

**Sociology 021 Shop 'Til You Drop:  
The Question of Consumer Society  
Boston College  
Spring 2012  
MWF, 1pm**

**Instructor:** Danielle Hedegard  
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**Office Hours:** Fridays 11am-12pm, or set up by email  
**Course Website:** on Blackboard

**Course Description:** Consumption is central to our society in many ways. This course brings together sociology, anthropology, and consumer studies. We will review the development of consumer society, various theoretical approaches to consumption, and explore the positive and negative consequences of consuming. Throughout the 20th, and now the 21st century, consumerism increasingly came to dominate American society. Shopping, buying, having, showing and wearing became central aspects of who we are, who we dream of being, how we interact with each other, and how we affect the larger environment. After years of runaway spending, the economic collapse of 2008 led to a dramatic fall in consumer spending, and widespread questioning about whether the era of consumerism had ended.

**Contacting the Instructor: Please communicate with me if you have questions.** If you email me with questions about the readings, please be as specific as possible. Please do not email saying "I don't understand [name of reading] reading." Instead, reread the article and then email me saying, "I'm not sure what the main argument of this reading is. Is it [insert your thoughts]?" or "I don't understand how the article's argument that [insert argument] relates to conflict theory?" These are just examples, but be specific.

**Required Texts:**

1. Juliet Schor. *The Overspent American*.
2. Halter, M. (2000). *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity*, Schocken Books New York, NY.

All other readings and videos will be available on the course website.

**Course Requirements:**

Discussion: Participation is vital to the learning process. You are required to participate in an online discussion, by responding to the questions posed by your classmates in their article reviews. You must post a response to at least once per week. Further details for this assignment are at the end of the syllabus.

Article Review: Each student will be responsible for preparing an outline and analysis of one of the class readings and posting it online the day BEFORE the reading is "due" to be read in class. Further details for this assignment are at the end of the syllabus.

Field Activity: You will complete your own sociological analyses of a site of consumption. Further details are at the end of the syllabus.

Exam: There will be one final exam.

**Grading:**

Exam	100 pts
Article Assignment	100 pts
Discussion Posts (14 at 6pts each)	84 pts
Field Assignment	100 pts
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TOTAL	384 pts

**Grading Scale**

Letter Grade	Percentage	Letter Grade	Percentage
A	100 - 93%	C	77 - 72%
A-	92 - 90%	C-	71 - 70%
B+	89 - 88%	D+	69 - 68%
B	87 - 82%	D	67 - 62%
B-	81 - 80%	D-	61 - 60%
C+	79 - 78%	F	59 - 0%

**Students with Disabilities:** If you determine that formal, disability-related accommodations are necessary, it is very important that you be registered with Disability Resources and notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. We can then plan how best to coordinate your accommodations.

**Academic Honesty:** Students are expected to comply with the standards for academic integrity outlined in the Boston College Student Guide (<http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/integrity.html>). Cheating on tests, quizzes, or exams will result in a grade of "0" for the test in question. Plagiarized assignments will also receive a grade of "0." In the case of either cheating or plagiarism, I am required to contact your academic dean.

**Course Policies:**

**1. Late work will not be accepted. Please do not contact me requesting an extension.**

**2. Make up will not be allowed for any activities.**

**3. Exams will be administered only on the scheduled date.**

**4. No extra credit will be assigned to make up for missed work. Do not ask me for extra credit.** Exceptions to these policies will only be made in the case of a DOCUMENTED illness or family emergency. If you have a legitimate need (a medical emergency or death in the family) for an extension or alternate exam date, you should contact me by email as soon as possible and a scan of your documentation (a dated hospital admittance form) should be attached to the email when you contact me. I cannot grant extensions for students that do not provide documentation within 2 weeks of the emergency.

**5. I do not negotiate grades.** If you feel I have incorrectly graded your work or have not entered your points correctly (it happens), please contact me with your concern as soon as possible. However, if you contact me simply to bargain for a higher grade than you have earned in the class, I WILL DEDUCT POINTS from your overall grade.

