us than others.

Homology: “Birds of a similar feather flock together.”



Does clothing have a code?
Empirical findings and theoretical
implications in the study of clothing
as a means of communication

Grant D. McCracken *
Victor J. Roth *

REMINDER

“The term ‘code’ is here defined as the knowledge that must be shared by the addressor and addressee of a clothing message in order for the former to create this message and the latter to understand it.”



Demythologizing Consumption Practices: How Consumers Protect Their Field- Dependent Identity Investments from Devaluing Marketplace Myths

ZEYNEP ARSEL
CRAIG J. THOMPSON

Marketplace myths are commonly conceptualized as cultural resources that attract consumers to a consumption activity or brand. This theoretical orientation is prone to overstating the extent to which consumers' identity investments in a field of consumption are motivated by an associated marketplace myth. We provide a theoretical corrective to this tendency by investigating consumers who have become vested in a commercially mythologized consumption field through an incremental process of building social connections and cultural capital. For these consumers, the prevailing marketplace myth is experienced as a trivialization of their aesthetic interests, rather than as a source of identity value. In response, they employ demythologizing practices to insulate their acquired field-dependent social and cultural capital from devaluation. Our findings advance theorizations concerning marketplace myths and consumer identity work and explicate the sociocultural forces that deter consumers from abandoning a consumption field that has become culturally associated with undesirable meanings.



Aesthetic discrimination = articulating subtle differences of why “they are doing it wrong” (**high field status**)

Symbolic demarcation = articulating subtle differences of why “I’m doing it differently” (**lower field status**)

Class-based emotions and the allure of fashion consumption

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‘Smart shopping’

consumption strategies that look for affordable ways to access rare and/or high-value goods that (may) retain their value for longer periods

High versus Low emotional involvement in fashion

High cultural capital facilitates and makes fashion “easy”, lower cultural capital creates anxiety and stress

“The nature of the emotions experienced by consuming agents occurs differently depending on how their class habitus and cultural competence enables them to interact in different sets of social relations.”

Subtle Signals of Inconspicuous Consumption

JONAH BERGER
MORGAN WARD

While theories of signaling and conspicuous consumption suggest that more explicit markers facilitate communication, this article examines the utility of subtle signals. Four studies demonstrate that while less explicit branding increases the likelihood of misidentification (e.g., observers confusing a high-end purchase for a cheaper alternative), people with more cultural capital in a particular domain prefer subtle signals because they provide differentiation from the mainstream. Such insiders have the necessary connoisseurship to decode the meaning of subtle signals that facilitate communication with others "in the know." Consistent with the notion that these effects are driven by outward communication, they are stronger in identity-relevant product domains and situations where consumption is more public. This work highlights the communication value of less explicit signals and discusses the implications for branding, signal persistence, and the communication of identity.

In fact, we don't have logos.
(Designer Tom Ford [Menkes 2007])

