

SOCIOLOGY OF CONSUMPTION

SOC 496: Topics in Sociology, Class No: LEC 37199 (3 credits)
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Fall 2023

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 14:30am – 15:45pm CST
Room: 1163 Mechanical Engineering Building

Course Canvas URL: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/371313>

Course Designation: Level – Advanced, L&S Credit

- Counts as Liberal Arts and Science credit in L&S

Instructional mode: Face-to-Face

Prerequisites: Junior standing or (SOC 181, SOC/C&E SOC 210, or 211)

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 16.00-18.00, or by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW

Why do we buy the things we buy? We live in societies in which most adults spend a significant part of their lives working for pay and using the money earned to buy various goods available on the market. While some of these goods may be said to meet basic physiological needs (food, defense against cold weather), physiology alone does not explain neither the variety nor the quantity of goods we consume. Since the early days of sociology, sociologists have sought to explain why we consume as we do, and to what consequences for society and nature. Competing theories argued that people consume to attain status (Veblen), to gain an illusion of realizing unrealizable dreams that mass culture imposes on them (Frankfurt school, Baudrillard), to define their identity and achieve a sense of personhood (consumer culture theories), to draw social boundaries and exclude outsiders (Bourdieu), to champion certain political causes (politicized consumption theories), and even to resist ideological hegemony (cultural studies). The aim of this course is to explore all of these insights into the nature of modern consumption.

The course is organized in a (roughly) chronological fashion. It starts with historical accounts of the birth of the consumer society and its contrasts with the previous economic formations. We proceed to the early days of the sociology of consumption (Veblen, Simmel) and then discuss the mass consumer society as it emerged in the US in the 1930s-1950s, with its various supporting institutions (advertisement, consumer research, etc.). We will further discuss the changes in consumption patterns occurring in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the emergence of youth subcultures and the multiplication of lifestyles, and new trends in advertisement. We then discuss in detail Pierre Bourdieu's work on tastes and its function as an instrument of social exclusion, used by various factions of elites against non-elite groups and against each other. Various emerging cultural phenomena (cultural omnivorousness, "trickle-upward" and "trickle-round" fashion cycles, "no-brow" consumption, etc.) are further discussed in

the light of Bourdieu's theory. In the closing sections of the course, we will discuss, first, consumption in its comparative dimension and, second, ethical consumption and various responses to ecological challenges.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. **Understanding Consumer Behavior and Motivations:**
 - Define the key concepts related to consumer behavior and motivations.
 - Explore the various factors influencing why individuals buy certain products or engage in specific consumption patterns.
 - Analyze how sociological theories explain consumer behavior, from meeting basic needs to fulfilling social and psychological desires.
2. **Examining the Societal Impact of Consumption:**
 - Evaluate the social and environmental consequences of modern consumption patterns.
 - Critically assess the role of consumption in shaping identity, status, and social boundaries.
 - Investigate how consumer culture interacts with larger social structures and norms.
3. **Analyzing Theoretical Approaches to Consumption:**
 - Identify and differentiate between prominent theoretical perspectives in the sociology of consumption, such as Veblen's and Bourdieu's.
 - Evaluate the strengths and limitations of each theoretical framework in explaining diverse consumption practices.
 - Apply theoretical insights to real-world scenarios to comprehend the complex interplay between culture, identity, and consumption.
4. **Exploring Trends and Changes in Consumption Patterns:**
 - Examine historical shifts in consumption patterns and their implications for society and culture.
 - Interpret emerging trends in consumption, including cultural omnivorousness, "trickle-round" cycles, and sustainable consumption.

CREDITS

In this class, we'll have two classes every week, each lasting 75 minutes throughout the fall semester. You can expect to spend about 2 hours outside of class each week on course activities like reading, writing, and doing your own research.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS

The main focus of our work in this course is reading the assigned texts. The readings you'll find below come in two types. The ones marked with a * are a must-read – they're mandatory. The other readings are recommended, and if you're familiar with them, you'll earn extra points when we discuss things together (and you'll enjoy the course even more). Please make sure to read the mandatory texts before our class sessions and be prepared to discuss them. On average, the mandatory readings for each class are about 30 pages. But the lengths and difficulty of the texts can vary, so it's a good idea to start reading the longer ones ahead of time.

Course Materials: Most mandatory readings are available as PDF files in Canvas. Missing readings can be either easily found on the Internet (I'll provide links in the course schedule below), or accessible within the university network, usually through Jstor. If you're having trouble finding any text, don't hesitate to reach out to me – I'm here to help!

