

Psychology in a Material World (ENVI/PSYC 172)
Macalester College, Fall 2013
MWF 2:20 – 3:20
Olin Rice 370



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Office hours: Wednesday 10:30 – 11:30, and by appointment

Course Description

This course is an in-depth psychological analysis of consumerism and the human relationship to “stuff”. Consumerism, materialistic aspirations, advertising, and “affluenza” (the disease of affluence) all exert profound and often undesirable effects on both people's individual lives and on society as a whole. These phenomena, and the consumerist culture they are embedded in, affect our psyches, our families, our local communities, the peoples of the world, and the integrity of our ecological system. The overarching goal of this course is not to conclude that our consumer culture is categorically bad, but to take a step back and assess the evidence.

This course draws from a range of theoretical, clinical, and methodological approaches to address several key questions: Where does the drive to consume originate? Do we control our consumer behavior? Is it possible to live in our culture and not be a consumer? Are there realistic alternatives to the status quo? We will critically examine the scholarly merits and ramifications of these ideas and discuss whether and how to act upon them in our lives and in society more broadly. A portion of class time will be spent in experiential exploration of suggested “antidotes to materialism” such as mindfulness, gratitude, and voluntary simplicity, in a variety of settings (e.g., Mall of America, a local landfill, an intentional community, etc.)

Course Goals:

- Introduce students to psychological perspectives on materialism and consumerism
- Familiarize students with the psychology of marketing and how it is used
- Cover the main approaches guiding non-marketing psychological research on consumer behavior (e.g., needs theories, identity theory, unconscious processing, evolutionary psychology, social norms, hedonic value theories)
- Develop and enhance student analytical skills through critical reading and discussion
- Assist students in practicing and improving college-level argumentative writing
- Encourage students to reflect upon their personal values and choices when it comes to consumer behavior

Learning Environment:

As we work cooperatively to create a positive and productive learning environment, I would like you to keep the following thoughts in mind:

- We are all potential teachers. The diversity of perspectives and experiences that we each bring to class is an invaluable resource. Your peers’ insights may give you new understanding of old ideas, or challenge your assumptions. Each of us has a voice that is valid and important, and we can disagree with respect and consideration

for different points of view.

- Each individual is ultimately responsible for his or her own learning and growth. You will benefit from this class exactly to the extent of the effort that you put into it. This means coming to class curious about the ideas and willing to engage in discussion and brainstorming, and taking an active role in defining the interesting themes and questions.

Course Materials:

All readings listed in the Readings Schedule are available through the course's Moodle website (ENVI/PSYC 172).

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

Final grades for the course will be based on the following:

1. Completion of reading preparation (required) 8%
2. Participation and attendance (required) 8%
3. Attendance at and one-paragraph summary of **three** EnviroThursday presentations (required) 4%
4. Three short papers (8% each) 24%
5. Bi-weekly "challenge" write-ups (5% each) 30%
6. Individual preparation for and participation in mindfulness teaching exchange with Prof. Aanonsen's class (5%)
7. Interview project and in-class presentation 10%
8. Final paper 10%

If you submit any of the above assignments late, you will be graded down one full grade for each day beyond the deadline. That is, if an assignment that was due on Tuesday is turned in on Thursday, the highest grade it can receive is a C+.

Final Grade Scale:

A (95 – 100), A- (90 – 94), B+ (87 – 89), B (83 – 86), B- (80 – 82). Similar ranges apply for C grades and D grades. Below 60 is a failing grade.

Assignments

1. Reading preparation (8%):

You will post a short response to each reading assignment (see *note below). The intention of this requirement is that we all come to class familiar enough with the material that we can spend a significant amount of time applying it rather than explaining it. Your response should have the following format:

1. Identify and summarize one or two important concepts, findings, or ideas that you took away from this reading.
2. Why do you believe that these concepts, findings, or ideas are important?
3. Describe something that you disagree with or object to.
4. What are you wondering about after reading this text? Formulate one or two substantive questions that you would like to discuss with your peers in class. (Guidelines for questions - these should be questions that you can only answer having read the text. They should be questions you honestly would like to hear other people's thoughts about and that are best answered with input from many perspectives and people.)

Response postings are due by 9 a.m. on the morning of class. Be concise - the best responses are short and to the point. Writing thoughtfully and thoroughly within a word limit is an important academic skill that this assignment will help you master.

After you have posted your response, Moodle will allow you to read the responses from the other students who have already posted theirs. Please take a few minutes at some point before class to look through the reading responses from your peers.

You must upload your assignment to the Moodle site for that date. NOTE: The Moodle clock does not always correspond to yours – Moodle will timeout at 9 a.m. so don't wait until the last minute. DO NOT e-mail reflections to me. I cannot accept late reading responses.

Your reading responses will be evaluated on a 0 (no credit), 1 (satisfactory), 2 (good) basis, (3) very good. However, note that these grades will not be included in your final grade calculation. The reading responses are required and you will not pass the course without a majority of at least "satisfactory" reading responses.

