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

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

**Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-1:50**

**Academic Year 2020, courses held online. See Canvas for course Zoom info.**

**Course instructor:** Dr. Emily Huddart Kennedy, [emily.kennedy@ubc.ca](mailto:emily.kennedy@ubc.ca)

**Teaching Assistants:** Carly Hamdon and Divija Madhani (see Canvas for emails)

**Office hours:** Office hours daily (M,T,W,Th), on Canvas Chat, 4:00-5:00, or by appointment (Zoom), see Canvas for more information.

**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 TopHat account, which is available free to UBC students.

**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)

**LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT:**

UBC’s Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on in their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site. My home, from where I will be teaching this course, is located on traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the səl̓ilwətaɁɬ təməxʷ (Tsleil-Waututh), S’ólh Téméxw (Stó:lō), Qayqayt, Stz’uminus and šxʷməθkʷəy̓əmaɁɬ təməxʷ (Musqueam) people.

**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.

Because our class will be held online this year, I have structured most of our time to be as interactive as possible and to involve a lot of small group work and hands-on workshops. *For the most part this will be our weekly schedule*:

* We will meet synchronously on Tuesdays, when I will give an interactive lecture and you will use TopHat and participate in small groups to follow along and engage with the material. **Note: I will record synchronous lectures but these will only be posted to Canvas for 2 weeks, due to annoying storage limits.**
* On Thursdays, there will be (mostly) fun workshops. Three of these are graded and the remaining workshops just count toward your participation grade. While you are welcome to complete these asynchronously (by watching the recorded class and turning in the workshop by the end of the day), you will likely get the most out of the workshops by coming to the class.

*A Comment on Online Learning*

During this pandemic, the shift to online learning has greatly altered teaching and studying at UBC, including changes to health and safety considerations. Keep in mind that some UBC courses might cover topics that are censored or considered illegal by non-Canadian governments. This may include, but is not limited to, human rights, representative government, defamation, obscenity, gender or sexuality, and historical or current geopolitical controversies. If you are a student living abroad, you will be subject to the laws of your local jurisdiction, and your local authorities might limit your access to course material or take punitive action against you. UBC is strongly committed to academic freedom, but has no control over foreign authorities (please visit [this site](http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,33,86,0) for an articulation of the values of the University conveyed in the Senate Statement on Academic Freedom). Thus, we recognize that students will have legitimate reason to exercise caution in studying certain subjects. If you have concerns regarding your personal situation, consider postponing taking a course with manifest risks, until you are back on campus or reach out to your academic advisor to find substitute courses. For further information and support, please visit: <http://academic.ubc.ca/supportresources/freedom-expression>

**GRADING BREAKDOWN:**

* Quizzes (4, 10% each): 40%
* Reflection Paper (3 submissions): 35%
* Participation
  + TopHat: 10%
  + Workshops (3, 5% each): 15%

**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 28 | *10* |
| Quiz 2 | Multiple choice, in-class | | Tuesday, Feb 23 | *10* |
| Quiz 3 | Multiple choice, in-class | | Tuesday, Mar 16 | *10* |
| Quiz 4 | Multiple choice, in-class | | Tuesday, Apr 6 | *10* |
| Reflection and Analysis Papers (RAP) | |  | | |
|  | Phase 1 | | Tuesday, Feb 9 | *5* |
| Phase 2 | | Tuesday, Mar 9 | *5* |
| Phase 3 | | Wednesday, Apr 15 | *25* |
| Participation |  | |  |  |
| Top Hat | Assessed through in-class course engagement | | Weekly | *10* |
| Workshops | Hands-on application of the thinking frames | | Three throughout the term | *15* |
| *\*Assignments are considered late when turned in after 11:59 p.m. on the due date. Late work happens, we know, but it is difficult as your teachers to manage. Work submitted late will be given a grade and some comments, but will not receive extensive written feedback.* | | | | |

**Quizzes:** Four 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), multiple-choice quizzes that will be held promptly at the beginning of class. Because we’re online and I don’t like Proctorio, these will be open-book, but please use your notes and not the course textbook. 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 three consumer culture case-studies (meat, fashion, or phones) and identify a more specific focus within one of those categories (e.g., hamburgers, over-supply of used clothing, Instagram). You will eventually apply a *thinking frame* to analyze your topic. Phase 1 is due Feb 4, Phase 2 is due Mar 3, and Phase 3 is due April 8.

