Sociology 238, Marketplace Activities: An Interactionist Analysis

Instructor: Carrie B. Sanders
Class Location & Time: Tuesday 2:30 - 4:20, RCH 308
Office Hours: Tuesday 4:30-5:30 or by appointment in PAS 2053
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Course Description and Objective

This course is best defined as the sociology of consumption. The course examines the growth of the ‘consumer society’, by questioning how people’s accumulation of material objects and leisure pursuits inform or work to construct their identity. It has been argued, within the sociology of consumption, that the aestheticization of everyday life has led to an increasing interest in the presentation of an image and the construction of a lifestyle, which is not formed around need, but for individuals to demonstrate their membership within particular social groups. The sociology of consumption, therefore, moves beyond a sociological analysis of production – the experience and effects of paid employment- to one of consumption.

While the majority of the course, and its subsequent readings, are informed by a symbolic interactionist paradigm, the course will also introduce you to a number of other interpretive theorists and theories on consumption. The concepts of ‘consumer culture’ and ‘consumer society’ are central to unlocking some other mysteries of contemporary societies. This course focuses on theories of consumer culture, with an aim to situate and make sense of these theories as part of the broad development of social thought over the modern period. We will draw on a number of ethnographic case studies to investigate fundamental social categories that have been closely interrelated with consumption such as choice, identity, taste and authenticity.

The course will explore traditions of theorizing consumption and consumer society; commodification and subject-object relations; and, taste, identity and subjectivity. Key substantive themes in the sociology of consumption including the shopping experience, advertising, fashion, identity and class construction, the body, and social resistance will be examined. Since this is a sociology course as opposed to a marketing or business school course, it is essential to acknowledge some very different emphases in this course. Reflecting interpretive theories of consumption, such as symbolic interactionism and post-structuralism, attention is given to the interactive and socially constructed nature of people’s exchanges and relationships. Thus, unlike other courses offered in marketing and sales, which assume a positivistic (quantitative) and prescriptive orientation, we study the humanly meaningful production of activity in this component of our everyday life. The objective of the course is to introduce you to the sociology of consumption and its theoretical foundations by such theorists as Herbert Blumer, Fred Davis, Jean Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu. The first part of the course deals specifically with the aforementioned theorists and their contributions to our understanding of consumption. The remainder of the course provides you with an overview of topic areas fitting of the sociology of consumption.
**Course & Reading Outline:**

Note: This is a projected course outline, some variation in implementation may occur. Be prepared to adjust accordingly!

**May 1, 2007 >>>>>>>>>> Introduction to the Course and Course Objectives**

In class materials only

**May 8, 2007 >>>>>>>>>> Introduction to Symbolic Interactionism (SI) and the Sociology of Consumption**

Basic Premises and Propositions of Symbolic Interaction….. Marketing as Socially Constructed Activity


**May 15, 2007 >>>>>>>>>> Introduction to Interpretive Theories of Consumption**

Basic Theoretical Premises & Subject – Object Relations within Post-Structuralism. Of specific interest in these readings are the theoretical ideas provided by: Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, Jean Baudrillard, Veblen & Bourdieu


**May 22, 2007 >>>>>>>>>> Other Interpretive Theories Continued…with specific attention to Bourdieu and the Distinction of Taste**

Bourdieu and the social critique of the judgment of taste: The concepts of economic capital, cultural capital and habitus


**Topic Readings on the Sociology of Consumption**

May 29, 2007 >>>>>>>>>>>>> Possessions, Shops & Shopping


June 05, 2007 >>>>>>>>>> MIDTERM TEST – Worth 30%
This test covers all reading material as well as material introduced in lectures.

June 12, 2007 >>>>>>>>>>>>> Advertising


July 03, 2007 >>>>>>>>>>>>> Clothing & Fashion: Constructing Class Status


July 10, 2007 >>>>>>>>>>>>> The Body


July 17, 2007 >>>>>>>>>> Consumption, Social Inequality & Social Resistance


*****Pick-up 1 week Take-home Exam*****

July 24, 2007 >>>>>>>>> Term Wrap-up - Take Home Examination Due- Worth 40%!!!

