

SOC 4220: LIFE IN A CONSUMER SOCIETY

CRN 32786 – Spring 2016 – T/H noon-1:15PM (SS044)

Dr. Marjukka Ollilainen

Contact information

Office: SS116

E-mail: mollilainen@weber.edu

(Entitle your e-mail as "Soc 4220")

Phone: (801) 626-6238

Office hrs: M/W 9-10 AM and

T/Th 10:30-11:30 AM or by appointment

Course Description

Since the transformation of the U.S. from an industrial to postindustrial society, Americans can be described more accurately as consumers than producers. But what is life like in a consumer society, where our statuses and identities are built on what and how we consume? This course explores the main trends and processes related to consumption and consumerism. We begin with a review the history of the U.S. as a consumer society from the emergence of mass markets to the fragmented consumer groups of the early 21st century. We examine marketing and advertising in promoting and sustaining consumption as an integral economic activity, despite its many critics and counter-movements, and explore how consumerism reflects as well as structures social inequality and pulls people into the "work-spend cycle."

In a consumer society, we are what we consume. Advertisers tell us what to eat and wear and how to live and thereby act as socializing agents from early childhood through old age. They influence our needs, wants, and choices. But consumerism has a price. When everyone is encouraged to consume in order to demonstrate a "standard of living," many feel compelled to do so without adequate means. We explore the connections between the global production of our food and material objects and consider the impact of global consumerism on the environment.

Required Books and Readings

- 1) Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt (eds). 2000. *The Consumer Society Reader*. New York: The New Press. ISBN 1-56584-598-6 (pbk)
- 2) John C. Ryan and Alan Thein Turing. 1997. *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things*. Sightline Institute. ISBN 1-886093-04-0
- 3) Required Articles on Canvas (<http://canvas.weber.edu>) and handouts given out in class

Note: In case of any interruption to regular class meetings (e.g., professor's absence or campus closure), the course will continue to meet on Canvas.

Course Objectives and Student Outcomes

Having taken this course, students will be able to (both orally and in writing):

- Describe how the consumer society emerged and explain its main critiques
- Analyze the causes and consequences of the work-spend cycle for individuals and families
- Evaluate the role of symbols and advertising in the construction of statuses and identities
- Identify ways in which consumption reflects and reproduces social inequality
- Explain consumerism and its economic and environmental consequences globally

Note on Special Needs

A student requiring accommodations or services due to a disability must contact Services for Students with Disabilities, located in the Student Service Center <http://www.weber.edu/ssd/>

Course Format

This course is a seminar, which means that it is different from the traditional, lecture-based class. In a seminar, the main focus is on reading and critically considering what you read through discussion and writing. Therefore, most of this course is made up of class discussions on the readings, activities that help you make sense of the readings, and films that highlight key ideas. **IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT YOU COMPLETE ALL THE ASSIGNED READINGS BEFORE YOU COME TO CLASS.** I assure you that our class time will be more productive and fun when everyone has read. Without your and your classmates' input, the class will be boring and our discussion will fall flat. I will also be monitoring and evaluating your reading very closely through reading notes, reflection papers, quizzes, and other class assignments. If you already know that you won't be able to commit enough time to preparing for this course, I suggest you consider taking another course. Since the class is largely based on discussion, it is crucial that we take turns, respect everyone's views and recognize they may be different from ours. The key is to allow everyone to express their take on the materials without anyone dominating the discussion.

Evaluation

I Exams (2 x 25% = 50%)

There will be two take-home essay exams—a midterm and a final—to test your understanding of the readings and class discussions. The exams will cover the designated articles, notes, films, and handouts given out in class and you will be asked to synthesize what you have read and watched into coherent and compelling essays.

II Observation reports (30%)

There will be three observation assignments where students observe and report on consumerism-related phenomena and/or behaviors outside of class. For each assignment, I will provide detailed instructions. Assignment due dates are listed in the class schedule.

