

Ryerson University – Sociology

SOC 931: Waste and Consumerism

Tuesdays, 10:10AM to 12:00 Noon, Victoria Building 203

Wednesdays, 2:10PM to 3:00PM, Victoria Building 203

Instructor: Prof. Paul S. Moore (psmoore@ryerson.ca)
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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:30PM to 1:30pm, or by appointment

I will normally reply to E-mail or phone messages within 48 hours. E-mail is best used as business communications, and you are expected to use and check your Ryerson.ca email account. Meet in person to discuss ideas and the substance of lectures, assignments, or activities.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides a forum for exploring the rise of consumerism in Western culture and its broader social, environmental, economic and political implications. Topics include: the historical development of department stores, shopping malls, and advertising; the integration of personal identity formation with consumer goods; the relationship between capitalist economic systems and consumerism; the growing practice of utilizing consumption as a political tool; and the effect of increasing rates of consumption on the degradation of the environment.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Waste is an inevitable result of consumption, but our consumer society allows us to ignore the garbage, trash, and rubbish we create. In more theoretical terms, the ideology of consumerism emphasizes the pleasures and desires of individual wants, rather than the social and systemic consequences of fulfilling our collective needs. We will explore and critique this ideology on an individual level, but also on global and institutional terms, using in-depth case studies of marketing to children and the ethics of waste, and ending with the global circulations. A weekly one-hour session focused specifically on theoretical background and concepts.

We will start the course with a book on the commercialization of childhood, and begin learning theoretical concepts about the commodity fetish, desire and identity, and the contradiction between individual actions and social structures of capitalism. We will then explore waste in detail and you will conduct a research or creative project and interpretive essay about it.

Early in the course, you will be tested on your understanding of concepts thus far. You will complete at least five out of ten weekly theoretical reflections, brought to Wednesdays' classes for discussion. In the middle of the course you will collect observations in a waste diary and begin researching your observations on waste habits. At the end of the course, we will consider global issues of consumption and waste for a final exam.

TEXTBOOKS

Schor, Juliet B. *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004). Library Call Number: HF 5415.33 U6 S36.

Hawkins, Gay. *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). Library Call Number: TD 793.9 H38.

Schor, Juliet B. and Douglas B. Holt, eds. *The Consumer Society Reader* (New York: New Press, 2000). Library Call Number: HC79 C6 C79.

All three books were ordered at the Ryerson Campus Store (in September in the POD annex with other Sociology textbooks). The library’s copies will be placed on 1-day reserve loan.

REQUIRED WORK AND GRADING STRUCTURE:

Component	Format	Value	Due Dates
In-Class Test	90 minute In-Class Quiz on Concepts, and Analysis of Childhood Consumption	25%	Tues. Oct 1, in class
Theoretical Reflections	At least 5 one-page reflections applying theory to lectures; due at the START of Wednesday classes	20%	5 of 10 Weds. (none on Oct 2 or Nov 27)
“Waste Diary” Research Essay	A “Waste Diary” and essay-style reflection; can be done either comprehensively or creatively	30%	Tues. Nov 12, in class
Final Exam	Focused on last four lectures and theoretical reflections	25%	In Exam Period TBA: Dec 3-14

In-Class Test (90 minutes, on October 1)..... 25%
 Covers basic concepts and definitions of lectures analyzing childhood consumption.
 Graded tests will be returned well before the drop date, but grades may not be on Blackboard.

Weekly Reflections, Posted by Sunday early evenings, Due at START of Wednesdays (Do any 5 out of 10; minimum one-page typed, double-spaced, and printed) 20%

Waste Diary, Documentation and Research Essay (2000 words minimum; about 7-8 pages; Due Tuesday, November 12, in class) 30%
 Methodically track your waste, either comprehensively for a short period of 48 hours, or more creatively in some aspect for a two-week period; summarize, interpret and analyze the results in relation to theoretical readings and secondary research.

Final Exam (90 minutes, in Exam Period)..... 25%
 Will focus on the final four lectures and theoretical reflections (similar to Oct test).

LAST DATE TO DROP in good Academic Standing: Friday, November 15, for this and all Fall undergraduate courses. You should withdraw from the course by Nov. 15 if, for whatever reason, you are not attending and have missed major assignments.

Please feel free to contact me if you have significant concerns about completing the course, but if you are registered after Nov. 15, you must be assigned a final grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As in all courses, you are expected to follow the Student Code of Conduct. Read about the Code, issues around proper citation, cheating, and plagiarism, and consider your student rights and responsibilities at the following Ryerson website: www.ryerson.ca/academicintegrity/

ACCESS CENTRE

Students with accessibility or disability concerns – In order to facilitate the academic success and access of students with disabilities, they should register with the Access Centre www.ryerson.ca/student services/accesscentre. Before the first graded work is due, students should also inform their instructor through an “Accommodation Form for Professors” that they are registered with the Access Centre and what accommodations are required.

MISSED CLASSES AND/OR EVALUATIONS

Students are required to inform their instructors of any situation which arises during the semester, which may have an adverse effect upon their academic performance, and must request any considerations and accommodations according to the relevant policies and well in advance. Failure to do so will jeopardize any academic appeals.

Medical certificates – If a student misses the deadline for submitting an assignment, or the date of an exam or other evaluation component because of illness, he or she must submit a Ryerson Student Medical Certificate AND an Academic Consideration form within 3 working days of the missed date. Both documents are available at www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/medical.pdf. If you are a full-time or part-time degree student, then you submit your forms to your own program department or school. If you are a certificate or non-certificate student, then you submit your forms to the staff at the front desk of the Chang School.

