

Honors 391 A/D: Consumption and Inequality
University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Spring 2012
Course Meetings: Tuesdays 9:30-10:20am, Dickinson 114

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Where:	Machmer Hall W33e	Thompson 638
When:	Tues 10:30 am-11:30 am	Thurs 8:30-10:30 am
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Site:	https://moodle.umass.edu/course/view.php?id=831	

Course Description

Consumption is an undeniable part of our lives. Whether we're striving to be out with the old and in with the new, bargain hunting at neighborhood tag sales, or restricting produce purchases to locally grown organic vegetables, our actions, beliefs, ideals, bodily behaviors, and monetary exchanges form a constellation of consumption.

This course will survey how scholars examine social phenomena related to consumption and consumerism, including theories about globalization, culture, inequality, gender, and intersectionality. We will consider three main themes over the course of the semester: 1) the historical, political, and economic underpinnings of consumption; 2) cultural aspects of consumption and image representation in relation to racial, ethnic, gender, sexuality, and class inequality reproduction, and 3) retail and service work.

Course Requirements:

One of the best parts of a seminar class is in having people with different backgrounds and experiences hash out a given topic. Our goal will not be to all agree – but to thoughtfully, respectfully, and energetically push each other forward in our understandings of the materials and of our own viewpoints. You need not read or respond to the materials the same way we do, but you should be prepared to take a position and argue for it! Much of your course grade will be based on exactly that – so being engaged is your best chance at doing well in the class.

Class Participation. This course meets only once a week – making course attendance crucial. You may miss no more than one class session without a documented excuse, presented either before the absence or within one week after the absence. This course is also a small-group seminar: there will be no lecturing; instead we'll be having small group discussion, making it painfully obvious if you did not complete the reading for class. Class Participation composes 30% of your grade for this class.

Discussion Posts. The course moodle includes a discussion forum. On this forum, you will post your thoughts about the week's reading by **Sunday at 9 pm**. You must do this **eight times** over the course of the semester. These posts are meant to help you articulate your thoughts after doing the reading, but before we actually discuss the materials in class. They should help us have more fun and vibrant discussions, but also show your mastery of the course materials.

You will post about two paragraphs (around 150-200 words) summarizing (a) what the author(s) of the readings argued (as best as you can tell!), and (b) whether you agree, disagree, or both agree and disagree with what they argue (with some sort of examples to explain why you think as you do). Posts are especially nice when they are “threaded” to connect to points raised by those who posted earlier than you. Discussion Posts make up another 40% of your grade for this class. We do not require formal exams because we expect you to show mastery of the material through your posts and discussions.

Researching Consumption. You will conduct three short research projects on consumptions in American malls. We are focusing on the following stores: Guess, Abercrombie & Fitch, American Eagle, Urban Outfitters, Hot Topic, Hollister, and Pacific Sunwear. These stores have somewhat different market niches, and also price their goods somewhat differently, giving us insights in how class, as well as style, play out. We will ask you to “sign up” for these stores early in the semester.

Each of these assignments are meant to help build our understanding of how consumption is carried out in society. In the first project, you will describe the website for one of these stores, identifying the style of the store, paying close attention to the descriptors being used for the merchandise, as well as describing the visual images and merchandise sold on the website. You will also examine any job advertisements for customer service workers, to see if they suggest a certain style. In the second project, you will visit the store, and write up ethnographic field notes, describing in detail the setting of the store: its physical space, the merchandise. In the third project, you will visit the store and write up ethnographic field notes, describing in detail the workers and customers in the stores, including information about their appearance and their demographics. You will also connect these field notes about the workers to the job advertisements for customer service reps, found on the store website. Each project will be worth 10% of your final grade for the course. You should post these assignments in Word (.doc or .docx) to the moodle on the day that they are due; we will talk about the data you gathered in class, and spend time analyzing it as a class. Your assignment will lose 1 point for each day it is late.