A lot of the required readings can be found in a book called "*The Consumer Society Reader*," edited by Schor, J., & Holt, D. B. (2011), and published by The New Press. If the topic interests you, you might want to consider getting this book from the University Bookstore.

Beyond academic texts, we also have other materials like novels, plays, advertisements, and more. You don't have to read these, but I will mention them in class discussions (plus, many of them are recognized as great works of art!).

It's important to know that this course is like a journey through the history of how social sciences have studied consumption. Some of the texts, especially the older ones, are likely to seem old-fashioned in the way they talk about things or the way they view certain groups of people. But seeing how our predecessors thought helps us understand our own biases better. It's all part of growing, even if it feels a bit awkward sometimes.

Attendance and Participation: Our classes will have a mix of lectures (about 2/3 of the time) and discussions (1/3). It's important that you come prepared to talk about the readings we've been assigned. That means being ready to sum up what the authors are saying, giving your own examples to explain their ideas, pointing out where their arguments might be problematic, and, not the least, speaking up if there's something you're not getting. Don't worry if some of the readings seem tough – we're here to learn how to tackle challenging texts. Some of the texts we'll talk about (like Adorno, Baudrillard, Bourdieu) are challenging by any standards. Many scholars spent lives debating their meanings. It's totally okay to feel a bit lost when reading them (honestly, it's hard not to!). But remember, if you're confused, chances are others are too. So, it's a great opportunity for a class discussion to figure out what's puzzling us.

Participation isn't mandatory, but if you don't show up regularly, you won't get as much out of our discussions and that might affect your chance to earn points for participation.

Written Assignments: There will be four written assignments in this course. Assignments #1 and #2 will each contribute 10% to your final grade, while assignments #3 and #4 will count for 15%. You can find the deadlines for these assignments in the Table provided. Please keep in mind that the schedule aligns the assignments with the corresponding classes. The deadlines are set this way to make the workload balanced throughout the semester, which means they might be due a week or two later than the related class.

If you submit your assignments after the deadline, they'll have a lower score. For every day your assignment is late, it will lose 10 points out of 100.

All assignments should be submitted through Canvas.

Closed-Book, Closed-Note Quiz: We'll have a short quiz on November 7. The quiz covers the readings you've been assigned up to that point. It might include material that we haven't talked about in class. This will be a pen-and-paper quiz – no electronics. I'll ask you not to use any devices while taking the quiz to make sure it's fair for everyone.

Closed Book Exam: There will be a comprehensive closed-book, closed-note exam on December 20. This paper-and-pencil exam will include multiple choice, fill in the

blank, true/false, and short answer questions. It will cover all the readings you've been assigned throughout the semester.

Grading: Each assessment has a specific weight, which you can see in the table below. Each assessment will be given a score between 1 and 100. To calculate your final score, we'll multiply the weight of each assessment by the score you got and then divide it by 100. This will give us your final grade for that assessment.

<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Date due</i>
Participation	20%	n/a
Assignment 1	10%	Sep. 26
Assignment 2	10%	Oct. 10
Assignment 3	10%	Oct. 24
Quiz	10%	Nov. 7
Assignment 4	15%	Nov. 21
Final exam	25%	Dec. 20
TOTAL	100%	

The course will be graded according to the following scale:

A 94-100%

AB 88-93%

B 84-87%

BC 78-83%

C 70-77%

D 60-69%

F 59 or less

There will be no curving.

COURSE POLICIES

HOW WE'LL COMMUNICATE: All course-related communication will be through Canvas or email. Make sure you're getting notifications from Canvas and check your email regularly. I'll do my best to reply within 48 hours during the semester (though I can't promise immediate responses, so please don't wait until the last minute to ask questions!).

Feedback is Gold: I'm eager to hear any questions you have, but I'd also really appreciate any feedback you can give. Since this is my first time teaching in the US, there may be many things I haven't thought about. Your input can help make this course better!

ELECTRONIC DEVICES: Using your devices for non-educational activities (like texting or social media) can distract others and make being in class less helpful for you. I'll ask you to minimize their use in class so that everyone can focus.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT: University policy states: "Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental to the mission of higher education and of the University of Wisconsin system" (Wisconsin Administrative Code 14.01). Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or

expulsion. All instances of plagiarism are reported to department administration. For more information, see this page: "[Academic Misconduct](#)."

Indeed, the boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not may be blurred. If you're ever unsure about something, don't hesitate to ask me or your advisor for help. We're here to support you! You can also check out the [Student Resources for Academic Integrity](#) for guidance.