*note: You can skip 3 reading responses during the semester. I know that things can get overwhelming during a busy semester, so skipping 3 reading responses gives you the opportunity to balance your workload responsibly. I do expect that

even if you skip the response, you will still read the day's reading and be able to contribute to class. Important: for a "skip" day, you will need to log on to moodle and post the word "skip" to the forum as your contribution. Otherwise, Moodle will give you a score of zero.

2. Participation and attendance (8%):

The quality of the course, and value of the experience for all of us, depends on careful preparation for class by everyone. Thus it is critical that you read the readings carefully and on time and be prepared to discuss them and apply them to in-class assignments. Your attendance and participation are required for the entire session of each class. Good participation has four foundations:

- Regular attendance. Regular attendance is required in order to receive a passing grade for the course, regardless of how well you do on your written assignments. More than two unexcused absences results in no evaluation (0).
- Preparation for discussion by carefully and critically reading the class readings and completing the required Moodle response posting.
- Active engagement in class demonstrated by regular, thoughtful and substantive contributions to the discussion, the brainstorming, and the in-class assignments.
- Supporting others' contributions through attentive and respectful listening, offering responses that refer to others' contributions, not dominating the discussion and brainstorming, and allowing others to have a turn to speak.

For those who are less comfortable speaking in class, remember that asking a good question is also a valuable way to contribute to the discussion. However, if you are having serious difficulties with participation, please talk to me outside of class so that we can develop a strategy for improvement.

****Laptops are not allowed during class discussions.****

3. Attendance at and summary of three EnviroThursday presentations (required) (4%)

Every Thursday, the Environmental Studies department sponsors a speaker from 12:00 to 1:00 in OLRI 250. You are required to attend three of these presentations and to write a one-paragraph summary of each. The summaries are due on the last day of class (or email them to me soon after you've attended all three presentations). By the way, there is always food served at EnviroThursday.

The rest of the assignments will be explained during the course

4. Three short papers (8% each) 24%
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6. Individual preparation for and participation in mindfulness teaching exchange with Prof. Aanonsen's class (5%)
7. Interview project and in-class presentation 10%
8. Final paper 10%

Academic Integrity

All students will be required to abide by the Macalester College academic integrity guidelines found at <http://www.macalester.edu/academicprograms/integrity.html>. Instances of suspected academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, and using the same paper in more than one course) will be handled as outlined in the guidelines.

Accommodations

Academic Support

1. Course Writing Assistant: Mark Riegel, mriegel@macalester.edu

2. The Macalester Academic Excellence (MAX) Center (x6121; Kagin Commons) is here to help you do your best at Macalester in meeting your own goals and highest standards. Through academic enrichment and support services, ranging from workshops to individual assistance, the MAX Center can help you excel in your academics.

Professional counselors and peer tutors in writing, mathematics, science, and study skills provide personal assistance in:

- Writing for any college course, from brainstorming through final editing
- Content areas such as calculus, statistics, organic chemistry, or cellular biology
- Sharpening study and time management skills

General hours are 9:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M., M-F and 7 P.M. – 10 P.M., S-Th. Peer tutors are usually available in all areas during the evening, but as schedules vary during the day, it is useful to call x6121 (daytime) or x6193 during evening hours to schedule an appointment.

The MAX Center also provides testing accommodations. Students must verify the need for accommodations through the Dean of Students Office.

3. Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Contact the Associate Dean of Students, Lisa Landreman at 696-6220 to make an appointment. Students are encouraged to address any accommodations with me as soon as you become aware of your needs. Additional information regarding the accommodations process for students with disabilities can be found at www.macalester.edu/studentaffairs/disabilityservices/

Moodle:

Our course Moodle website duplicates much of the information in this syllabus, including the reading schedule and assignment due dates. It also serves as the distribution system for paper prompts, and provides a direct link to our course's e-reserves. Go to <http://moodle.macalester.edu/>, and login using your Macalester username and password. After logging in, click on the link to Psychology in a Material World in the My Courses section. Anything posted to the forums will automatically be emailed to everyone registered for the course. Click on each assignment to get the description. There will also be an option on Moodle to submit your projects to me in electronic form.