Grade: Class Participation (30) + Forum Posts (40) + Researching Consumption (30)
The grading scale for this course is A=>93; A-=90-92.9; B+=87-89.9; B=83-86.9; B-=80-82.9, C+=77-79.9, C=73-76.9, C-=70-72.9, D+=67-69.9, D=63-66.9, D-=60-62.9, F=<60.

Required Materials

All readings are available on the course moodle,

<https://moodle.umass.edu/course/view.php?id=831>

You need to do all of the readings *before* the class session for which they are listed.

Class members will also be asked to visit malls to carry out two research projects. If you need transportation to do so, please let Kyla/Joya know.

Course Schedule

<p>January 24</p>	<p><i>Introduction to Class</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surowiecki, James. "Inconspicuous Consumption." The New Yorker. 12 October 2009. • Collins, Laura. "Brown Baggers." The New Yorker. 22 December 2008.
<p>January 31</p>	<p><i>Consumption in Context</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandine, Al. 2010. "Cultural Impersonations and Appropriations: A Fashion Report." Monthly Review 62(4). • Shah, Anup. "Consumption and Consumerism." Global Issues. 6 March 2011. • Shah, Anup. "Creating the Consumer." Global Issues. 14 May 2003.
<p>February 7</p>	<p><i>Consumption in Context</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schor, Juliet B. 1998. <i>The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, and the New Consumer</i>. New York: Basic Books. Excerpt: Pp. 3-24, "Introduction"
<p>February 14</p>	<p><i>Consumption and Social Class</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schor, Juliet B. 1998. <i>The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, and the New Consumer</i>. New York: Basic Books. Excerpt: Pp. 25-42, "Communication with Commodities: How What We Buy Speaks Volumes"
<p>February 21</p>	<p><i>Consumption and Gender</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bordo, Susan. [1993.] 2000. "The Hunger Ideology." Pp. 99-114 in <i>The Consumer Society Reader</i> edited by Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt. New York: The New Press. • Holt, Douglas B. and Craig J. Thompson. 2004. "Man-of-Action Heroes: The Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity in Everyday Consumption" <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i> 31(2):425-40.
<p>February 28</p>	<p><i>Consumption and Race</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collins, Patricia Hill. 2006. "New commodities, new consumes: Selling blackness in a global marketplace." <i>Ethnicities</i> 6(3):297-317.

March 6	<p><i>Consumption in Cyberspace</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zukin, Sharon. 2004. <i>The Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture</i>. New York: Routledge. Excerpt: Pp. 227-51, "The Zen of Internet Shopping" <p>ASSIGNMENT DUE: WEBSITE DESCRIPTIONS</p>
March 13	<p>Ethical Consumption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gibson, Chris and Elyse Stanes. 2011. "Is green the new black?" Pp. 169-86 in <i>Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction</i> edited by Tania Lewis and Emily Potter. New York: Routledge.
March 20	No Class – Spring Break
March 27	ASSIGNMENT DUE: PHYSICAL SPACE FIELD NOTES
April 3	<p>Gender, Sexuality, Class and Retailing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lan, Pei-Chia. 2003. "Working in a neon cage: Bodily Labor of Cosmetics Saleswomen in Taiwan." <i>Feminist Studies</i> 29(1):21-45. Hanser, Amy. 2005. "The Gendered Rice Bowl: The Sexual Politics of Service Work in Urban China." <i>Gender and Society</i> 19(5):581-600.
April 10	<p>Gender and Retailing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leslie, Deborah. 2002. "Gender, Retail and the Clothing Commodity Chain." <i>Gender, Place and Culture</i> 9(1):61-76.
April 17	No class – Monday Schedule
April 24	ASSIGNMENT DUE: WORKER/CUSTOMER FIELD NOTES
May 1	<p>Culture Jamming and Resistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harold, Christine. 2004. "Pranking Rhetoric: 'Culture Jamming' as Media Activism." <i>Critical Studies in Media Communication</i> 21(3):189-211. "Culture Jamming, Memes, Social Networks, and the Emerging Media Ecology: The "Nike Sweatshop Email" as Object-To-Think-With." <p>http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/polcommcampaigns/peretti.html</p>

