Sociology of Consumption

SYP 4420/001 (3 Credit Hours)

Tuesdays 9:30 am-12: 20 pm, ES 116, Davie

Instructor: Dr. Naihua Zhang

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\* Contact me via email for all course matters, I will reply with in 24 hours, usually much sooner. It is important that all emails begin with the following placed in the subject line of your email: SYP 4420 (your last name) and then the subject of email. If you email me from Blackboard site, please use “Send email” rather than “Messages” because the latter is not connected to my mailbox thus creating obstruction to communication.

“A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone.” – Henry Thoreau (1817-1862)

“And I encourage you all to go shopping more.” – George W. Bush

Course Description

This course is a sociological exploration of consumption and consumerism. It focuses on the expansion of consumerism and development of consumer society in the 20th century and the consequences of overconsumption on the environment, society, community and family, personal identity and social relations. One line of inquiry provides a macro overview of the subject matter, starting with sociological explanation and concepts of consumption and consumerism and its historical development, moves on to examine the forces that cultivate consumers and consumption demands, followed by discussion of the dire consequences of consumer culture to human society and planet earth. Another line of inquiry is more micro in nature, looking at how afflunenza, the all-consuming epidemic has affected individuals, families, community, society, and the environment. It demands our attention and action to finding the cure and addresses the planet’s most urgent crises and establishes an economy that achieves true biological sustainability and shared wealth for all. It is up to everybody to make right choices and act individually and collectively.

Learning Objectives

* To acquire sociological perspectives that help us to thinking about consumption and consumerism
* To understand the history of development of consumerism in the United States and other parts of the world
* To appreciate the forces that shaping consumer behavior and demands
* To understand the consequences of consumerism to the environment that is unsustainable
* To articulate alternatives to the consumer society and specify changes that need to take place at different levels

Course Evaluation

1. Two in-class essay exams on main ideas form the readings, lectures & videos, 25% each, 50% in total.
2. Five weeks’ daily journal recording the time, energy and money you spend on activities such as work consumption, family, housework, and community/civic engagement, etc., itemized, including monetary amount of income and expenditure. The first week is for practice; data from the remaining month will be used in your paper (explained below), 15%, including final tables based on collected data.
3. Paper: Fighting back Affluenza on three fronts: at environmental, societal and personal levels. It should be 6-7 pages in length, double-spaced, 12 point font, 15%. See separate document for details.
4. Attendance: 10%. Students are expected to attend all classes. If you have a legitimate reason for your absence (religious observations, jury duty, for example), it must be provided to me in writing in advance or immediately after the occurrence. In case of sickness, a doctor’s note is needed. Three (3) unexcused absences will result in an automatic F. You need to be in class for its entirety to receive full credit for attendance.
5. Preparedness for class and participation, 10%. You need to complete the reading prior to coming to class and be ready to discuss them. You are required to always bring both of your textbooks to class every time we meet. Practice active listening and actively participation in class and group discussions, and make a good effort to maintain a positive learning environment for all. Make sure you check your FAU email regularly for class updates. Six percept (6%) of the participation grade goes to quizzes on the reading of the week.
6. Academic Integrity: All students are expected to pursue scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Cheating and plagiarism are not acceptable and will be severely punished. Please refer to university’s policy on academic irregularity.

Grading System

A = 90-100; B+ = 88-89; B = 82-87; B- = 80-81; C+ = 78-79; C = 72-77;

C- = 70-71; D+ = 68-69; D = 62-67; D- = 60-61; F = 0-59

Required Readings

Barry Smart. 2010 *Consumer Society: Critical Issues and Environmental Consequences*.  Sage ( ISBN-13: 978-1-84787-050-6)

[John de Graaf](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=ntt_athr_dp_sr_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=John+de+Graaf&search-alias=books&text=John+de+Graaf&sort=relevancerank), [David Wann](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=ntt_athr_dp_sr_2?ie=UTF8&field-author=David+Wann&search-alias=books&text=David+Wann&sort=relevancerank), and [Thomas H Naylor](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=ntt_athr_dp_sr_3?ie=UTF8&field-author=Thomas+H+Naylor&search-alias=books&text=Thomas+H+Naylor&sort=relevancerank). 2014. *Affluenza: How Overconsumption Is Killing Us—and How to Fight Back* (3rd edition). Berrett-Koehler Publishers (ISBN-13: 978-1609949273)