Special Note About Using ChatGPT: In this course, you're allowed to use tools like ChatGPT to come up with ideas or polish your writing. Keep in mind, though, that while ChatGPT is often very helpful, it can't replace your own work. Also, be cautious – sometimes it might give wrong answers.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES STATEMENT:

University policy states: "The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy ([UW-855](#)) require the university to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities to access and participate in its academic programs and educational services."

If you need any instructional accommodation, it's important to tell me at the start of the semester (ideally within the first two weeks). You can also let me know as soon as you're approved for accommodations, if that occurs later. I'll either work directly with you or team up with the McBurney Center to make sure you get the support you need for classes and coursework. Remember, anything about disabilities and the help you get is private and protected by FERPA, a law that keeps your education records confidential (See: [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#))

ACADEMIC CALENDAR & RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES: Please let me know during the first two weeks of the course if you would not be able to attend any classes due to religious observances. If such days fall on quiz or exam dates, accommodation will be made.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Sep.7) Introduction. What is a consumer society?

No mandatory reading

Douglas, Mary and Baron Isherwood (1979), *The World of Goods*, New York: Basic. "Preface", pp.i-xv

Warde, A. (2015). The sociology of consumption: Its recent development. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41, 117-134.

A historical introduction: The consumer revolution

(Sep.12) The world before mass consumption

* Braudel, F. (1992). *Civilization and capitalism, 15th-18th century, vol. I: The perspective of the world*. Univ of California Press. Chapter 4.3 ("Costume and fashion"), pp.311-33

*Arensberg, C. M. (1968). *The Irish countryman: An anthropological study*. Waveland Press. Ch.2 ("Countryman at work"), pp. 50-77.
Available online through university library catalogue:
https://search-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C1672933#page/8/mode/1/chapter/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C1681032

Williams, R. H. (1982). *Dream worlds: Mass consumption in late nineteenth century France*. Univ. of California Press. Ch. 2 "Closed world of courtly consumption" p.17-57.

Ladurie, E. L. R. (2013). *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French village 1294-1324*. Penguin UK.

Supplementary materials: *The Ballad of Narayama* (A 1983 film by Shōhei Imamura).
WARNING: This classical film depicts life in a XIX century Japanese village; some of the issues it deals with (such as infanticide, self-maim, etc.) might be extremely upsetting.

(Sep.14) The consumer revolution in Europe (and beyond)

*McKendrick, N., Brewer, J., & Plumb, J. H. (1982). *The birth of a consumer society: the commercialization of eighteenth-century England*. Ch.1 ("The consumer revolution of eighteenth-century England"), pp. 9-34

Williams, R. H. (1982). *Dream worlds: Mass consumption in late nineteenth century France*. Univ of California Press. Ch. 2 "The dream world of mass consumption" (pp.58-107)

Campbell, C. (1983). Romanticism and the consumer ethic: Intimations of a Weber-style thesis. *Sociological Analysis*, 44(4), 279-295.

Clunas, C. (1999). Modernity global and local: Consumption and the rise of the West. *The American Historical Review*, 104(5), 1497-1511.

Clunas, C. (2004). *Superfluous things: material culture and social status in early modern China*. University of Hawaii Press. Ch. 6 ("Anxieties about things"), pp. 141-166.

The classical social competition thesis

(Sep.19) Thorstein Veblen and conspicuous consumption

*Veblen, T. [1899] *The theory of leisure class*. Any edition. Ch. 1 ("Introductory"), Ch.3-4 ("Conspicuous leisure" – "Conspicuous consumption"), Ch.6 ("Pecuniary canons of taste")
Can be downloaded from: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/833>

Canterbery, E. R. (1999). Thorstein Veblen and *The Great Gatsby*. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 33(2), 297-304.

Bagwell, L. S., & Bernheim, B. D. (1996). Veblen effects in a theory of conspicuous consumption. *The American Economic Review*, 349-373.

Nelissen, R. M., & Meijers, M. H. (2011). Social benefits of luxury brands as costly signals of wealth and status. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 32(5), 343-355.

Sundie, J. M., Kenrick, D. T., Griskevicius, V., Tybur, J. M., Vohs, K. D., & Beal, D. J. (2011). Peacocks, Porsches, and Thorstein Veblen: Conspicuous consumption as a sexual signaling system. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 100(4), 664.