III "Reading review" assignments (15%)

To encourage students to think about what they read and to prepare for a good class discussion, students will complete a review assignment for assigned readings. These assignments include turning in reading notes (a one page summary or well-organized outline of the content, typed, min one page per reading) or completing a quiz. Reading review assignments will be graded. Because these assignments serve as an introduction to the class discussion, a missed review assignment cannot be made up.

V Class participation (5%)

Class participation includes participation in class discussions, responses to films, and all in-/out-of-class assignments. Thoughtful comments and questions based on class materials and topics are encouraged and rewarded. I also record your attendance. Unexcused absences will negatively impact your grade. Please see the class attendance policy for details.

Grading scale for course performance:

	A = 100-93%	A- = 92-90%
B+ = 89-87%	B = 86-83%	B- = 82-80%
C+ = 79-77%	C = 76-73%	C- = 72-70%
D+ = 69-67%	D = 66-63%	D- = 62-60%
E ≤ 59%		

Class Policy	
1. Attendance	You must be present at least 80% of the class time. <i>Unexcused absences exceeding 20% of class will result in a reduction of your final grade by one whole letter grade (A→ B; A-→ B-, etc.).</i>
2. Professionalism and soft skills	<p>Taking this course comes with a set of expectations:</p> <p>* Timeliness – Class will start and end on time. You are expected to come to class on time and submit all assignments on time. Also, if you have to leave early, please let me know before class begins.</p> <p>* Technology – This course will be <u>technology-free in that you are to take hand-written notes and store your phones and laptops in your bag, turned on silent.</u> No phones will be allowed on the table; no texting or headphones either. If we can disconnect for 75 minutes, we will be able to focus on the course material better.</p>
3. Late assignments and exams	<p>* All assignments are to be handed in on the due date. Late <u>assignments and exams</u> will accrue penalty of 5% reduction for <u>each late day, including weekends.</u></p> <p>* Late coupon: You may turn in one assignment (but not an exam) late, no questions asked, with the late coupon. All work using a late coupon must be turned in by last day of class, April 21.</p>
3. Extra credit	There is no planned extra credit in this class.
4. WSU Student Code	Students are expected to be familiar with the WSU Student Code and abide by it. The Code may be reviewed on line at http://www.weber.edu/ppm/Policies/6-22_StudentCode.html All necessary steps will be taken to enforce the Student Code to guarantee fairness to all students.
5. Plagiarism	<p>As you write your exam essays, make sure you cite other people=s work appropriately. Plagiarism (i.e., using someone else=s work, ideas, or wording as your own without citing) is considered cheating at Weber State (see student code, section IV.D.2b) and will result, at minimum, in failing your assignment. This also includes getting ideas from your classmates, working on exams together, and copying from the Internet. We will review in class some basic rules of using citations and writing essay exams before the first midterm.</p> <p><i>WSU subscribes to TurnItIn.com, an electronic service that verifies the originality of student work. Enrollment in this course may require you to submit some or all of your assignments to it this semester, and documents submitted to TurnItIn.com are retained, anonymously, in their databases.</i></p>

TENTATIVE CLASS CHEDULE

Articles from *The Consumer Society Reader* are marked as “*Consumer Society*”; the rest of the readings you can find in a Canvas module by the name of the author

Date	Topic	Reading and assignments
T 1/12	Introductions and syllabus	
Th 1/14	How/why did we become consumers?	(1) Syllabus (2) Hine: “Why We Want Objects and How They Change Us” (Handout)