Classroom Participation

Course attendance and engagement in the discussion is a crucial part of this small-class seminar experience. In class, we expect you to engage thoughtfully and respectfully in our discussion of the readings. There are thirty points available to you based on classroom participation. We will grade this component of the class at the end of the semester, based on the following rubric:

	0 or 1 unexcused absences	2-3 unexcused absences	4 or more unexcused absences
Speaks up in class consistently and respectfully, showing engagement in course materials	(27-30 points)	(24-27 points)	(20-24 points)
Does not speak up in class/does not appear familiar with readings	(20-24 points)	(16-20 points)	(0-16 points)

Forum Posts

You will post eight times (out of ten possible class sessions) over the course of the semester to the Moodle Forum **the Sunday before the class discussion of the course materials (by 9 pm)**. In your post, you will be identifying what the authors are arguing, as well as whether you agree/disagree/or both (with evidence to support your argument). Writing about readings *before* we discuss them in class should help you clarify your thoughts. Posts are especially nice when they are “threaded” to connect to points raised by those who posted earlier than you. In grading the forum posts, we will use the following rubric.

	2.5 points	1.5 points	.5 points
Reading Argument	Very clearly identifies the arguments of the reading	Generally identifies the arguments of the reading	Doesn't identify the arguments of the reading
Your argument	Very clearly identifies your argument and provides evidence in support of your argument	Clearly identifies your argument and provides some evidence in support of your argument	Doesn't identify your argument; or makes assertions with little support for your argument

Researching Consumption

To connect our course readings with the “real world,” you will be conducting research on consumption in American malls. This project also helps you learn about how sociologists carry out research about topics like consumption. We focus on the following stores, which we have divided into different market niches, and which also have slightly different price points:

<i>Preppy</i>	<i>Edgy</i>	<i>California</i>
Guess (Holyoke Mall; Newbury Street, Natick Collection, Cambridgeside Galleria, Northshore Mall)	Urban Outfitters (Northampton, Natick Collection, Legacy Place, Back Bay, Harvard Square)	Hollister (Holyoke Mall, Berkshire Mall, Auburn Mall, Natick Mall, Cambridgeside Galleria)
Abercrombie & Fitch (Holyoke Mall, Faneuil Hall, Natick Collection, Cambridgeside Galleria, Northshore Mall)	Hot Topic (Holyoke Mall, Berkshire Mall, Eastfield Mall, Auburn Mall, Solomon Pond)	Pacific Sunwear (Hampshire Mall, Holyoke Mall, Berkshire Mall, Natick Mall, Auburn Mall)
American Eagle (Hampshire Mall, Holyoke Mall, Eastfield Mall, Natick Mall, Cambridgeside Galleria)		

Website Project: DUE MARCH 6

In the first project, you will be assigned one store from the ones listed above. Your work will primarily be in studying and describing the website for the store. You will answer the following questions about the store, providing as much detail as possible, in order to convey the way the store is being marketed to its customers via the website:

1. What are the main categories of clothing being sold that are listed on the website? Do these differ for men and women? Are there any other items being sold on the website? Are you directed to any additional store websites, and if so, what are they, and how do they differ?
2. What are the average prices on the website for clothing (you will want to break this down by category)? What are the prices like for “new arrivals”? Are sales prices prominent on the website, for example, on the main page, or in special sales sections?
3. Are there any images of people on the website? Do they reflect assumptions about customers by age, gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality? What other images appear and what do they convey?
4. Is there a “careers” section of the website? (Look at the bottom of the web page; this link may be in smaller print.) If so, are there positions open for sales associates or models? If so, what are they titled? What are the qualities they are looking for in out-front workers?
5. What do you think the “style” of this store is? How does this style reflect class, race, gender, sexuality, and/or age in the assumptions about its customers? What evidence do you draw upon to make this claim?

You will turn these descriptions into a short paper, which you will post on the “assignment” forum on the moodle site in .doc or .docx format. In class, on the day that this is due, we will make comparisons across the seven stores, so be prepared to summarize your findings in class as well. This paper is worth **ten points** of your final grade.