Assignment 1:

For this assignment, your task is to read the chapter titled "Gold Coast" in Harvey Zorbaugh's book "Gold Coast and Slum." After reading the chapter, write an essay that highlights and discusses instances of conspicuous consumption mentioned in the chapter. Your essay should be between 700 and 800 words long.

Paper due: September 26

(Sep.21) Simmel and the classical trickle-down cycle

*Simmel, G. (1957). Fashion. *American Journal of Sociology*, 62(6), 541-558.

Liebertson, S., & Bell, E. O. (1992). Children's first names: An empirical study of social taste. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98(3), 511-554.

Leibenstein, H. (1950). Bandwagon, Snob, and Veblen Effects in the Theory of Consumers' Demand, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 64 (2), 183-207.

Berger, J. & Heath, C. (2008), Who Drives Divergence? Identity Signaling, Outgroup Dissimilarity, and the Abandonment of Cultural Tastes, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95 (3), 593-607.

Assignment 2: Choose an example of an object undergoing the trickle-down fashion cycle (first adopted by the elites, then imitated by lower-status groups, and consequently abandoned first by the former, then by the latter) which was not discussed at the seminar. Describe the evolution of such a signal in a 800-1000 word essay mentioning the relevant sources of data.

Paper due: October 10

The Golden Age of mass society and the production of consumption perspective

(Sep.26) The Golden Age of consumerism

*Packard, V. (1960) *The Status Seekers. An Exploration of Class Behavior in America*. N.Y.: Longman. Ch. 3 ("Emerging: A diploma elite"), Ch. 5 ("Snob appeal") and Ch. 9 ("Shopping for status")

Available at:

<https://soilandhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/0303critic/030321status/status.pdf>

Davis, J. A. (1956). Status symbols and the measurement of status perception. *Sociometry*, 19(3), 154-165.

Supplementary material: *Babbitt*, 1922 novel by Sinclair Lewis

(Sep.28) Advertising and the birth of consumer research

*Friedan, B. (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*. WW Norton & Company. Ch. 9 "The sexual sell" (pp.199-223)

*Dichter E. (1949) A Psychological View of Advertising Effectiveness, *Journal of Marketing*, 14(1): 61–67

Packard, V. O. (1957). *The Hidden Persuaders*. N.Y.:MacKay

Supplementary materials: *Mad Men*, Season 1, Episodes 1-3

(Oct.3) The Frankfurt school and the production of consumption

*Adorno, T. W., & Horkheimer, M. [1947]. The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as mass deception. In *The Dialectics of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*. Any edition

Can be downloaded from:

https://monoskop.org/images/9/99/Adorno_Theodor_Horkheimer_Max_1947_2002_The_Culture_Industry_Enlightenment_as_Mass_Deception.pdf

Galbraith, J. K. (1998). *The Affluent Society*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

(Oct.5) Semiotics and Baudrillard

* Baudrillard, J. (1981) The ideological genesis of needs. In *For the Critique of the Political Economy of Signs*. Telos. pp.63-87

Mick, D. G. (1986). Consumer research and semiotics: Exploring the morphology of signs, symbols, and significance. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(2), 196-213.
NB. If you need an introduction to semiotics, this text may serve as one.

The active consumer, trickle round and the creative revolution in advertisement. Consumer culture theory

(Oct. 10) Changes in cultural production. Mass culture thesis and beyond

*MacDonald, D. (1953). A theory of mass culture. *Diogenes* 1(3), 1–13

*Peterson, R. A. (1990). Why 1955? Explaining the advent of rock music. *Popular Music*, 9(1), 97-116.

Adorno, T.W., & Rabinbach A. (1975) Culture industry reconsidered. *New German Critique*, 6: 12-19.

(Oct.12) Subcultures and Birmingham school of cultural studies

*Hebdige, D. (1988). *Hiding in the light: On images and things*. Psychology Press. Ch.4 “Object as image. The Italian scooter cycle.” (pp. 77-116)

NB: If you are not comfortable with Baudrillard, it may be a good idea to omit the two first paragraphs at the first reading.

Hall, S. (2007). Encoding and decoding in the television discourse. In *CCCS Selected Working Papers* Routledge: 402-414.

Hebdige, D. (2012). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. Routledge.

Hall, S., & Jefferson, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain*. Routledge.

(Oct.17) The new age of advertisement

*Frank, T. (1997) *The conquest of cool. Business culture, counterculture, and the rise of hip consumerism*. The University of Chicago press. Ch. 3 ("Advertising as cultural criticism: Bill Bernbach versus the mass society") pp.52-73.