		(3) Stearns: "Ch. 5 - The Explosion of Consumerism in Western Europe and the United States (pp. 44-60)" (Canvas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading notes due in class (min one page for each reading)
T 1/19	Emerging consumerism in Western Europe and America	(1) Matt: Ch. 1 (Canvas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading notes due in class
Th 1/21	Critiques of the consumer society	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 1 (Adorno & Horkheimer) (2) Paterson: "You Are What You Buy" (Canvas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz
T 1/26	Consumption and women's lives	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 3 (Friedan) (2) Zukin: "Julia Learns to Shop" (Canvas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz
	The social organization of symbols –marketing	
Th 1/28	The creation of needs	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 5 (Baudrillard) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading notes due in class
T 2/2	The meaning of things— Advertising	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 6 (Goldman and Papson) (2) Lindstrom: "I Can't Quit You" (Canvas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz FIRST OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENT GIVEN OUT
Th 2/4	Advertising cont.	No Reading
T 2/9	Capitalism and commodification	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 19 (Marx) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading notes due in class FIRST OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS
Th 2/11	The commercialization of feeling	(1) Hochschild : "The Commodity Frontier" (Canvas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz
T 2/16	Food and consumerism	(1) Simon: "Introducing the Starbucks Moment" (Canvas) (2) Moss: "The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food" (Link embedded, also on Canvas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz MIDTERM GIVEN OUT
Th 2/18	Fashion, image, identity	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 21 (Gladwell) (2) Miller: "Why Clothing Is Not Superficial" (Canvas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading notes due in class
T 2/23	Consumption as liberation	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 16 (Twitchell) (2) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 18 (Fiske) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiz MIDTERM DUE IN CLASS
	Consumption and social inequality	

Th 2/25	Conspicuous consumption and distinction	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 11 (Veblen) (2) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 12 (Bourdieu) • Reading notes due in class
T 3/1	Cultural capital and consumption	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 13 (Holt) • Reading notes due in class
Th 3/3	Consumption across classes	No reading
3/8-10	SPRING BREAK	
3/15	Consumerism in children's lives	(1) Schor: "The Viacom Generation" (Canvas) (2) Pugh: "Consumption and Care and Belonging" (Canvas) • Quiz
Th 3/17	Consuming Kids	No reading
T 3/22	Ethnicities and consumption	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 14 (Kotlowitz) (2) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 15 (DuCille) • Reading notes due in class • SECOND OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENT GIVEN OUT
	The work-spend cycle	
Th 3/24	The Overworked American	(1) Schor: "The Insidious Cycle of Work and Spend" (Canvas) • Quiz
T 3/29	The Overspent American – Consumer Debt	(1) Manning: "Can't Leave Home Without It: Consumer Debt and Credit in American Society" (Canvas) • Reading notes due in class • SECOND OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS
Th 3/31	Spaces and places of consumption	(1) Ritzer: "A Tour of the New Means of Consumption" (Canvas) • Reading notes due in class
T 4/5	A new religion? "Cathedrals of consumption"	No reading
Th 4/7	Can shopping save the world and cure cancer? Commercial philanthropy	(1) Einstein: "How Corporations Co-opt Caring" (Canvas) (2) Sulik: "Consuming Pink" (Canvas) • Quiz
	Globalization, consumerism, and the environment	
T 4/12	Global consumption and production	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 27 (Taylor and Tilford) (2) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 28 (Bergman) • Reading notes due in class • THIRD OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENT GIVEN OUT

Th 4/14	Consumerism and the environment	(1) Ryan & Durning: <i>Stuff</i> (read the whole book by this date) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz
T 4/19	Consumerism and the environment cont.	No reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • THIRD OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS • FINAL EXAM GIVEN OUT IN CLASS
Th 4/21	Semester wrap-up: New critiques and action	(1) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 23 (Elgin) (2) <i>Consumer Society</i> Ch. 24 (Lasn) (3) Lasn: "The New Activism (Fire in the Belly)" (Canvas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz • THIRD OBSERVATION PAPER DUE <i>Last day to turn in an assignment with the late coupon</i>

FINAL EXAM DUE WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27 @ 12 NOON in SS116 (my office) or SS114 (Dept office). A late exam will accrue penalties, please review Class Policy. Emailed exams are not accepted without a hard copy.

Late Submission Coupon

This coupon will allow you to turn in a late assignment once during this semester, no questions asked. Just write in the submission that you would like to use your Late Submission Coupon or attach this coupon (or a copy) onto your submission. This card is valid for a written assignment only, not for exams. The last day to turn in a late assignment is April 21.