* **Phase 1** of the assignment: research the social and/or environmental problems associated with your case study topic and write a short, 1-page 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 essay describing your experiences. (LO3, LO4)
* In **Phase 3**: Bring it all together! Write an essay (1500-2000 words) that sociologically analyzes the consumer case-study, its problematic elements, and (perhaps) potential solutions. 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 academic sources (other credible websites or other sources are acceptable in addition).
* Papers are graded out of 10 marks and count for 5% of your final grade.

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

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 (TopHat) to answer questions during class as well as your attendance. Your TopHat grade is mostly based on participation, not whether your answers are correct or incorrect.

**Workshops:** There are two types of workshops: graded and ungraded. The graded workshops are completed individually and ask you to apply a thinking frame to a current event. Ungraded workshops can be completed in small groups and give you a chance to deepen your knowledge of the week’s core concepts. Both types of workshops should be submitted through Canvas (even if you do the workshop in a group, you each need to submit an assignment). The TAs will review the ungraded workshops in order to identify any concepts that are unclear.

**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 an online classroom environment that is informative and engaging and where all students feel comfortable participating to the best of their ability. Your TAs and I will be available to meet by appointment via Zoom and through the week on the Canvas Chat. With respect to feedback on assessments, I will work with the TAs to return your work to you within ten days of the date you submit your assignment / complete your quiz or exam. You should send all email queries to the TAs and they will contact me if necessary.

**EMAIL COMMUNICATION:**

* Assignments must be submitted via Canvas, not via email.
* **You should send all email queries to the TAs and they will contact me if necessary.**
* 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 your 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.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

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

* See Canvas for information on renting this textbook. It is available for purchase at the UBC Bookstore along with other online vendors.
* Additional online course materials and readings are available through the syllabus and Canvas Library Online Course Reserves.

# Class Schedule\* (see canvas for the most up-to-date version)

### Week 1. Introduction

Date: January 12

In our first class, we’ll talk about the structure of the course and I’ll try to convey why I think that learning about consumer culture is so important. Note: this class will be much better if you read the syllabus.

Readings:

1. Syllabus

Date: January 14

Today we will meet synchronously to talk about why sociologists study consumption and what you can learn about the world through an examination of the stuff of everyday life. We will also have time to address questions from the syllabus.

Readings:

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

### WEEK 2: consumer culture

Date: Jan 19, Consumption

This week is all about the material and cultural dimensions of consumer culture. For today, we will read about the culture of conspicuous consumption and about the impacts of this culture on people and the planet.

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.
2. 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/)”.
3. Watch: “The Story of Stuff” [20 min video]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM&vl=en>

Date: Jan 21

Consumption, *Cultural /* *Material Thinking Frame*, **Graded** **Workshop 1**

This is our first graded workshop and you can find instructions through Canvas Announcements. Use the class Slack channel to ask any questions. The workshop is due by the end of the day and should be submitted through Canvas.

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

Date: Jan 26

This week we will talk about shopping to wrap up our focus on why sociologists study consumer culture and how doing so allows us to learn about the social world and the impacts of humans on the environment. Next week we get started on our consumer case studies.

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology*: Chapter 5

Date: Jan 28

**\*Be sure to complete Quiz 1 today**: 20 minutes (**covers material up to and including Jan 21**)

For today’s workshop, you will need to read these two brief texts and answer questions about them. Submit your work through Canvas by the end of the day.

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: Feb 2

Now we get into the case studies! We start out with a focus on fast food.

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 2 and 3

Date: Feb 4

For this week’s (ungraded) workshop, you will read about beef and put forth an argument about whether or not you think meat production is sustainable.

Readings/Materials:

1. [McDonald’s Sustainability](https://www.mcdonalds.com/ca/en-ca/about-our-food/sustainability.html)

### Week 5. coffee

Date: Feb 9

Mmmmm….Coffee. Where would I be without it? What do our coffee choices say about our social class and identity?

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 4

\*Note: **Assignment: RAP Phase 1 due** via Canvas by the end of the day

Date: Feb 11

This is our second graded workshop, this time using the *Structure /* *Agency Thinking Frame* to reflect on the power of market-based solutions to the environmental justice problems of coffee. Submit **Graded** **Workshop 2** via Canvas by the end of the day.