Sivulka, J. (2011). *Soap, sex, and cigarettes: A cultural history of American advertising*. Cengage Learning.

Supplementary materials: some of Bernbach's original commercials can be seen in the short documentary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8KQVjvmEGk>

Assignment 3. Imagine that Dichter and Bernbach are hired to promote electric scooters to UWM students. How do you think each of them would tackle this task?

Your Task:

1. **Scripts for Fun TV Ads:** Picture this: You're a scriptwriter for 30-second TV ads. Write two scripts, one for Dichter and one for Bernbach. These scripts will show how they'd make electric scooters appeal to UWM students. You can even go the extra mile and create visuals if you're up for it (extra points for this!)
2. **Explain Your Choices:** After crafting your ads, give a short explanation for each. Why did you think Dichter would go one way and Bernbach another? What makes their approaches different? Share your insights in a short essay.

Paper due: October 24

(Oct.19) Consumer culture theory and the anthropology of consumption

*Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139-168.

*McCracken, G. 1986. *Culture and consumption*. Indiana University press. Ch.7 ("The Evocative Power of Things") pp.104-117

Kopytoff, I. "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process." *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective* 68 (1986): 70-73.

Holbrook, M.B. (1987) What Is Consumer Research? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14: 128-32.

Holbrook, M. B. (1993). Nostalgia and consumption preferences: Some emerging patterns of consumer tastes. *Journal of Consumer research*, 20(2), 245-256.

Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2005). Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research. *Journal of consumer research*, 31(4), 868-882.

(Oct.24) Trickle round and the dialectics of (re)appropriation

*Goldman, R., & Papson, S. (1996). *Sign wars: The cluttered landscape of advertising*. New York: The Guilford Press. Pp.

Featherstone, M. (1990). Perspectives on consumer culture. *Sociology*, 24(1), 5-22.

Featherstone, M. (2007). *Consumer culture and postmodernism*. Routledge

Cultural capital and the return of the social distancing thesis

(Oct.26) A flashback: the courtier and the bourgeois

NB – next two classes require massive readings; please, be advised to start it early enough!

*Goffman, E. (1951). Symbols of class status. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2(4), 294-304.

* Lynes, Russel. (1976 [1949]). Highbrow, lowbrow, middlebrow. *The Wilson Quarterly*, 1(1), 146-58.

Williams, R. H. (1982). *Dream worlds: Mass consumption in late nineteenth century France*. Univ of California Press. Ch. 2 “Closed world of courtly consumption” p.17-57.

DiMaggio, P., & Mohr, J. (1985). Cultural capital, educational attainment, and marital selection. *American Journal of Sociology*, 90(6): 1231-1261.

Elias, N. [1938-9] *The Civilizing Process. The History of Manners*. Any edition

Supplementary materials: *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, 1670 play by Moliere

(Oct.31) Bourdieu: The social reproduction thesis and the classifying nature of taste

*Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction. The Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Harvard University Press. “Introduction” (p.1-8) and Ch.1 (pp.11-63)

(Nov.2) How our preferences define us in the eyes of others? Empirical evidence

*Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (1983). Finding one's way in social space: a study based on games. *Social Science Information*, 22(4-5), 631-680.

Dittmar, H (1994), "Material Possessions as Stereotypes: Material Images of Different Socio-Economic Groups. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 15(6): 561-585.

(Nov.7) The curator groups and the structure of fields

*Bourdieu, P. (1983). The field of cultural production, or: The economic world reversed. *Poetics*, 12(4-5), 311-356.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* Sage.

Ch.1 (“Foundations of a theory of symbolic violence”), pp. 1-68.

Rocamora, A. (2002). Fields of fashion: Critical insights into Bourdieu's sociology of culture. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2(3), 341-362.

QUIZ takes part on this day. *This is the one class I would ask you to attend. If that is not possible for a serious reason, please contact me for deciding on an accommodation.*

Consumption in the Western world today

(Nov.9) Mapping present-day consumption: psychographics and market research

*Yankelovich, D. (1964). New criteria for market segmentation. *Harvard business review*, 42(2), 83-90.

<https://hbr.org/1964/03/new-criteria-for-market-segmentation>

*Plummer, J. T. (1974). The concept and application of life style segmentation: The combination of two useful concepts provides a unique and important view of the market. *Journal of marketing*, 38(1), 33-37.

*Kahle, L. R., Beatty, S. E., & Homer, P. (1986). Alternative measurement approaches to consumer values: the list of values (LOV) and values and life style (VALS). *Journal of consumer research*, 13(3), 405-409.

