

Working-class consumers: A look at the complex social system of a trailer park

September 10 2013

Contrary to stereotypes, low-income trailer park residents form distinct groups with different visions of morality, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"These findings emphasize the multiplicity and richness of [social identities](#) that exist within the same social class of the working poor," write authors Bige Saatcioglu (Ozyegin University) and Julie L. Ozanne (Virginia Tech).

The authors conducted an ethnographic study within a trailer park community in the United States. They examined the ways low-income consumers negotiate their social status within a resource-restrained and stigmatized community. They found that residents used different visions of morality to evaluate themselves and their neighbors.

The study revealed five distinct [social groups](#) within the trailer park. The Nesters value hard work, discipline, and perseverance, and cherish their trailers as power symbols of their successful consumerism. Nesters are critical of many of their neighbors who they see as irresponsible, lazy, and immoral. Reluctant Emigrants view life in the park as a downward trajectory from their past lives. Community Builders offer constructive communal solutions and cooperate with various stakeholders to help improve life within the park. Homesteaders are resigned and indifferent, but skilled in leveraging social support within the community. They are reluctant to leave the park where they feel at ease and find support. Finally, the Outsiders represent a tightly knit defiant subculture focused

around a thrill-seeking moral disposition. They engage in defiant and rule-breaking practices within the park and attach little symbolic meaning to the trailer home or life in the park.

This study sheds light on why it is difficult for low-income consumers to unite.

"Why is there enduring class stability and very few working-class protests despite growing [social inequalities](#) in the United States?" the authors ask. "The micropolitics of life within the trailer park suggest organizing for social change would need to overcome significant differences among these groups."

More information: Bige Saatcioglu and Julie L. Ozanne. "Moral Habitus and Status Negotiation in a Marginalized Working Class Neighborhood." *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2013.

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: Working-class consumers: A look at the complex social system of a trailer park (2013, September 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-09-working-class-consumers-complex-social-trailer.html>

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