

HONORS ECCLES FELLOW PROGRAM APPLICATION

Course proposal for HNRS 3900: Selling Emotion, Buying Feeling:
Emotions, Work, and Consumption in America

Applicant: Susan Matt
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Co-applicant: Marjukka Ollilainen
Extension: 6238
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Please submit a proposal describing the following:

1. The proposed class including a detailed course syllabus

This course uses historical and sociological frameworks to explore the connections between emotions and consumerism in American society. We will examine the emergence of the American consumer society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; we'll study the central role of emotions in its development, for consumers found new opportunities to express envy, attachment, and happiness by purchasing goods. We'll explore as well how in the centuries to come, Americans' feelings have been both sold and bought in various social settings from shopping malls to amusement parks. The course will involve a study excursion to Las Vegas and Disneyland, where students will observe first-hand how emotional landscapes are manufactured in late capitalism and how individuals are participating in this construction as both workers and consumers. A detailed syllabus with readings is attached.

2. How the class relates to your research, including copies of or references to any of your publications in this area

This course relates to both of our research agendas. It builds directly on our past works and will contribute to our future projects.

Susan has written a book on the history of envy in consumer society, and how the emotion was transformed from a sin to an economic stimulant. Her book on homesickness also explored how generations of Americans have used the consumer marketplace to recreate a sense of home and at least partially resolve their homesickness. Her most recent work (co-authored with Luke Fernandez) on technology and emotions, looks at the way past and present communications technologies from the telegraph to the smartphone have sold themselves as antidotes to loneliness and boredom. Her next project will look at the relationship between capitalism and feelings, and in particular the rise of selfishness.

Marjukka has published research on the emotional labor that modern workers do in corporations. She has previously taught a sociology course that explores consumption (*Life in a Consumer Society*); however, that course lacks the integrated knowledge that will be provided by historical research and Susan's depth in the scholarship of emotions. She continues to be interested in how work and consumerism interact in people's lives and,

especially, how the service sector calls for increasingly consumer-oriented presentation of a worker's self through "aesthetic labor" (displaying an appropriate body and attire) to evoke pleasurable exchange with customers. Last spring, she presented a paper on how women faculty who are pregnant manage the presentation of their bodies at work.

References:

Susan J. Matt, *Keeping up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003)

Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)

"Emotions in the Marketplace," in *A Destiny of Choice? New Directions in American Consumer History*, eds. David Steigerwald and David Blanke (Rowman and Littlefield: 2013)

A Hunger for Home: Homesickness and Food in a Global Consumer Society, *Journal of American Culture*, 30 (2007): 6-17

Marjukka Ollilainen, "'Ideal Bodies' at Work: Faculty Mothers and Pregnancy in Academia." Paper presentation at the Pacific Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Oakland, CA, (2016)

"Gendering Emotions, Gendering Teams: Construction of Emotions in Self-Managing Teamwork," in Neal Ashkanasy, Charmine Härtel and Wilf Zerbe (eds), *Emotions in the Workplace: Research, Theory, and Practice* (Quorum, 2000)

3. How the course contributes to the Honors Program and the Weber State University community

We live in a consumer society—a society that relies on consumption (and not production) for its economic survival. To understand how consumerism shapes individual lives requires us to stop and place at the center of analysis a complex economic and cultural system that connects emotions, consumption, and human labor. This course makes a unique contribution to the honors program because it provides for students the tools they can use to analyze their lives as consumers and help them become critical observers of consumer culture. Students will read and discuss scholarship in history and social theory to reflect on many aspects of their consumer-lives, including how identities are constructed through consumer products, how service sector jobs (including their future careers) involve the management of emotions (both one's own and the customers'), and the public places they frequent are built to appeal to emotions to encourage buying more things. This is also the time to get students to think critically about consumerism as they are building their lives and careers. We hope to provide a framework for understanding--and perhaps resisting--the lure of our culture's tendency to equate success with ownership of stuff. This is a particularly pressing concern in Utah, the state with the fifth highest rate of personal bankruptcy in the nation. Even more importantly, then, the class could help students create a more sustainable lifestyle and to avoid getting into debt in order to keep up with the Joneses.

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The course contributes to the WSU community by bringing attention to the issues discussed in class and which can be shared more widely with the campus community in talks and workshops by the instructors. We will organize excursions to nearby commercial areas—e.g., Farmington's Station Park and the City Creek Mall in Salt Lake City—to observe emotions and consumerism at work. These excursions will be open to students beyond this course as well as the WSU community.

4. How the Honors Eccles Fellowship can contribute to your research.

Susan is just completing a book with Luke Fernandez on the relationship between emotions and technology. One key theme of the book is how emotions such as loneliness have been deployed to sell phones, phonographs, Facebook. Her next book will examine the role that emotions have played in the historical development of capitalism, and will begin its exploration in the seventeenth century. This course will provide an opportunity to read a range of new historical works on capitalism and emotions, and, more importantly, be exposed to sociological approaches to the topic.

Marjukka is currently exploring questions about how the presentation of an appropriate, aesthetic self at work, one which displays the ideal body and emotions, reflects the values of consumer culture and is increasingly required not only in low-skilled service occupations but also in highly skilled professions. The preparation for and co-teaching this course would provide the time and focus to dig into the literature and recent research on aesthetic labor and the presentation of a customer-pleasing self as part of professional work. This investigation will also inform the course excursion to Las Vegas and Disneyland where the requirements for aesthetic labor are significant to the smooth operation of the consumer-entertainment industry.

