

Dept of Media, Culture, and Communication  
MCC-UE 1409  
Spring 2018  
Mon/Wed 11-12:15  
Silver 409

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## **Consumption, Culture and Identity**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course examines theories of consumption, consumer culture, commodification, shopping, branding, and the construction of social and cultural identity in the context of everyday life. We will investigate practices of consumption at both a theoretical level and in relation to our own practices of consumption, consumer identities, and ethics of consumption. What does it mean to consume things, stuff, food, media, and ideas? What are the affective and emotional aspects of shopping and consumption? How can we be informed consumers? We will consider critical responses to consumer culture, including the resistance and refusal of consumption as well as the attempted mobilization of consumption toward social change as commodity activism.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Students are required to attend all classes, complete the readings for each class session, and complete all assignments. If you miss more than 4 classes without a reasonable excuse, your grade will be lowered.

You should make an effort to meet with me in person at some point in the semester. I am available for consultation via e-mail, in office hours, and by appointment.

### **READINGS:**

Elizabeth Chin, *My Life with Things: The Consumer Diaries* (Duke University Press, 2016)  
Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Second Edition (Routledge, 2011)

Additional reading materials and assignments will be posted on NYU Classes.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

This class will have a blog, shared only by class participants, in which you will have a minimum of 5 assignments. These are to be completed by the assignment deadline for each. In addition you will complete a paper that analyzes the life cycle of a particular commodity, including the materials that go into its production, the labor conditions and site of its production, its journey from production to sites of consumption, and its post-commodity afterlife. This will mean drafting a proposal for feedback, and crafting a final paper/project of 8-10 pages, including

media links and images. In addition, you will be expected to participate fully in class discussions, including being assigned regularly to bring questions of the reading and to do short presentations.

These assignments will be worth the following portion of your grade:

Blog posts: 10% each

Paper/project: 30%

Class participation: 20%

Type and double-space your written work and number your pages. I recommend you use Chicago style for your citations; the short version is here: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html). If you submit a paper via e-mail, please put your name in the file name and on each numbered page.

## GRADING AND EVALUATION

You are responsible for the material covered in lecture and in the reading. You will be evaluated on (1) the level of your engagement with the class materials (as evidenced in your written work and class participation) (2) your capacity to explain your ideas and analysis in articulate and well-written forms (3) and your ability to creatively explore these theories and methodologies. All of your written work will be graded on two primary evaluative scales (1) how well it demonstrates an understanding of the theories and methodologies of the class (2) how well it structures and articulates its argument.

Evaluation Rubric:

A= Excellent

This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B=Good

This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average

This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory

This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams, making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others, and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours. You violate the principle of academic integrity when you cheat on an exam, submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors, receive help on a take-home examination that calls for independent work, or plagiarize.

When taking this class, you enter into a contract that states that all the work you are turning in has been your own and no one else's, and that you have not turned in any work for which you have received credit in another class, and that you have properly cited other people's work and ideas. Do not take this policy lightly! Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade in the course. If you have questions about these policies, or proper citation of scholarship, please come speak with me in person. (see [http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic\\_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity))

## STUDENT RESOURCES

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with disabilities (<http://www.nyu.edu/csd/>)  
Writing Center: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233. Schedule an appointment online at [www.rich15.com/nyu/](http://www.rich15.com/nyu/) or just walk-in.

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

*Week 1:*

**Mon. Jan. 22—Introduction**

**Wed. Jan. 24— Making Sense of Consumption**

Reading:

Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Introduction

Elizabeth Chin, *My Life With Things: The Consumer Diaries*, Introduction

Recommended:

Mark Paterson, "You Are What You Buy: Theories of the Consumer"

*Week 2:*

**Jan. 29— Systems of Exchange**

Reading:

Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Chapter 1

Carol Rose, "Giving, Trading, Thieving and Trusting"

**Jan. 31— Thinking About Things**

Reading:

Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Chapter 2  
Chin, *My Life With Things*, pp. 37-56

Recommended:

Daniel Miller, “Theories of Things”

*Week 3:*

**Feb. 5— Making Sense of the Commodity**

Reading:

Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Chapter 1  
Arjun Appadurai, “Commodity and Politics of Value”  
Karl Marx “The Fetishism of the Commodity”

***Blog 1 due: Choose a consumer object of importance to you, and analyze why it is meaningful. Include in your post two images, one of the commodity you own and one of its representation in brand culture.***

**Feb. 7— Making Sense of Shopping**

Reading:

Daniel Miller, “Why We Shop”  
Sharon Zukin, “A Brief History of Shopping”  
Chin, *My Life With Things*, pp. 58-84

*Week 4:*

**Feb. 12— Conspicuous Consumption**

Reading:

Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, *The Sum of Small Things*: Chaps 1 and 2  
Thorstein Veblen, *Conspicuous Consumption* (excerpt)  
Chin, *My Life With Things*, pp. 85-114

**Feb. 14— Spaces of Consumption: From Department Stores to Big Box Stores**

Reading:

Adam Gopnik, “Under One Roof”  
Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, excerpt from *Practices of Looking* Third Edition

*Week 5:*

**Feb. 19—No class, Presidents Day holiday**

**Feb. 21— Spaces of Consumption: Food Culture, Craft Culture, and Post-industrial Consumption**

Reading:

Sharon Zukin, “How Brooklyn Became Cool”

Richard Ocejo, *Masters of Craft* (excerpt)

Recommended:

Richard Florida, *The New Urban Crisis* (excerpt)

***Blog 2 due: Analyze a particular space of consumption.***

*Week 6:*

**Feb. 26— Making Sense of the Brand**

Reading:

Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Brand Keyword”

Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Chapter 6

**Feb. 28— Taste and Lifestyle**

Reading:

Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Chapter 4

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (excerpt)

Sharon Zukin, “Consumer Guides and the Invention of Lifestyle”

Chin, *My Life With Things*, pp.

*Week 7:*

**March 5— Logistics and Labor**

Reading:

Clare Lyster, “The Logistical Figure”

Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff: Distribution*

**March 7— Speed and Fast Fashion**

Reading:

Juliet Schor, “The Paradox of Materiality: Fashion, Marketing, and the Planetary Ecology”

Elizabeth Cline, “Fast Fashion” from *Overdressed*

***Blog 3 due: Examine one aspect of the logistics of consumption: production, shipping, distribution.***

**SPRING BREAK—March 12-16**

*Week 8:*

**March 19— Lifecycle of the Commodity**

Reading:

Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff*, Extraction

Pietra Rivoli, *Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy*, excerpts

**March 21— Data Collection and Consumer Tracking**

Reading:

Mark Bartholomew, *Ad Creep*, Chapter 3: New Market Research

Joe Turow, *The Aisles Have Eyes*, Chap 4: Hunting the Mobile Shopper

*Week 9:*

**March 26— Consuming the Nation**

Reading:

Marita Sturken, “Consuming Fear and Selling Comfort” from *Tourists of History*

Recommended:

Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, “Landscapes of Fictitious Capital”

**March 28— Identity as Consumption: Consuming Gender**

Reading:

Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Chapter 5

Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Free Self Esteem Tools? Brand Culture, Gender and Dove Real Beauty Campaign”

Chin, *My Life With Things*, pp. 118-123

***Blog 4 due: Analyze one aspect of data surveillance and consumer tracking.***

*Week 10:*

**April 2— Consuming Race/Ethnicity**

Reading:

Bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance”

Arlene Davila, *Latinos Inc* (excerpt)

Chin, *My Life With Things*, pp. 127-129, 170-184

**April 4— Consuming Identity Through Social Media: Instagram and Haul Videos**

Reading:

Alice Marwick, *Status Update*, excerpt

*Week 11:*

**April 9— Media Consumption: Systems of Distribution and Delivery**

Reading:

Michael Smith and Rahul Telang, *Streaming, Sharing, Stealing: Big Data and the Future of Entertainment* (excerpt)

Chuck Tryon, *On Demand Culture* (excerpt)

Recommended:

Jennifer Holt and Kevin Samson, *Connected Viewing*: Introduction

Hye Jin Lee and Mark Andrejevic, “Second Screen Theory”

**April 11— Consumption TV: Shoppers and Hoarders**

Reading:

Chin, *My Life With Things*, pp. 203-219

Additional readings TBD

***Blog 5 due: Analyze your media consumption.***

*Week 12:*

**April 16— Toward a Consumption Ethics**

Reading:

Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Chapter 7

Juliet Schor, “Towards a New Politics of Consumption”

**April 18— Environmental Impacts**

Reading:

Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff*, Disposal

Josee Johnson and Kate Cairns, “Eating for Change”

***Final Paper/Project proposals due.***

*Week 13:*

**April 23— Opting Out: Rejecting Consumption**

Reading:

Ann Patchett, “My Year of No Shopping”

Elizabeth Cline, “Make Alter Mend” from *Overdressed*

Recommended:

Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (excerpt)

**April 25—DIY Cultures**

Reading:

Laura Portwood-Stacer, “Anti-Consumption as Tactical Resistance”

*Week 14:*

**April 30— Commodity Activism**

Reading:

Sarah Banet-Weiser and Roopali Mukherjee, Introduction to *Commodity Activism*

Jo Littler, “Interior Economies: Anti-Consumer Activism and the Limits of Reflexivity”

**May 2—Consuming the University**

Reading:

Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Rate Your Knowledge: The Branded University”

Andrew Ross, “Is Student Debt Immoral?”

*Week 15:*

**May 7—Final Project Presentations**