**Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, UBC**

**SOCI 230 (3 CR) Shopping, Society, and Sustainability**

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**Office hours:** Wednesday, 1:30-2:30, or by appointment

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**Office hours:** By appointment

**COURSE OVERVIEW:**

It is now widely accepted that our society’s impact on the environment is not sustainable—we cannot live with such material abundance indefinitely. Of course, threats to sustainability extend far beyond you and me. The environmental impact of the fossil fuel industry, the social and environmental effects of urbanization, and the labour injustices in the manufacturing sector are just a few. But in many cases, these macro-level phenomena are tied to a very inconspicuous, everyday practice: shopping.

After a broad introduction to the sociology of consumption, we will use case studies to examine consumer culture in greater detail and in specific settings. Each case study will provide a lens to better understand consumer culture and our place in it. The case studies begin with basic processes of consumption – eating and drinking. We then move from the realm of immediate necessity to examine consumer items associated with communication, identity-building, and social connection. For each consumer case study, we will:

* Identify how consumption has sociological significance;
* Connect consumption to our social identities (how do consumers use this item to say something about who they are, and/or who they want to be?);
* Examine the relationship between consumption, social inequality, and sustainability.

**PRE-REQUISITES AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**There are no pre-requisites for the course. This course does require that you have a device on which to use Top Hat. Contact the instructor if this presents a barrier to your participation.**

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the social and environmental impacts (both positive and negative) of everyday consumption patterns. (LO1)
2. Explain the significance of consumption to social life and identity. (LO2)
3. Apply a sociological theory to explain a consumer ‘problem’ and its solutions. (LO3)
4. Evaluate a range of solutions that seek to address the social and ecological costs of consumption. (LO4)

**COURSE FORMAT:**

The course is organized as an overview of the sociology of consumption with a focus on the impacts of everyday consumption on people and the planet. In Section 1, we will learn why sociologists study consumption—what do we discover about society by understanding our shopping patterns? In Section 2, we will delve into consumer case studies. These case studies unpack a range of consumer ‘moments’ from the everyday (e.g., a cup of coffee) to the (hopefully) once-in-a-lifetime (e.g., a dream wedding). In these case studies we learn more about the social and environmental effects of shopping. Finally, in Section 3, we examine ways to clean up consumption, as we review and analyse individual and market solutions to the problems created by shopping.

The class will meet twice per week (T/Th). Most weeks, the first class will involve an interactive lecture to ensure that students understand the week’s core concepts. The second class in the week will usually start off with a shorter lecture and conclude with a workshop in which students work alone or in small groups to solve a problem related to the week’s theme. Most workshops demand that students critically read a popular text or take a critical look at their own consumption practices.

**GRADING BREAKDOWN:**

* Quizzes 30%
* Reflection Papers 35%
* Participation 10%
* Final Exam 25%

**ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT:**

The points associated with each of these assessment tools and the date due (if applicable) are listed below:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type | Description | | Date | Percentage |
| Quizzes |  | |  |  |
| Quiz 1 | Multiple choice, in-class | | Thursday, Jan 23 | *10* |
| Quiz 2 | Multiple choice, in-class | | Tuesday, Feb 11 | *10* |
| Quiz 3 | Multiple choice, in-class | | Thursday, Mar 10 | *10* |
| Reflection and Analysis Papers (RAP) | |  | | |
|  | Phase 1 | | Tuesday, Feb 4 | *5* |
| Phase 2 | | Tuesday, Mar 3 | *5* |
| Phase 3 | | Friday, April 2 | *25* |
| Participation |  | |  |  |
| Top Hat | Assessed through in-class course engagement | | Each class | *5* |
| Workshops | Interactive, in-class exercises completed in small groups | | ~Weekly (see course outline) | *5* |
| Final Exam | Multiple choice, short answer, essay question | | Exam period | *25* |
| \*Assignments are considered late when turned in after 11:59 p.m. on the due date. Late work will have 10% deducted per day unless there is a reasonable excuse for tardiness. | | | | |

**Quizzes:** Three in-class quizzes will be administered to assess your understanding of the impacts of the consumer society and your knowledge of various theories of consumption. These are short (20-minute), closed-book multiple-choice quizzes that will be held promptly at the beginning of class. Each quiz will contain material presented in previous lectures and readings from the text book.The quizzes are *not* cumulative, meaning that material tested for Quiz 1 will not be repeated for Quiz 2, etc. (L01, L02)

**Reflection and Analysis Paper:** The RAP is a cumulative project, and will be submitted in 3 phases. The assignment is focused on analyzing social/ecological problems related to consumer culture. You will choose from one of two consumer culture case-studies (food or phones). Phase 1 is due Feb 4, Phase 2 is due Mar 3, and Phase 3 is due April 2.