Religious observance – If a student needs accommodation because of religious observance, he or she must submit a Request for Accommodation of Student Religious, Aboriginal and Spiritual Observance AND an Academic Consideration form within the first 2 weeks of the class or, for a final examination, within 2 weeks of the posting of the examination schedule. If the required absence occurs within the first 2 weeks of classes, or the dates are not known well in advance as they are linked to other conditions, these forms should be submitted with as much lead time as possible in advance of the required absence. Both documents are available at <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/reobservforminstr.pdf>. If you are a full-time or part-time degree student, then you submit the forms to your own program department or school. If you are a certificate or non-certificate student, then you submit the forms to the staff at the front desk of the Chang School.

Schedule of Activities, Readings, and Lectures

- On Blackboard or on e-mail weekly, I may add links to suggested readings, websites, film clips, news items, etc.

SECTION ONE: THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF CHILDHOOD

Week 1 – Lecture Sept 3: Introductions and Key Concepts for Waste and Consumption

Discussion Sept 4: a first in-class theoretical reflection

Week 2 – Lecture Sept 10: Marketing and Advertising—why not to kids, too?

Read: Schor, *Born to Buy*, Chapters 1-3.

Discussion Sept 11: Veblen, “Conspicuous Consumption” and Fiske, “Shopping for Pleasure”

Week 3 – Lecture Sept 17: The Institutionalization of Childhood Consumption

Read: Schor, *Born to Buy*, Chapter 4-6.

Discussion Sept 18: Marx, “Fetishism of Commodity” and Baudrillard, “Genesis of Needs”

Week 4 – Lecture Sep 24: Violence and Junk Food: Is Indulgence Anti-Social?

Read: Schor, *Born to Buy*, Chapters 7-10.

Discussion Sep 25: hooks, “Eating the Other” and Friedan, “The Sexual Sell”

Week 5 – Oct 1: 90 minutes in-class test on Weeks 2-4

NOTE: No Class on Wed. Oct 2, and no theoretical reflection exercise this week.

SECTION TWO: THE ETHICS OF WASTE

Week 6 – Oct 8: Dumpster Diving: All the things we throw away

Read: Hawkins, *Ethics of Waste*, Chapters 1-2.

Discussion Oct 9: Bourdieu, “Aesthetic Sense” and Holt, “Cultural Capital”

NOTE: Thanksgiving and Fall Study Break, October 14-18, Classes are Cancelled

Week 7 – Oct 22: Oh, Crap! Human and Industrial Waste

Read: Hawkins, *Ethics of Waste*, Chapters 3-4.

Discussion Oct 23: Bordo, “Hunger as Ideology” and Galbraith, “Dependence Effect”

Week 8 – Oct 29: Life after Death: Reuse, Recycle, Compost

Read: Hawkins, *Ethics of Waste*, Chapters 5-6.

Discussion Oct 30: Elgin, “Voluntary Simplicity” and McRobbie, “New Rag Trade”

SECTION THREE: GLOBAL FLOWS OF WASTE, STYLE, LABOUR

Week 9 – Nov 5: “Second-Hand” Nostalgia: a possibility for reclaimed culture

Read: [Straw, Will, “Spectacles of Waste,” in A. Boutros and W. Straw, eds., *Circulation and the City: Essays on Urban Culture* \(Montreal: McGill-Queen’s, 2010, 193-213\).](#)

Read: Parsons, Liz, “New Goods, Old Records and Second-Hand Suits: Charity Shopping in South-West England,” *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 5, no 2 (2000): 141-151.

Discussion Nov 6: Hebdige, “Object as Image” and revisit Baudrillard “Genesis of Needs”

Week 10 – Nov 12: eWaste and the Global Flows of Consumption

Read: Grant, Richard and Martin Oteng-Ababio, “Mapping the Invisible and Real ‘African’ Economy: Urban e-Waste Circuitry,” *Urban Geography* 33, no 1 (2012): 1-21 (available online through Ryerson library).

Read: Lepawsky, Josh and Charles Mather, “From Beginnings and Endings to Boundaries and Edges: Rethinking Circulation and Exchange through Electronic Waste,” *Area* 43, no. 3 (2011): 242-249. (available online through Ryerson library).

Discussion Nov 13: Adorno & Horkheimer, “Culture Industry” and revisit Marx “Fetishism”

Week 11 – Nov 19: Clothing Prices and Labour Costs: The Socio-Politics of Sweatshops

Read: Scott, Allen J., “The Changing Global Geography of Low-Technology, Labor-Intensive Industry: Clothing, Footwear and Furniture,” *World Development* 34, no. 9 (2006): 1517-1536.

Read: Schor, Juliet B., “Prices and Quantities: Unsustainable Consumption and the Global Economy,” *Ecological Economics* 55, no. 3 (2005): 309-320.

Discussion Nov 20: Wilson, “Feminism and Fashion” and Schor, “New Politics”

Week 12 – Nov 26: The Socio-Politics of Carbon Taxes and Emissions Reductions

Read: MacKenzie, Donald, “Making Things the Same: Gases, Emissions Rights, and the Politics of Carbon Markets,” *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 34, no. 3 (2009): 440-455.

Read: Aldy, Joseph E. and Robert N. Stavins, “The Promise and Problems of Pricing Carbon: Theory and Experience,” *Journal of Environment and Development* 21, no. 2 (2012): 152-180.

NOTE: No Class on Wed. Nov 27, and no theoretical reflection exercise this week.

Final Exam – To Be Announced, Exam Period is December 3 to 14.

Will focus primarily on Weeks 9 to 12.