**6. When calculating the final grade, I round up if to the nearest whole percentage.** For example, if you have an 89.5, this will become a 90% final grade. Again, please do not ask me to adjust your grades.

**7. If you have a learning disability and need special accommodations, you must contact me BEFORE the assignment or exam in question.** Do not wait until an exam has begun to contact me to request extra time.

**8. Finally, a word on cheating. I strictly follow the BC code of academic integrity regarding cheating and I will report any violation.** If you copy text from any source (including the internet), you will receive a zero on the exam or assignment. Please remember that rewording someone else's thoughts must also be cited as if you were quoting that material. For example, if you use an internet source that reviews a course reading without citing the internet source, you are passing that information off as your own work. This is plagiarism and it will earn you a zero on the assignment.

### **Sociology 021 and the Core Curriculum**

Sociology 021 is a part of the Core Curriculum in Sociology. As such it is designed to address a range of intellectual issues, using a variety of methodologies, and to engage students in particular ways. These are discussed below.

a) The long-standing questions. Sociology, and intellectual inquiry more generally, have long been preoccupied with a set of big questions. These include the debate over biological versus sociological causality, how cultures and societies evolve, the nature of human agency and its relation to social structures, what constitutes progress and what are the contemporary possibilities for realizing it. This course addresses these, and other similar issues. For example, we will explore whether the highly acquisitive and consumerist society which has evolved in the United States is a product of "human nature," or social design. We look at the extent to which consumer desire is "produced" by advertising and marketing, or whether it is driven by social competition, or whether it is innate. Our readings delve into the origin of consumer society, and how it evolved from an environment of saving and austerity. We investigate the debate about the spread of Western consumer culture to other societies, and debate the pros and cons of that transformation.

b) Cultural diversity. This course also considers at consumer society from the point of view of cultural diversity, looking at how class, race, gender, and nation are structured and reproduced by consumer society. These distinctions are absolutely central to the operation of U.S. consumer society. We look at how racial stereotypes and images have become integral to contemporary marketing practices, and how at the same time, the consumer ideology supports a color-blind veneer. We explore the changing relationship between gender and consumer capitalism, and how class has been a persistent feature of this society since the beginning.

c) Historical perspective. Throughout the course, a historical perspective is included. The course begins with an exploration of the origins of consumer society in the early 20th century. It goes on to consider the 1950s and 60s, another key period, and ends with discussion of contemporary trends.

d) Methodology. Students are exposed to a variety of methodological approaches and tools. Much of the course is organized around debates (structure versus agency in consumer desire, pros and cons of globalization, etc.) By looking at a variety of points of view we are able to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of various methods of analysis.

e) Writing component. The course requires not only reading, but also writing. In addition to a final examination which is essay format, students post to a weekly online discussion which incorporate readings and personal experience. Finally, students produce a written report based on a field assignment in a site of consumption.

f) Creating a personal philosophy. Every one of us is a participant our consumer society. Not all of consume consciously, however. A major objective of this course is to get students to think critically and consciously about consumer society and their place in it. Students are forced to reflect on how they consume, how their consumption affects others, the environment, and themselves.

## Course Outline

Wed	Jan 18	<b>Intro</b>  <i>Video: Shop Til you Drop</i>
Fri	Jan 20	<b>Introduction to Consumer Society</b>  <i>Video: People Like Us</i>
Mon	Jan 23	James Twitchell, "Three Cheers for Materialism," in Schor and Holt.  Patricia Dalton, "We've Gotta Have It, But We Don't Need It, and It's Consuming Us," at <a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16434-2004Nov27.html">http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16434-2004Nov27.html</a>
Wed	Jan 25	William Leach, Land of Desire, Ch 1.
Fri	Jan 27	The new consumers: Ch 2: Cars
Mon	Jan 30	The New Consumers: Ch 4: Further resource linkages
Wed	Feb 1	<i>Video: Ethics and the environment</i>
Fri	Feb 3	Holt, D., 1995. How Consumers Consume: A Typology of Consumption Practices. Journal of Consumer Research 22, 1-16.
Mon	Feb 6	Wallendorf, Melanie, 1991. "We Gather Together"
Wed	Feb 8	Kozinets, R.V. 2002. "Can consumers escape the market? Emancipatory illuminations from burning man." Journal of Consumer Research: 20-38.
Fri	Feb 10	Juliet B. Schor, The Overspent American, chs 1-2
Mon	Feb 13	Juliet B. Schor, The Overspent American, chs 3-4
Wed	Feb 15	<b>Class and Consumption</b> Thorstein Veblen, (1899) "Conspicuous Consumption" in <i>The Theory of the Leisure Class</i>  Bryson, Bethany. 1996. "'Anything But Heavy Metal': Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes." American Sociological Review 61: 884-899.