* **Phase 1** of the assignment: research the social and environmental problems associated with your case study topic and write a short, 1-page (250-300 word), essay that describes these problems. (LO1, LO2)
* In **Phase 2**: research and implement a solution to the problems identified in Phase 1, trying out the solution in your own life, and submit a short, 1-page (250-300 word), essay describing your experiences. (LO3, LO4)
* In **Phase 3**: Bring it all together! Write an essay (2000 words) that sociologically analyzes the consumer case-study, its problematic elements, and potential solutions. This essay is due on the last day of class. In this paper, you will make reflexive and critical connections between sociological concepts and theories and your own consumption preferences and habits. (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4)

**Grading for Phase 1 and Phase 2**

* Assignment must be submitted to Canvas
* A strong paper will have an accurately described and clearly-stated social and/or ecological problem (Phase 1) and solution (Phase 2), be well-written, and will appropriately cite at least two academically-credible websites or other sources.
* Papers are graded out of 10 marks and count for 5% of your final grade. See rubric (Appendix A).

**Your Phase 1 and 2 assignments will be evaluated on 2 criteria (see rubric):**

1. Accuracy of description (capturing the macro and micro elements of the issue / solution, using evidence compellingly, convincingly, and appropriately)
2. Eloquence (writing style, tone, grammar, spelling, and citation standards).

**Your Phase 3 essay will be evaluated on 4 criteria:**

1. Critical reading (making clear connections to course concepts, readings, authors and theories; meet minimum citation requirements)
2. Sociological imagination and critical thinking[[1]](#footnote-1) (skillfully, critically, and creatively analyzing your topic, its problematic elements, and solutions)
3. Clarity and force of argument (making a clear point that is introduced and sustained throughout the paper)
4. Eloquence (writing style, tone, grammar, spelling, and citation standards).

**Participation:**

**Top Hat:** Participation will be partly evaluated based on your use of the in-class technology (Top Hat) to answer questions during class as well as your timely submission of brief memos identifying the take-home messages and any key definitions from the week’s reading. Your Top Hat grade is based on participation, not whether your answers are correct or incorrect.

**Workshops:** Participation will also be evaluated by your engagement in workshops. Workshops offer hands-on exercises to put into practice some of the concepts and theories introduced in the lectures. Workshops will be held at the end of class for most Thursdays in the semester. These will be done alone or in small groups (though you each need to complete the workshop individually) and require your familiarity with that week’s readings. Workshops should be submitted through Top Hat. Grading for workshops is automatic and based on submission. However, the TA will review submissions and identify, to the instructor, students whose responses are inaccurate.

**Final Exam:** The final exam evaluates the depth of your knowledge of sociological theories of consumption and your ability to apply these theories to make sense of societal consumption patterns—from the local to the global. The final exam is closed-book and is two hours long. The format: combination of multiple choice, short answer, and short essay. The final exam is cumulative and will test all material presented in the course.

**ACADEMIC** **INTEGRITY**

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply when the matter is referred to the Office of the Dean. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences. A more detailed description of academic integrity, including the University’s policies and procedures, may be found in the [UBC Calendar: Student Conduct and Discipline](http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,0,0).

**ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Academic accommodations help students with a disability or ongoing medical condition overcome challenges that may affect their academic success. Students requiring academic accommodations must register with The Center of Accessibility. The Centre will determine that student's eligibility for accommodations in accordance with [Policy 73: Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](http://www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2010/08/policy73.pdf). Academic accommodations are not determined by your instructors, and instructors should not ask you about the nature of your disability or ongoing medical condition, or request copies of your disability documentation. However, your instructor may consult with the Centre of Accessibility should the accommodations affect the essential learning outcomes of a course.

**ACCESSIBILITY CONCERNS**

If you have an academic concession, please do not contact your instructor or TA about it. Please visit the Office of Accessibility (<http://students.arts.ubc.ca/advising/academic-performance/help-academic-concession/>) and fill out the ‘Request for Academic Concession’ form.

**CONFLICTING RESPONSIBILITIES**

UBC recognizes that students may occasionally have conflicting responsibilities that affect their ability to attend class or examinations. These may include: representing the University, the province or the country in a competition or performance; serving in the Canadian military; or observing a religious rite. They may also include a change in a student’s situation that unexpectedly requires that student to work or take responsibility for the care of a family member, if these were not pre-existing situations at the start of term.