I, (Department Chair), support this application for an Honors Eccles Fellowship. I agree to reimbursement from the Honors Program for the Fellowship, and will not assign overload classes to this faculty member when s/he takes the related release time.

Signature 

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Signature 

*Submit applications as an email attachment (Word doc or PDF) to Aubrey Lord
(aubreylord@weber.edu).*

HNRS 3900: Selling Emotion, Buying Feeling -
Emotions, Work, and Consumption in America

Susan Matt (History) and Marjukka Ollilainen (Sociology)

Syllabus

The first 3 weeks lay the groundwork of the course, offering students background in the history of emotions and the history of consumer society as well as the key sociological and theoretical discussions on how emotions are an integral element in today's consumer society. The rest of the semester (weeks 4-14), we will explore the ways in which emotions feature in work and consumption. We have selected to discuss, for example, the commercialization of pleasure and intimate relationships, emotions in advertising, consumption and social class, and consumerism in the lives of children. In the middle of the semester, ideally during spring break, we propose to organize a study trip to Las Vegas and Disneyland to observe in action what we have studied. We will wrap up the semester with a consideration of questions about the sustainability of our current consumer society. The readings listed for each week's topic will not all be required reading; they are included to illustrate how we will integrate literature in history and sociology for an in-depth discussion of the origins of the emotion-work-consumer society as well as its current day manifestations.

Week 1: Introduction to the course

Read:

Eva Illouz, Emotions, Imagination and Consumption: A new research agenda, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, November 2009

"A Tour of the New Means of Consumption" from George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World* (2010)

Week 2: The Origins and Continuity of Consumer Society in America

Read:

Excerpts, Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*

Excerpts, Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*

Excerpts from Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*

Week 3: New Consumer Institutions: Department Stores, Catalogs, Advertising

Read:

Greg ("Fritz") Umbach, "Learning to Shop in Zion: The Consumer Revolution in Great Basin Mormon Culture, 1847-1910," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Autumn, 2004),

Jean Baudrillard, "The Ideological Genesis of Needs" from Schor & Holt, *The Consumer Society Reader* (2000)

“Social Theory and the New Means of Consumption” from George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption* (2010)

- Observation paper 1 Due

The next section of the course looks at the relationship between emotions and consumerism in the 19th and 20th centuries

Week 4: Playing upon emotions in turn-of-the-century consumer culture (and today) - Envy

Read:

Excerpts, Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*

Excerpts, Matt, *Keeping up with the Joneses*

Excerpts from Allison Pugh, *Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children, and Consumer Culture* (2009)

Week 5: The commodification of love (The rise of Victorian dating sites; Can intimate relationships be commodified?)

Read:

Excerpts, Pam Epstein, *Selling Love: The Commercialization of Intimacy in America*

Excerpts from Arlie Hochschild, *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work* (2003)

Week 6: The commercialization of pleasure

Read:

William Leach, “Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925,” *Journal of American History*, 1984

Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-thieving* (history of kleptomania)

“Reenchantment: Creating Spectacle Through Implosion, Time, and Space” in Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption* (2010)

- Excursion to Farmington Station and/or City Creek

Week 7: The Rise of Modern Advertisements and the Use of Emotion

Read:

Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*

Bordo, “Hunger as Ideology” and/or Goldman & Papson, “Advertising in the Age of Accelerated Meaning” from Schor & Holt, *The Consumer Society Reader* (2000)

- Paper 2: Students analyze turn-of-the-century advertisements; today's product placement in broadcast media

Week 8: Selling Feeling: Emotions at Work

Read:

Christina Kotchemidova, "Drive-by Smiling': A Social History of Cheerfulness," *Journal of Social History*, 39(1): 5-37.

Excerpts, Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart- Commercialization of Human Feeling* (1983)

John Kasson: *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*

John Van Maanen: "The Smile Factory: Work at Disneyland"

- Field trip to Vegas and Disneyland over Spring Break (2018)

Week 9: Emotions and consumerism in children's lives over a century

Read:

Excerpts from Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy* (2004)

Excerpts from Allison Pugh, *Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children, and Consumer Culture* (2009)

Excerpts from Gary Cross, *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood*

- Paper 3 (Disney observations) due

Week 10: Emotional landscapes of distinction: Consumption and social class

Read:

Paul Fussell, *Class*

Pierre Bourdieu, "The Aesthetic Sense as the Sense of Distinction" and/or Douglas Holt, "Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?" (Schor & Holt eds, 2000)

Week 11: The overworked and overspent American: Consumer debt and the work-spend cycle

Read:

Excerpts from John De Graaf et al., *Affluenza: The All Consuming Epidemic*

Juliet Schor, "The Insidious Cycle of Work and Spend"

Week 12: Emotional appeals to consume (Commercial philanthropy)

Read:

Excerpts from Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*

Excerpts from Mara Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.: How Corporate America Blurs the Line between What We Buy, Who We Are, and Those We Help* (2012)

Excerpts from Gayle Sulik, *Pink Ribbon Blues: How Breast Cancer Culture Undermines Women's Health* (2011)

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* (2009)

Week 13: Globalization of emotion: The emergence of the care economy

Read:

Excerpts from Arlie Hochschild, *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work* (2003)

Marjorie L. Devault, "Comfort and Struggle: Emotion Work in Family Life, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (January 1999)

Week 14: Is consumer culture emotionally and environmentally sustainable?

Read:

Carl Pope, "The Devil's in the Retail," *Sierra*, Sept/Oct 2006

Ryan & Durning: *Stuff: The Secret Life of Everyday Things* (1997)

Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2010: Transforming Cultures from Consumerism to Sustainability* (2010)

- Final paper due