Fri	Feb 17	Johnston, J., Baumann, S., 2007. Democracy versus Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 113, 165-204. (You can read the introduction and then skip to the analysis section)
Mon	Feb	<b>How Industry Shapes Consumption</b>
	20	Sheila Whiteley. 2008. <i>Christmas, Ideology, and Popular Culture</i> , Chapter 1 "Invention of the English Christmas"
Wed	Feb	Ritzer, George. The McDonaldization of Society, "Introduction" and "Control"
Fri	Feb 24	Chrys Ingraham, White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture, Chapter 2 "The Wedding Industrial Complex."
Mon	Feb 27	J. Twitchell, Branded Nation, Ch. 1, "Branding 101"
Wed	Feb 29	J. Twitchell. "One Market Under God" in Branded Nation
Fri	Mar 2	<b>Consumer Adaptations</b> Sheila Whiteley. 2008. <i>Christmas, Ideology, and Popular Culture</i> , Chapter 3
		"Consumption, Coca-colonization, Cultural Resistance – and Santa Claus."
Mon	Mar 12	Kozinits. 2001. "Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of Star Trek's Culture of Consumption"
Wed	Mar	<i>Video: Barbie Nation</i>
Fri	14 Mar 16	Juliet Schor, "The New Politics of Consumption," at <a href="http://bostonreview.net/BR24.3/schor.html">http://bostonreview.net/BR24.3/schor.html</a>
Mon	Mar 19	Thompson, Craig J, and Gokcen Coskuner-Balli. 2007. "Enchanting Ethical Consumerism: The Case of Community Supported Agriculture." <i>Journal of Consumer Culture</i> , 7:275-303.
Wed	Mar 21	<b>Gender, Sexuality, and Consumption</b> Leblanc, L. (1999). Pretty in punk: Girls' gender resistance in a boys' subculture, Rutgers Univ Pr. Chapter 5 "'I'll Slap on My Lipstick and Then Kick Their Ass": Constructing Femininity."

Fri	Mar 23	<i>Video: Killing Us Softly 4</i>
Mon	Mar 26	Mears, A. (2010). 'Size zero high-end ethnic: Cultural production and the reproduction of culture in fashion modeling.' <i>Poetics</i> <b>38</b> (1): 21-46.
Wed	Mar 28	Belk, R. and J. A. Costa (1998). 'The Mountain Man Myth: A Contemporary Consuming Fantasy.' <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i> 25(3): 218-240.
Fri	Mar 30	<b>FIELD ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY! - Be prepared to share a brief description with the class!</b>
Mon	Apr 2	<b>- Be prepared to share a brief description with the class!</b>
Wed	Apr 4	<b>Race, Ethnicity, and Consumption</b> Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity, Ch 1-2
Fri	Apr 6	<b>NO CLASS</b>
Mon	Apr 9	<b>NO CLASS</b>
Wed	Apr 11	Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity, Ch 3-4
Fri	Apr 13	Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity, Ch 5-6
Mon	Apr 16	Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity, Ch 7
Wed	Apr 18	Grazian, David. 2003. "Blues in Black and White" in <i>Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Fri	Apr 20	<b>Consumption and Globalization</b> Howes, David. 1996. <i>Cross-Cultural Consumption</i> . Chapters 1 and 6.
Mon	Apr 23	Foster, Robert. 2008. "Glocalizing Coca Cola" in <i>Coca-Globalization</i> .