**Course Textbook Requirements**
All course reading requirements are in a Sociology 238 Courseware Package available at the University bookstore.

**NOTE:** Articles denoted by (*) can be the focus of your critical reflection paper. Articles denoted by ++ are supplementary articles / readings, not required for you to read or be tested upon.
**Assignments / Grade Allocations**

A. Mid-term Test (30%)

B. 2 Critical Reflection Paper (each worth 15% for a total of 30%)

C. Take Home Final (40%)

**Course Requirements, Expectations and Standards**

A. Mid-term Test (30%)

There will be a mid-term test held in class on Tuesday June 05. This test will cover all course reading and lecture materials to date.

B. 2 Critical Reflection Papers (Each worth 15% - total of 30%)

Every student is responsible to write two, one page single-spaced, critical reflection papers on a course reading from two different topic weeks (i.e., shops & shopping; advertising; clothes, fashion & Identity construction; the body; etc.,). These papers can be done on the articles denoted by an asterix (*) in the course syllabus. The critical reflection papers are worth 15% each and will show critical thinking and reflection of the article and its argument within the sociology of consumption. The critical reflection paper must be handed in at the beginning of the specific topic week class.

Papers will not be accepted after this point.

The objective of the critical reflection papers is to make evident your abilities to critically read and analyze. It is not to be a means of re-stating or outlining the author’s argument, but instead provides a means for you to illustrate your own thoughts, ideas and sociological questions relating to the article.

The paper consists of four major components and should be presented under these pre-specified headings:

1. **Article Title** - worth 1 mark (includes: full and proper bibliographic citation);
2. **Theoretical Position** – worth 1 mark - (identifying the author’s theoretical position);
3. **Main Argument** – worth 3 marks - (brief description of the author’s key arguments – this section can be written in either bullet point or sentence structure)
4. **Critical Reflection** – worth 10 marks- (this is the bulk of your paper and includes your own thoughts, ideas and questions relating to the article, its arguments and theory in regards to the sociology of consumption. In this section of the paper, I would like to see you critically engaging with the article and questioning the appropriateness of its arguments. You are to discuss the relevance of this article to the study of consumption, while also showing how it connects to, or is different from, the other readings included in the specific topic week. Some suggested questions to help you get started writing are: How does this article connect to other articles presented or ones involved in this topic week? What do you find theoretically or conceptually strong or weak in the article? How is this relevant to the sociology of consumption?)

**Be advised, while this is a reflective piece that describes your thoughts and reactions, your comments must be phrased in sociological and analytically appropriate terms. Therefore, you must say more than “I LIKE it” or “I didn’t LIKE it” – I need to know why!**
C. One Week Take-Home Final Exam – Worth 40%
This one week take-home exam will ask you to answer a number of essay questions that describe
and discuss particular course concepts through their application in case studies presented throughout
the course. The test will be disseminated at the end of class on the July 17th and will be handed in at
the beginning of class on Tuesday July 24th. Those exams not handed in at the beginning of class
will not be accepted, unless occupied with a certified note explaining delay.

*******University Policy on Academic Discipline Policy #71***************
“Note on avoidance of academic offences: All student registered in the courses of the Faculty of
Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offence, to avoid committing academic
offences, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offence
is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic
Discipline). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students are directed
to consult the summary of Policy #71 which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section ;
on the Web at http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infossec/Policies/policy 71.htm). If you need help in
learning how to avoid offences such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need
clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your TA or course instructor for guidance.
Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate
associate Dean”

“Students who believe that they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve;
refer to Policy #70, Student Grievance, http://admuwaterloo.ca/infossec/Policies/policy70.htm.
“Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD),
located in Needles Hall, Room 1132 collaborates with all academic departments to arrange
appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic
integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your
disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term”

Other Sociology of Consumption and Marketplace Activity References
Publications: London.
York: The Modern Library.
McCracken, G (1988) Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of
Consumer Goods and Activities; Minneapolis: Indiana University Press