Students with conflicting responsibilities have a duty to arrange their course schedules so as to avoid, as much as possible, any conflicts with course requirements. As soon as conflicting responsibilities arise, students must notify **their Faculty Advising Office** (e.g. Arts Academic Advising), and can request [academic concession](http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,48,0,0#255). Instructors may not be able to comply with all such requests if the academic standards and integrity of the course or program would be compromised.

Varsity student-athletes should discuss any anticipated and unavoidable regular-season absences with the instructor at the start of term, and provide notice of playoff or championship absences in writing as soon as dates are confirmed.

Religious observance may preclude attending classes or examinations at certain times. In accordance with the [UBC Policy on Religious Holidays](https://www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2010/08/policy65.pdf), students who wish to be accommodated for religious reasons must notify their instructors in writing at least two weeks in advance. Instructors provide opportunity for such students to make up work or examinations missed without penalty.

**WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM YOUR INSTRUCTOR AND TAs:**

As your instructor I will do my best to provide a classroom environment that fosters stimulating discussion and where all students feel comfortable participating to the best of their ability. Outside the classroom I will be available to meet during office hours and I will attempt to accommodate students who cannot make it during that time. With respect to feedback, I will work with the TAs to return your work to you within one week of the date you submit your assignment / complete your quiz or exam. If you have questions about a grade, I encourage you to come speak with me during office hours.

**EMAIL COMMUNICATION:**

* Assignments must be submitted via Canvas, not via email.
* All course communication should be conducted through Canvas or your UBC email account - <https://it.ubc.ca/services/email-voice-internet/student-alumni-email-service>
* All emails must include the course code (SOCI 230) in the subject line.
* All emails should be signed with the student’s full name and student number.
* Emails from students will generally be answered within 2 working days of receipt. (Please don’t count on receiving last minute email answers to questions about an assignment. Plan ahead.)
* Treat emails as you would any other professional communication. Proofread. Use appropriate language. Be as concise as possible.

**CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:**

You probably know the basic rules of classroom etiquette, but everybody can use a refresher. You attend a top-ranked research institution and you should conduct yourself in a professional, responsible manner. Here are a few key things to remember:

* Refer to the instructor using standard university etiquette -- “Professor” or “Doctor”. Terms like “miss” “madam”, and “hey” are not appropriate for university communication.
* Turn off your phone when class begins. If there is a reason, either personal or professional, why you need to have the option of using your phone, please let me know and I can make an accommodation.
* If you are late, enter quietly and discreetly, and avoid walking in front of the instructor and projection screen.
* Never record the lecture without explicit permission from the instructor.
* **Laptop usage** is allowed in class, but should be used for notes only. Other uses (e.g., emailing, web surfing) distract your fellow students. Inappropriate laptop use will result in the student being required to turn off the laptop and it may affect their participation mark.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

*Introducing Sociology Using the Stuff of Everyday Life*. By: Josée Johnston, Kate Cairns, and Shyon Baumann. 2017. Routledge.

Additional online course materials and readings are available through the syllabus and course website.

# Class Schedule

### Week 1. Introduction

Date: January 7

Readings:

1. Syllabus

Date: January 9

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Preface for Students, Chapter 1

### WEEK 2: Why study consumers? What is consumer culture?

Date: Jan 14, Consumption, Reflecting on the *Cultural*

Readings:

1. Schor, Juliet B. “[Conspicuous Consumption](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosc096).” *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Ritzer, George (ed). Blackwell Publishing, 2007. Blackwell Reference Online.

Date: Jan 16, Consumption, Reflecting on the *Material*, **Workshop 1**

Readings:

1. Alana Semuels, The Atlantic, Aug 2018. “[We are all accumulating mountains of things](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/08/online-shopping-and-accumulation-of-junk/567985/)”.
2. In class, watch: “The Story of Stuff” [20 min video]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM&vl=en>

### Week 3. Shopping and The Culture of Consumerism

Date: Jan 21

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology*: Chapter 5
2. Zukin, Sharon. "Shopping." *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Ritzer, George (ed). Blackwell Publishing, 2007. Blackwell Reference Online.