Yankelovich, D., & Meer, D. (2006). Rediscovering market segmentation. *Harvard Business Review*, 84(2), 122.

Evans, F. B. (1959). Psychological and objective factors in the prediction of brand choice Ford versus Chevrolet. *The Journal of Business*, 32(4), 340-369.

(Nov.14) Tastes and displays of the present-day upper classes: ethnographies

* Brooks, D. (2010). *Bobos in paradise: The new upper class and how they got there*. Simon and Schuster. Ch.1-2. ("The rise of the educated class" & "Consumption") pp.13-102

Fussell, P. (1992). *Class: A guide through the American status system*. Simon and Schuster.

WARNING: the language used in this book is strongly classist and may offend.

Currid-Halkett, E. (2017), *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class*, Princeton University Press.

Friedman, S & Reeves A. (2020). From Aristocratic to Ordinary: Shifting Modes of Elite Distinction. *American Sociological Review* 85(2):323-50.

Assignment 4. Conduct a research replicating Thevenot and Boltanski's study. Your task is to invite three friends (one at a time) to play the role of Sherlock Holmes. Ask them to observe strangers in a public place (e.g. strolling along State Street on a Sunday afternoon) and derive as much information as possible from the way these strangers look.

Your Task:

1. **Select Friends:** Choose three friends, ideally with experience in the US.
2. **Observation Trials:** Accompany each friend on separate occasions for a total of five trials. While walking along State Street, point out a passerby (from a

- distance) and have your friend observe them discreetly. After the person passes, ask your friend to share their observations with you.
3. **Recording Responses:** Record your friends' responses for accuracy (with permission their permission!). You can use audio recording to capture their impressions as they describe their observations.
 4. **Synopsis of Observations:** After completing all 15 trials (five for each friend), compile a short synopsis of the observations made by each friend. Analyze what your friends noticed about the strangers' appearance. Identify details related to social status, personality, lifestyle, and possible life history that your friends believe they can deduce from appearances.
 5. **Comparing Impressions:** Compare the observations made by your friends with your own impressions. Note any similarities or differences in what each person noticed. Reflect on the extent to which these observations align with your understanding of consumption nuances in the US.
 6. **Paper Writing:** Write a 1000 word paper summarizing your research.

Important Considerations:

- Ensure your friends are comfortable with the assignment before proceeding.
- Respect privacy and avoid invading the personal space of strangers.
- Maintain a respectful distance during observations.

This assignment aims to replicate a famous sociological study, offering you an opportunity to engage in firsthand research and analysis. Remember, if you're uncomfortable with any aspect of this assignment, feel free to request an alternative. Good luck!

Deadline: November 21

(Nov.16) Cultural omnivorousness thesis, transposability and social networks

*Peterson, R. A., & Kern, R. M. (1996). Changing highbrow taste: From snob to omnivore. *American Sociological Review*, 900-907.

*Holt, D. B. (1998). Does cultural capital structure American consumption? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25(1), 1-25.

Erickson, B. H. (1996). Culture, class, and connections. *American Journal of Sociology*, 102(1), 217-251.

Peterson, R. A. (1997). The rise and fall of highbrow snobbery as a status marker. *Poetics*, 25(2-3), 75-92.

Lewis, K., & Kaufman, J. (2018). The conversion of cultural tastes into social network ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 123(6), 1684-1742.

Supplementary reading: Fellowes J. (2004) *Snobs*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson

(Nov.21) Inconspicuous consumption and “invisible ink” thesis

*Berger, J., & Ward, M. (2010). Subtle signals of inconspicuous consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(4), 555-569.

*Bellezza, S., & Berger, J. (2020). Trickle-round signals: when low status is mixed with high. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 47(1), 100-127.

Han, Y. J., Nunes, J. C., & Drèze, X. (2010). Signaling status with luxury goods: The role of brand prominence. *Journal of marketing*, 74(4), 15-30.

Childress, C., Baumann, S., Rawlings, C. M., & Nault, J. F. (2021). Genres, objects, and the contemporary expression of higher-status tastes. *Sociological Science*, 8, 230-264.

(Nov.23) Class, status, factions of the elites, and the new forms of social capital

*Jarness, V. (2017). Cultural vs economic capital: Symbolic boundaries within the middle class. *Sociology*, 51(2), 357-373.

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(Dec. 20) Closed-books exam, 10:05 AM - 12:05 PM. Good luck!