Readings:

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

***READING WEEK! HOORAY!***

### Week 6. Toys

Date: Feb 23

Toys are a commodity that helps us to understand gender identity and the way that gender roles are produced in our society. We also reflect on how parents from different class backgrounds buy toys for their kids. Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 7

Date: Feb 25

**\*Be sure to complete Quiz 2** **today** **(covers Chapters 2-4 from course text and assoc. course content).** The reading for today’s workshop will NOT be on Quiz 2. For the workshop, read Ornstein’s piece and submit your answers to the workshop via Canvas by the end of the day.

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*.

### Week 7. WeddingS

Date: Mar 2

Weddings are a big business and are a great example of a consumption event with a lot of historical and personal significance and environmental impacts. We’ll get into the environmental content in the workshop.

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology.* Chapter 8.

Date: Mar 4

Although there are plenty of environmental impacts associated with weddings, today’s ungraded workshop focuses on gold.

Readings:

1. The Conversation: [Dirty Gold](http://theconversation.com/how-activism-pushes-companies-to-be-political-86892)

### Week 8. Smart PhoneS

Date: Mar 9

It’s hard to imagine life without our phones! Today we are going to delve into an examination of what our phones say about us, and about society more broadly.

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 9

**\*Note: Assignment: RAP Phase 2 due** via Canvas by end of day

Date: Mar 11

For the final graded workshop, you will need to use your *Micro /* *Macro Thinking Frame* to connect the environmental impacts of phones to your own use of a phone. Submit **Graded** **Workshop 3** via Canvas by the end of the day.

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)

### Week 9. Looking Good & Being Unique

Date: Mar 16

Today we will talk about fashion and beauty, using these topics to investigate gender and race identities and inequalities. It’s a big day, content-wise, plus, you are also completing **Quiz 3**: **(covers Chapters 7-9 from course text and assoc. course content)** at the start of class.

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology:* Chapter 10 + 11

Date: Mar 18

Today we’re going to watch TV! Specifically, we’ll watch Hasan Minhaj’s episode on fast fashion and then talk about the material impact of fashion in small groups.

Materials:

1. Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj, Fast Fashion

### Week 10. What’s on your playlist?

Date: Mar 23

This is new content in the course and I’m excited about it! Music is a way into understanding social problems, including racism and cultural appropriation, but also appreciating what consumer culture generates in terms of art and story-telling.

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology*: Chapter 12

Date: Mar 25

This ungraded workshop gives you a choice of two avenues to reflect on music and the justice system. As always, submit your work via Canvas by the end of day.

Readings:

1. Either:
   1. Listen: [Slow Burn, Season 3, Episode 1](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/season-3-trailer/id1315040130?i=1000454792812)
   2. **Or** read: Dunbar, A., Kubrin, C. E., & Scurich, N. (2016). The threatening nature of “rap” music. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, *22*(3), 280.

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

Date: Mar 30

This week is all about transportation and, in particular, cars. Talking about cars lets us think about culture and masculinity at the same time as we acknowledge the material impacts of driving.

Readings:

1. *Introducing Sociology*: Chapter 13

Date: Apr 1

Well, no one is really going anywhere these days, but this week’s workshop will be experiential, in that you will reflect on the cultural narratives that you are aware of when you get around your city. Submit via Canvas.

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: Apr 6

This is our last week of content!

**\*Be sure to complete Quiz 4 today**: **(covers Chapters 10-13 from course text).** Our class today will be a discussion of how we might respond to the various issues and challenges that consumer culture creates. What is your role in this response?

Reading:

1. Schor, Juliet. 2010. *Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth*. Chapter 2.

Date: Apr 8

For the last workshop, I’ll ask you to watch No Impact Man on your own and submit your reflections via Canvas (ungraded).

Materials:

1. FILM: No Impact Man.

### Week 13

Date: Apr 13

No readings to do for this class wrap-up, but there will be a chance to ask questions about the final RAP assignment and we will have lots of small group work and class discussions about all that you’ve learned over the past semester.

* No readings

**Assignment: Phase 3: final RAP due April 15** (via Canvas, of course)

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)