

SOC243: CONSUMER SOCIETY
Fall, 2018
Instructor, Dr. P. Cormack

Office: 112a Annex

Office hours: Tuesday – 9:15-10:30; Wednesday – 11:15-2:00; Friday – 10:15-12:15.

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Class time: X4 (Tuesday, 11:15-12:30) and X5 (Friday, 12:45-2:00)

What is a “consumer society” and how is it different from other types of societies? In this course we will explore this question by way of classic and contemporary theoretical literatures as well as empirical studies. We will discuss issues that include social class, gender, mass society, inequalities, advertising, marketing, and brands.

Evaluation

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| Midterm exam | 20% (OCT 9) |
| Final exam | 40% (TBA) |
| Reports* | 20% (1 point x 20 readings – see below for details) |
| Presentations** | 20% (10 points + 10 points - see below for details) |

Each written report should be about 200 words and typed. Submit your reports with the date, your name, and the author and title. These reports may be submitted only in class, in person (not electronically) on the day we take up the assigned reading. You must submit a report on those readings designated below with an asterisk () or forfeit your 20 points. Otherwise you can write on any other readings for a total of 20 readings. Your submission should begin with a quotation copied from the assigned reading, followed by an explanation of why this passage is important in the context of the overall thesis of the reading. You should paraphrase the thesis in your own words and discuss key concepts. Underline your paraphrased thesis. Late submissions will not be accepted. Do not plagiarize your responses from Wiki etc. Do not plagiarize from other students. Your submissions will be graded in terms of how they show serious engagement with the reading. Submissions that are a general summary of the thinkers’ ideas, rather than the assigned reading, will be given a grade of zero.

**Each week one group will begin the class by writing what it takes to be the thesis of one of the readings for that day, a key sentence, and a list of key concepts on the board. The group will then explain the main points in terms of how the reading formulates consumers, consumerism, and consumer society. The oral presentation is graded out of 10 points. Each presentation should be about 10 minutes long. This presentation should be accompanied by a written report (about 500 words) submitted for evaluation. The report will be graded like any essay, looking for good organization, clarity, grammar, syntax, etc. It is graded out of 10 points. Students who cannot participate in group presentations may write a research essay as substitution. Please see me if you are doing

the research essay and I will assign you a topic. I am happy to meet with groups as you prepare your presentations.

Required Reading

- Schor, JB and BD Holt (eds.). 2000. The Consumer Society Reader. New York: The New York Press. (One copy of this book is on 3 hour reserve in the library.)
- Readings posted to moodle.

Reading Schedule

Sept 4: Introduction to this course (Song: “The Consumer”, Stompin’ Tom Connors)

Part 1: The Masses and the Commodity

Sept 7: Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry.”* (pages 3-19)
(Song: “Little Boxes”, Pete Seeger)

Sept 11: Galbraith, “The Dependence Effect.”* (pages 20-25)
(Song: “Satisfaction”, Rolling Stones)

Sept 14: Marx, “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret.”* (pages 331-334)
(Song: “The Revolution will not be Televised”, Gil Scott-Heron)

Sept 18: Marx continued.* (pages 335-340) (THIS IS A TOUGH READING – WE NEED TWO CLASSES. SUBMIT A REPORT FOR BOTH PARTS OF THIS READING.)
(Song: “Money Makes the World Go Around”, Liza Minnelli and Joel Grey)

Sept 21: Baudrillard, “The Ideological Genesis of Needs.”* (pages 57-67)
(Song: “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend”, Marilyn Monroe)

Sept 25: Baudrillard continued.* (pages 68-77) (ANOTHER TOUGH ONE. SUBMIT A REPORT FOR BOTH PARTS OF THIS READING.)

Part 2: Inequalities: Class, Race, Gender

Sept 28: Veblen, “Conspicuous Consumption.”* (pages 187-204)
(Song: “Mercedes Benz”, Janice Joplin)
PRESENTATION #1

Oct 2: Bourdieu, “The Aesthetic Sense as the Sense of Distinction.” * (pages 205-210)

Holt, "Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?" (pages 212-248)
(Song: "No Trash in My Trailer", Colt Ford)
PRESENTATION #2

***** **MIDTERM: OCTOBER 9** *****

Oct 12: Bourdieu, "Forms of Capital".* (moodle)
Bookman, "Coffee Brands, Class and Culture in a Canadian City". (moodle)
PRESENTATION #3
(Song: "The Coffee Song", Frank Sinatra)

Oct 16: Halnon, "Poor Chic". (moodle)
Rock, "Discomforting Comfort Foods" (moodle)
(Song, "Thrift Store", Mackelmore)
PRESENTATION #4

Oct 19: Cairns, et. a. "Feeding the Organic Child". (moodle)
Hochschild, "The Commercialization of Intimate Life." (moodle)
(Song: "Can't Buy me Love", Beatles)
PRESENTATION #5

Oct 23: Ducille, "Toy Theory: Black Barbie and the Deep Play of Difference." (pages 259-275)
hooks, "Eating the Other." (pages 343-359)
(Song: "Barbie Girl", Aqua)
PRESENTATION #6

Oct 26: Sandlin and Maudlin, "Consuming Pedagogies" Controlling images of women as consumers in popular culture." (moodle)
(Song: "Respect", Aretha Franklin)
PRESENTATION #7

Part 3: Branding and Advertising

Oct 30: Arvidson, "Brands". (moodle).
Cormack, "'True Stories': Tim Hortons and Branding of National Identity." (moodle)
(Song: "We Want Your Soul", Adam Freeland)
PRESENTATION #8

Nov 2: Wilk, "Bottled Water". (moodle)
Biro, A. "Reading a Water Bottle Menu". (moodle)
(Song: "Bottled Water", Mark Bishop)
PRESENTATION #9

Nov 6: Simmel G. 'Fashion'.* (moodle)
Wilson, "Feminism and Fashion". (pages 291-304)
(Song: "Dedicated Follower of Fashion, Kinks")
PRESENTATION #10

Nov 9: Friedan, "The Sexual Sell." (pages 26-46)
Bordo, "Hunger as Ideology." (pages 99-114)
(Song: "Shopping from A to Z, Toni Basil")
PRESENTATION #11

Nov 13: Goldman & Papson, "Advertising in the Age of Accelerated Meaning." (pages 81-97)
Frank, "Advertising as Cultural Criticism: Bill Bernbach vs Mass Society." (pages 375-391)
(Song: "Lost in the Supermarket, The Clash")
PRESENTATION #12

Nov 16: O'Guinn, "Touching Greatness". (pages 155-167)
Lalancette and Cormack, "Justin Trudeau and the Play of Celebrity in the 2015 Canadian Federal Election". (moodle)
(Song: "Fame", David Bowie)
PRESENTATION #13

Part 4: Resistance and Change

Nov 20: Radway, "The Act of Reading the Romance: Escape and Instruction." (pages 169-182)
Fiske, "Shopping for Pleasure: Malls, Power, and Resistance." (pages 306-328)
(Song: "Let's Go the Mall", Robin Sparkles)
PRESENTATION# 14 (?)

Nov 23: Kennedy, et al., "Food Activists, Consumer Strategies, and the Democratic Imagination" (moodle)
Bauman, et al., "Understanding the Food Preferences of People of Low Socioeconomic Status" (moodle)
(Song: "Imagine", John Lennon)
PRESENTATION# 15(?)

Nov 27: Johnston, et al., "Good Food, Good People" (moodle)
Schor, "Towards a New Politics of Consumption" (pages 446-462)

Nov 30: (REVIEW FOR EXAM)

*****EXAM TBA*****