Date: Jan 23, **Quiz 1**: 20 minutes (**covers material up to and including Jan 21**)

Readings:

1. Jacobs, Suzanne. 2016. “[Consumerism plays a huge role in climate change](https://grist.org/living/consumerism-plays-a-huge-role-in-climate-change/)”. *Grist.com* <https://grist.org/living/consumerism-plays-a-huge-role-in-climate-change/>
2. Atkin, Emily. 2019. “[Climate change is the symptom. Consumer culture is the disease](https://newrepublic.com/article/154147/climate-change-symptom-consumer-culture-disease).” *New Republic.* <https://newrepublic.com/article/154147/climate-change-symptom-consumer-culture-disease>

**--CONSUMER CASE STUDIES--**

### Week 4. FAST food

Date: Jan 28

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 2

Date: Jan 30, **Workshop 2**

1. Readings: *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 3

### Week 5. coffee

Date: Feb 4, **Assignment: RAP Phase 1 due** (submit by 11:59 pm to avoid penalty)

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 4

Date: Feb 6, **Workshop 3**

Readings:

1. Cole, N. L. and K. Brown. 2014. “The Problem with Fair Trade Coffee.” *Contexts* 13(1):50–55.

### Week 6. Toys

Date: Feb 11, **Quiz 2**: 20 minutes **(covers Chapters 2-4 from course text)**

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 7

Date: Feb 13, **Workshop 4**

Readings:

1. Ornstein, Peggy. 2014. [“What do little girls really learn from ‘career Barbies’”](https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2014/03/12/what-do-little-girls-really-learn-from-career-barbies/), *Sociological Images*.
2. Passaro, Jamie. July 31st, 2015. “The chemicals in a plastic doll,” *The Atlantic.*

***READING WEEK!***

### Week 7. WeddingS

Date: Feb 25

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology.* Chapter 8.

Date: Feb 27, **Workshop 5**

Readings:

1. The New Yorker: [The Bride in her Head](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-bride-in-her-head)
2. The Conversation: [The Conversation on Dirty Gold](http://theconversation.com/how-activism-pushes-companies-to-be-political-86892)

### Week 8. Smart PhoneS

Date: Mar 3, **Assignment: RAP Phase 2 due** (submit by 11:59 pm to avoid late penalty)

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 9

Date: Mar 5, **Workshop 6**

Readings:

1. [Carbon footprint of ICT](https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/what-on-earth-newsletter-smartphone-carbon-footprint-1.4904887) (Background research)
2. [Smartphones and generational changes](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/) (Follow-up research at PEW 2015 Teens, Social Media, see text p.272)

**--NEGOTIATING THE SOCIAL WORLD WITH CONSUMER GOODS--**

### Week 9. Looking Good & Being Unique

Date: Mar 10, **Quiz 3**: **(covers Chapters 7-11 from course text)**

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 10 + 11

Date: Mar 12, The material impact of consumer culture, **Workshop 7**

Readings:

1. Joy et al. 2012 on fast fashion and sustainability

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2752/175174112X13340749707123>

### Week 10. What’s on your playlist?

Date: Mar 17, **Workshop 8,** Guest Speaker: Emily Truong-Cheung

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology*: Chapter 12
2. Thompson, Derek. 2014. “[The Shazam Effect](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/12/the-shazam-effect/382237/?single_page=true),” 2014. *Atlantic Monthly*. Posted Nov 17 2014.

Date: Mar 19

In-class film:

1. Homecoming: A Film by Beyoncé

### Week 11. Loving (and Hating) Car Culture

Date: Mar 24

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology*: Chapter 13

Date: Mar 26, **Workshop 9**

Readings:

1. [Getting over driving](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/01/the-decline-of-the-drivers-license/425169/) in The Atlantic
2. [Cycle, Walk, Drive or Train.](https://theconversation.com/cycle-walk-drive-or-train-weighing-up-the-healthiest-and-safest-ways-to-get-around-the-city-100238) In The Conversation.

### Week 12. CLEANING UP Consumer Culture

Date: Mar 31

Reading:

1. FILM: NO Impact Man (watch on your own).
2. Schor, Juliet. 2010. *Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth*. Chapter 2.

Date: Apr 1, **Workshop 10**

Class wrap-up

**Assignment: Phase 3: final RAP due April 2** (submit by 11:59 pm to avoid late penalty)

1. What is critical thinking? Briefly, critical thinking involves a higher-order of thinking that goes beyond *description*, and involves *analysis*. Critical thinking means skeptically asking *how* we know things, not just listing what you think are facts and truths. Critical thinking also involves reflexivity – testing and critically examining your own assumptions and thinking process. Trying watching this short video on critical thinking produced by teaching experts at UBC: <http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/student-toolkits/thinking-critically/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)