Sociology 771 Understanding Consumer Society  
Spring 2014  
McGuinn Hall 415

Juliet Schor (schorj@bc.edu)  
Office address: 531 McGuinn, tel: 552-4056  
Office hours: Tuesday 1:30-3 and by appointment

Course Objectives and Requirements

This course is designed to expose and train graduate students in the sociology of consumption and to analyze contemporary contradictions and trends in consumer culture. As such the major emphasis is on the literature in sociology, but the reading list also includes authors from related disciplines such as history, marketing and anthropology. Although consumption has been studied for more than a century, in the 1980s, the literature exploded, in a variety of areas, and from a number of fields. It is now large, and includes studies of the ways in which people consume media, food, cultural products, clothing and fashion, vehicles, technology, celebrity, etc. Originally the literature centered on the critiques of writers such as Marx, Veblen, Simmel, and the Frankfort school. It has since moved on to consider issues such as the ways in which consumption structures and reproduces social difference, the role of consumer practices in the constitution of culture and personal identity, how consumption becomes a site of sub-cultural resistance, the role of consumption in modernity and post-modernity, and so forth. These theoretical perspectives form the structure of the course.

In sociology, the journal *Theory, Culture and Society* was an early outlet for the revival of the study of consumption, more recently the *Journal of Consumer Culture* has emerged. Over the last 20 years, *The Journal of Consumer Research* has also carried many articles of strong interest to sociologists. For those of you planning to do a field in the sociology of consumption, I suggest you begin reading the *JCC* on a regular basis, and begin familiarizing yourself with back issues of the other two.

There are three requirements for the class. The first is to keep up with the weekly reading assignments. I have tried to keep weekly assignments reasonable, but there is quite a bit of reading. The purpose of the large recommended list is to provide you with a larger bibliography in the field. This is something you can draw on if you go on to do a field exam in consumption.

The class will be run as lecture/discussion. I will come to class with a lecture, but I expect that a good portion of the class will be discussion. In a graduate seminar, everyone who participates is expected to take responsibility for understanding, critically digesting and talking about the readings. To facilitate this, I ask you to write a one page response to the readings which you submit the day before the class. We will read each other's contributions. That helps us jump right into conversation, makes sure that everyone is participating, and allows us all to prepare for the conversation. You are expected to read these submissions before coming to class.
The second requirement is a final paper of approximately 20 pages. For most of you, this paper should entail doing some primary research. The paper will be due on the first day of exams, with intermediate deadlines along the way. For those of you who have a long term interest in consumption, you should think of this paper as a future journal article, or even the start of a dissertation topic. I urge you to start thinking about a topic as soon as possible, and to consider this paper a serious piece of work. If you are not familiar with them, please ask me about human subjects issues and IRB approval for projects. Deadlines for written work will be provided in a separate document.

Third, you will be asked to write a book review of recent sociological books on consumption. I will point out good candidates from the recommended readings list. In past years, students who have chosen recently published books have been able to get their reviews published.

**Booklist.**

The books below should be available at the BC bookstore under this course number. In cases where the readings are not included in the books below, they are either available online at the O’Neill course reserves or they are journals, also available online. I have pdfs of many of the journal articles and make them available. For those of you with limited financial resources for purchasing books, I have extra copies of some of these and would be happy to lend them to you.


Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford 1991)


Michèle Lamont, *Money, Morals and Manners*, (Chicago 1992)


**Reading List**

**Part I. Consumption Theory**

**January 14 Introduction: Situating Consumption within Social Theory and History**

Recommended:


Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, The World of Goods (Routledge)
Roberta Sassatelli, Consumer Culture: History, Theory and Politics (Sage 2007)

January 21 Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective: Gender and Race

Anne McClintock, 1995, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest, (Routledge) ch 5, pp. 207-231.
Lizabeth Cohen, A Consumer’s Republic: The Political of Mass Consumption in Postwar America (Knopf 2003), ch. 3, pp. 112-165.

Recommended:
Lawrence Glickman, Consumer Society in American History: A Reader (Cornell University Press 1999).
Bridget T. Heneghan, Whitewashing America: Material Culture and Race in the Antebellum Imagination (Mississippi 2004), chs 1-2, pp. 3-85.
Bridget T. Heneghan, Whitewashing America: Material Culture and Race in the Antebellum Imagination (Mississippi 2004), chs 1-2, pp. 3-85.
Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, “Alienation, Hope, and Transcendence: Determinism or Determination?” in Nike Culture, 94-117.
Tricia Rose, Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America (Wesleyan/New England 1994)
Sharon Zukin, Point of Purchase (Routledge 2004), chs 2, 6.
Arlene Davilla, Latinos, Inc. (California 2000).
Amy Best, Romancing the Prom (Routledge 2000).

January 28 Production-Oriented Critiques of Consumer Culture and the Agency-Manipulation Debate


Recommended:
Richard Klein, Cigarettes Are Sublime (Duke 1993), chs. 1-2, pp. 1-49.

**February 4 Consumption as Status Display**

Grant McCracken, “Ever Dearer in Our Thoughts: Patina and the Representation of Status before and after the Eighteenth Century,” *Culture and Consumption*, (Indiana 1990) ch 2, pp. 31-43.

**February 11, 18, 25, March 11: Bourdieusian Consumer Theory**

February 11:

February 18:

February 25: Debating and Using Bourdieu


March 11: The Concept of Fields

Recommended:

III. Consuming in Post-Modernity

March 18: Identity and narratives of the self


Recommended:


Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame*.


**March 25 Advertising and the Post-Modern Consumer**

Frederick Jameson, 1984, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* #146.


Recommended:
Baudrillard, Jean, Selected Writings
Daniel Boorstin, The Image.
Mike Featherstone, Consumer Culture and Post-Modernism (Sage 1991).
Susan Bordo, Unbearable Weight (California 1993).
Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images (Basic Books 1988).
Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, Nike Culture (Sage 1998).
Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent, (Pantheon 2002).
Noam Chomsky, Thought Control in Democratic Societies (South End Press 1989)

April 1 Race and Contemporary Consumption

Karyn R. Lacy, 2007, Blue Chip Black: Race, Class and Status in the New Black Middle Class.

April 8 Consuming Emotions

Arlie Hochschild, The Managed Heart, ch 1, pp. 3-23.
Millian Kang, The Managed Hand: Race, Gender and the Body in Beauty Service Work, chs. TBA

Recommended:
Arlie Hochschild, 2003, The Commercialization of Intimate Life (California)
Eva Illouz, 2008, Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions and the Culture of Self-Help (California).

April 15,22 The Global Consumer Culture


Recommended:
Juliet Schor, “Is the Mouse Eating the World?” (unpublished)
Dannie Kjeldgaard and Søren Askegaard, 2006, “The Glocalization of Youth Culture: The

**April 29 Emerging Trends in Consumer Culture: Sustainable Consumption**