	2 points (great)	1 point (OK)	0 points (poor)
Merchandise	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Pricing	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Images	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Careers (if possible)	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Style/Comparison	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information

Merchandise/Space Project: DUE MARCH 27

In the second project, you will visit your store. You will write up ethnographic field notes about your visit, describing in as much detail as possible the spaces and the merchandise you see in the stores. You will answer the following questions about each store, providing as much detail as possible in order to convey the way the store is being marketed to its customers via its physical spaces:

1. What are the main categories of clothing being sold, and are these different from the website? How does the clothing differ for men and women, in colors, styles, and how much space they take up in the store?
2. How does the physical space in the store look? Provide detail about colors, textures, lighting, floor, and wall coverings. How clean is it? How well organized is it? Does the store seem crammed full of things, or more spare? How do the dressing rooms look?
3. Are there any mannequins, images, or advertisements in the store. Please describe them. (For example, how are the mannequins positioned, and does their positioning differ by gender?) Do these visual markers reflect any gendered, classed, or raced assumptions?
4. How do the prices in the store compare to the website? What are the prices like for “new arrivals”? Is there a sales section? Where is it located, and does it differ from the rest of the store in any way?
5. What do you think the “style” of this store is? Are the clothing presented in ways that seem to reflect age, sexuality, gender, race, and/or class? Are there any other markers that you think are important regarding age, sexuality, gender, race, and/or class in the store?

You will turn these descriptions into a short paper, which you will post on the “assignment” forum on the moodle site in .doc or .docx format. In class, on the day that this is due, we will make comparisons across the seven stores, so be prepared to summarize your findings in class as well. This paper is worth **ten points** of your final grade.

	2 points (great)	1 point (OK)	0 points (poor)
Merchandise	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Space	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Images	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Prices	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Style	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information

Customer/Workers Project: DUE APRIL 24

In the final project, you will visit your store again. You will write up ethnographic field notes about your visit, describing in as much detail as possible the customers and workers you see in the stores. You will answer the following questions about each store, providing as much detail as possible, in order to convey the way the store is being marketed to its customers via how the workers present themselves:

1. Based on what you can guess, by looking at them, what are the age, gender, and race/ethnicity of the workers? If you notice anything else about the workers' physical characteristics, please note this as well, for example, information about tattoos or piercings. Along with their demographic information, please summarize what each worker is wearing, and whatever you think you can describe about weight and attractiveness.
2. Do the workers appear to be wearing clothing from the store? Clothing currently being displayed in the store? Do their clothes imply anything about class, race, gender, or sexuality? For example, are they dressed in ways that emphasize their sexual attractiveness, or dressed more neutrally? Do men and women workers (if both are there) dress similarly, or differently?
3. Do any of the workers appear to be managers, or assistant managers, supervising the other workers on the floor? Do their characteristics differ from the other workers (for example, are they older)? Do the workers' jobs differ? For example, are some workers primarily models, while others are working the cash registers, or do some workers only work in certain sections?
4. Based on what you can guess, by looking at them, what are the age, gender, and race/ethnicity of the customers? If you notice anything else about the customers' physical characteristics, please note this as well, for example, information about tattoos or piercings. Do the customers appear to be similar to or different from the workers in the store, regarding age, gender, and race/ethnicity, tattoos, piercings, weight, and attractiveness? Do workers appear to dress more or less conservatively than typical customers?
5. How would you describe your own characteristics and clothing style? Have you ever shopped in the store? If so, how often? Did you feel comfortable or uncomfortable when carrying out this research?

You will turn these descriptions into a short paper, which you will post on the "assignment" forum on the moodle site in .doc or .docx format. In class, on the day that this is due, we will make comparisons across the seven stores, so be prepared to summarize your findings in class as well. This paper is worth **ten points** of your final grade.

	2 points (great)	1 point (OK)	0 points (poor)
Worker Characteristics	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Worker Clothing	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Workers' Roles	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Customer Characteristics	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information
Own Characteristics	Very detailed	Some information	Very little information