Course Schedule

Class Meeting	Topics and activities	Readings (to be read before class on the date shown)	Assignments due in class
First class Friday, August 30	Introductions (with object) and overview of course		Paper 1 assigned
Week # 1: Wednesday, Sept. 4 Friday, Sept. 6	Part 1: What objects mean to us Sleep Presentation, Discussion: Are you your stuff? WRITING SESSION 1	 Dittmar 2004; Czikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Dalton (1981)	 DRAFT of Paper 1 DUE (will not be graded)
Week #2: Monday, Sept. 9 Wednesday, Sept. 11 Friday, September 13	What objects mean to us Discussion: Extended self Discussion: Extended self LIBRARY SESSION	 Belk (1984) Ahuvia (2005)	 Challenge 1 assigned
Week #3: Monday, Sept. 16 Wednesday, Sept. 18 Friday, Sept. 20	Part 2: Do we choose what we buy? Discussion: Can money buy happiness? Discussion: Commercialization of childhood FIELD TRIP TO WASTE SITE	 Diener & Biswas-Diener (2005) Levin & Linn (2003)	 Revised Paper 1 DUE Bring two images to class Paper 2 assigned Challenge 1 DUE
Week #4: Monday, Sept. 23 Wednesday, Sept. 25 Friday, Sept. 27	Do we choose what we buy? Discussion: The unconscious consumer Discussion: Advertising and “hidden persuaders” WRITING SESSION 2	 Dijksterhuis et al (2005) Walker in NYT (2004)	 DRAFT of Paper 2 DUE
Week #5: Monday, Sept. 30 Wednesday, Oct.2 Friday, Oct. 4	Do we choose what we buy? Discussion: Thoughts of money Discussion: The stuff of college FIELD TRIP TO HMONGTOWN MARKETPLACE	 Buchanan in New Scientist (2009); Schwartz (2007) Farrell (2010)	 Revised Paper 2 DUE Challenge 2 assigned
Week #6:	Do we choose what we buy?		

Monday, Oct. 7	Discussion: Mortality salience	Arndt et al (2004)	
Wednesday, Oct. 9	Discussion: Mindfulness	Rosenberg (2003)	
Friday, Oct. 11	MINDFULNESS PRACTICE		Challenge 2 DUE
Week #7:	Do we choose what we buy?		
Monday, Oct. 14	Discussion: Gratitude	Pollack & McCullough (2006)	Challenge 3 assigned
Wednesday, Oct. 16	Sleep presentation, Discussion: Identity	Dittmar (2011)	
Friday, Oct. 18	MOA FIELD TRIP	Guterson (1993)	
Week #8:	How material goods define and position us		
Monday, Oct. 21	Discussion: Identity, continued	Reading TBA	Paper 3 assigned
Wednesday, Oct. 23	Discussion: priming consumerism and IN CLASS ACTIVITY	Bauer et al (2012)	Challenge 3 DUE Bring purchase receipts to class!
(no class Friday)	HAPPY FALL BREAK		
Week #9:	How material goods define and position us		
Monday, Oct. 28	Discussion: Evolution and consumer behavior	Griskevicius et al (2012)	Interview project assigned
Wednesday, Oct. 30	Discussion: Conspicuous consumption	Sundie et al (2011)	Challenge 4 assigned
Friday, Nov. 1	WRITING SESSION 3		DRAFT of Paper 3 DUE
Week #10:	How material goods define and position us		
Monday, Nov. 4	Discussion: Positional concerns	Richins (1995)	Revised Paper 3 DUE
Wednesday, Nov. 6	Discussion: Girls, body image, and advertising	Kilbourne (2003)	
Thursday, Nov. 7 6 – 8 p.m.	Evening dinner and collaborative teaching session with Prof. Aanonsen's class		
Friday, Nov. 8	MINDFULNESS PRACTICE		
Week #11:	How material goods define and position us		

Monday, Nov. 11	Discussion: Commercialism's influence on black youth	LaPoint & Hambrick-Dixon (2003)	Final paper assigned Challenge 4 DUE
Wednesday, Nov. 13	Sleep presentation; Discussion: Does wealth come at a cost?	Bond in New Scientist (2011)	Challenge 5 assigned
Friday, Nov. 15	GUEST SPEAKER	Van Boven (2005)	
Week #12:	Part 4: Where in the material world do we find pleasure and meaning?		
Monday, Nov. 18	Discussion: Self control	Baumeister (2002)	
Wednesday, Nov. 20	Discussion: Ownership and hoarding 2 student presentations	Morewedge et al (2009); Cherrier (2010)	
Friday, Nov. 22	WRITING SESSION 4		DRAFT or outline of final paper DUE
Week #13:	Where in the material world do we find pleasure and meaning?		
Monday, Nov. 25	Discussion: How much choice? 2 student presentations	Schwartz (2004)	
Wednesday, Nov. 27	Discussion: Flow experiences 2 student presentations	Czikszentmihalyi (2003)	Challenge 5 DUE Challenge 6 assigned
(no class Friday)	HAPPY THANKSGIVING		
Week #14:	Where in the material world do we find pleasure and meaning?		
Monday, Dec. 2	Discussion: The pleasure of stuff 2 student presentations	Alba & Williams (2013)	
Wednesday, Dec. 4	Sleep Presentation; Discussion: The Unconsumer 2 student presentations	Hueneke (2005); Atkinson (2012)	
Friday, Dec. 6	Discussion: Spending money right 2 student presentations	Dunn et al (2011); Chancellor & Lyubomirsky (2011)	Challenge 6 DUE
Week #15:			
Monday, Dec. 9	End of class discussion 5 student presentations		
Finals Week:			
Thursday, Dec. 12			Final paper due at 1:30