Recommended:

[Vicki Robin,](http://www.us.penguingroup.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,1000014043,00.html) Joe Dominguez, and Monique Tilford. 2008. *Your Money or Your Life: 9 Steps to Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Achieving Financial Independence*. NY: Penguin Group (USA)

[Rob Dietz](http://www.amazon.com/Rob-Dietz/e/B008L4A1G0/ref=ntt_athr_dp_pel_1) and [Dan O'Neill](http://www.amazon.com/Dan-ONeill/e/B00AP5L2SY/ref=ntt_athr_dp_pel_2). 2013. *Enough Is Enough: Building a Sustainable Economy in a World of Finite Resources.* Publisher: Berrett-Koehler Publishers (SBN-13: 978-1609948054)

Reading Schedules:

8/19:

Introduction and course overview

Video in class: Affluenza

Part I: Consumption and Consumerism: Conceptual Issues and History

8/26:

Smart, Chapter 1:Consumer Society

John de Graaf et al: Introduction

9/2: John de Graaf et al: Part Two” causes (chapters 11- 16)

Part II Cultivating Consumers and Promoting Consumer Demand

9/9:

[John de Graaf et al:](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=ntt_athr_dp_sr_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=John+de+Graaf&search-alias=books&text=John+de+Graaf&sort=relevancerank) Part III Treatment (Chapters 17-18)

Reference material pertaining to data collection on how you spend your money and time:

Robin & Dominguez 08 Chapter 2 Money Ain't what it used to be A

Robin & Dominguez 08 Chapter 3 Where is it all going?  
 Due in class: A brief summary of your Affluenza Self-Diagnosis Test result & reflection. It should be typed, no more than one page, bringing in the hard copy to class

Start your journal today

9/16:

Smart, Chapter 3: Cultivating Consumers: Advertising, Marketing & Branding

John de Graaf et al, Part III Treatment: Chapter 22

9/23:

Smart, Chapter 4: Designing Obsolescence, Promoting Consumer Demand

John de Graaf et al, Part III Treatment: Chapter 21

9/30: **1st Essay Exam**

10/7**:**

Smart, Chapter 5: Globalization and modern consumer culture

[John de Graaf et al:](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=ntt_athr_dp_sr_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=John+de+Graaf&search-alias=books&text=John+de+Graaf&sort=relevancerank)  Part I Symptoms, Chapters 1-4

Part III. Consumer Society: Consequences and Alternative

10/14:

Smart, Chapter 6: Consequences of Consumerism

[John de Graaf et al:](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=ntt_athr_dp_sr_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=John+de+Graaf&search-alias=books&text=John+de+Graaf&sort=relevancerank) Part I Symptoms, chapters 5-7

10/21:

Smart, Chapter 7: Consumption and the Environment

[John de Graaf et al:](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=ntt_athr_dp_sr_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=John+de+Graaf&search-alias=books&text=John+de+Graaf&sort=relevancerank) Part I Symptoms, Chapters 8-10

10/28: Smart, Chapter 8: Consuming futures I: Business as usual

Smart, Chapter 9: Consuming futures II: ‘Green’ and sustainable alternatives

**11/4: Second Essay Exam**

**11/11: Veteran’s Day, no class!**

11/18: Smart, Chapter 8: Consuming futures I: Business as usual

Smart, Chapter 9: Consuming futures II: ‘Green’ and sustainable alternatives

11/25 John de Graaf et al, Part III Treatment: Chapters 19-20, 23-25

**Film: Escaping from Affluenza**

12/2 Reading Day

**Dec. 4 Thursday, 7:45-10:15 am: Sharing experiences and resolutions with your follow students, final Paper Due on BB and hard copy in class**

Syllabus is subject to change to fit the need for better learning.

University Policies:

ACCOMMONDATION FOR DISABILITY:

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) -- in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880); in Davie, LA 240 (954-236-1222); in Jupiter, SR 110 (561-799-8010); or at the Treasure Coast, CO 117 (772-873-3441) – and follow all OSD procedures.

ACADEMIC IRREGULARITY**:**

Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see University Regulation 4.001 at <http://www.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg_4.001_5-26-10_FINAL.pdf>