Wed	Apr 25	Goldstein-Gidoni, Ofra. 2000. "The Production of Tradition and Culture in the Japanese Wedding Enterprise." <i>Ethnos</i> , 65 (1): 33-55.
Fri	Apr 27	Turner. "Neoliberal Ecopolitics and Indigenous Peoples: The Kayapo, The "Rainforest Harvest," and The Body Shop"
Mon	Apr 30	Jaffee. 2007. "Mejor, Pero No Muy Bien Que Digamos": The Limits of Fair Trade" in <i>Brewing Justice</i>
Wed	May 2	Video assignment: "The Story of Stuff." watch at <a href="http://www.storyofstuff.com/index.html">http://www.storyofstuff.com/index.html</a>
		<b>FINAL EXAM</b>



## ARTICLE REVIEW GUIDELINES

Provide a summary of your assigned reading, outlining its key points. Make sure to explain what the ARGUMENT of the article is. Also explain how the article relates to relevant sociological concepts and to the topic of the week (globalization, reception, etc). 40 points.

What were 2 things in the article you found particularly interesting? Why? 40 points.

Do you agree with the article's argument or perspective? Why or why not? 10 points.

What are 2 questions (related to the reading) that you have for the class? 10 points.

Post your article review on Blackboard.

You can post it early, but it MUST be posted the day BEFORE the day it is assigned.

## DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

You are required to participate in an online discussion, by responding to the questions posed by your classmates in their article reviews. You must post a response to at least once per week, responding to article review questions. These are worth 6 points each.

The following should be kept in mind for responses:

- Ensure that the responses add to the discussion and are relevant to the questions posted for that week.
- Please do not just disagree or agree, but clearly and concisely explain your argument.
- Please use examples from the assigned readings for the week and any other relevant materials that may add to the discussion.
- Please include examples from your experience or current events to support your answer (when you can).

### Grading Rubric for Discussion posts

Earned points	0	3	6
Criteria	Agree or disagree; 1 or 2 sentences responses that may be related to the topic.	Adds to the discussion but lacks several of the above substantial criteria	Meets all of the above criteria

## FIELD ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

1. Choose a "site" of consumption which interests you. Your "site" should be a physical place of consumption, like a sporting event, a bar, a particular store in a shopping mall, a county fair, etc. See the list below for possible sites. **Your site must be something that is new for you, so do not chose a location that you frequent regularly (such as your regular gym or favorite bar).**
2. Prepare a 1.5-2 page ethnographic description of the site. It should describe what individuals and groups are in the site, what they are doing, how they are or are not interacting, what if anything is the central focus of the site/activity, what objects or rituals are most important in the site and how can you tell this by observing the site, and where do you fit into the site.
3. Prepare a half page reflection on how you felt in the site and what you think of the site.
4. Prepare a 2 page sociological analysis of the site and be prepared to discuss your work in class. First, decide which of the following are MOST important issues in the site: race, class, gender, globalization, authenticity, environmentalism, or any other concept we read about in class. **CHOOSE ONLY 2 TO DISCUSS IN THE PAPER.** Analyze the site with these two theories or concepts. You must cite at least 2 of the course readings.
5. Format this paper in 12-point, double spaced lines, Times New Roman font. It should be **AT LEAST 4 pages long.** Please submit in Microsoft WORD format.
6. Submit a copy of your final paper by the due date listed on the syllabus. You can submit the paper in class or by email.

### Possible Field Sites:

- a fashion show
- a club
- sports bar (only if the bar is new to you)
- a gym (only if the gym is new to you)
- a sporting event (not one that you always attend)
- a dog race
- an art show
- a wedding
- a holiday event (valentines day dinner, etc.)
- car show
- book sale
- library
- cosmetics counter "event"
- a yoga, dance, or martial art class (some places will let you take a first class for free)
- concert (of a music you don't usually listen to)
- museum exhibit
- a play or musical
- a brand store (apple, fossil, etc.)
- church event
- festival
- farmers market
- circus, carnival, etc.
- the beach
- dog park
- zoo