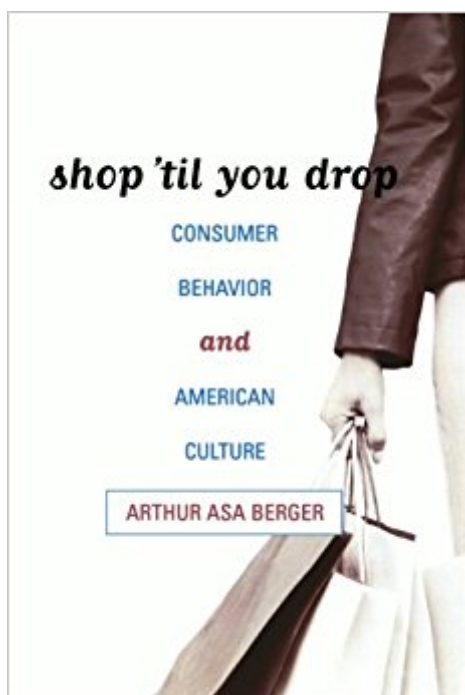


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Shop 'til You Drop: Consumer Behavior And American Culture



Synopsis

Are Americans obsessed with shopping? *Shop 'til You Drop* is a lively look at our consumer culture and its role in our everyday lives and society. Is the United States different from other first-world nations in the amount of time we spend shopping or in our attitudes toward consumption? Are we one unified consumer culture or are several cultures operating and battling against one another? Arthur Asa Berger uncovers the answers to these and other questions, considering the sacred roots of consumer culture, the demographics of consumption, theories about competing cultures, and the semiotics of shopping. Accessibly written and entertaining, *Shop 'til You Drop* is ideal for courses in cultural studies, advertising, and American studies, as well as for anyone curious about our nation's drive to consume.

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Customer Reviews

The number of malls in America has nearly doubled in the last 17 years, as has the amount of credit card debt. In this slim volume, Berger ponders this correlation and attempts to explain in great detail why the citizens of the most prosperous nation on Earth derive such joy from the mere act of consumption. Berger quotes French sociologist Jean Baudrillard, who explains that "in the consumption of surplus... the individual-and society-feel not merely that they exist, but that they are alive." Alternately dry and glib (his crudely drawn stickman cartoons with their thoughtful captions dot various chapters in the book), Berger explores the origins of "consumer culture" in an academic fashion and relies upon the work of social anthropologists to help unravel the mystery and

motivation behind the urge to splurge. Whereas God once determined our actions, as stated by 18th-century Puritan writer Jonathan Edwards, it seems that ad agencies have now taken the place of the divine. While an analysis of shopping malls and their need to adapt to changing buying behaviors shows the resilience and creativity borne from capitalism, and the discussion of semiotics and cultural myths in advertising reveals how predictable the results of marketing manipulation can be on the buyer, the prevailing theme seems to be the effect of postmodernism on the American pursuit of happiness. The need to consume, Berger offers, once again citing Baudrillard, stems from the fear of missing something and an entitlement mindset that says one has the right to try everything. Though some of Berger's observations may interest the general reader, this dense analysis is largely for those who are serious about the study of consumerism. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

This lively, well-formatted book moves quickly, explaining theories succinctly and profiling consumers' personalities, behaviors, and preferred shopping environments. In examining the cultural aspects of shopping, Berger's unique work looks at the changing demographics and psychographics of today's consumers, comparing the role of modern department stores to that of medieval cathedrals. Highly recommended. (CHOICE) In *Shop 'Til You Drop*, Berger covers everything on the subject of consumer culture from Calvinist perspectives on asceticism, to the mythical importance of houses, the feminization of men, and the death of shopping malls. The book appears to serve as a kind of 'catch-all' on consumer culture, defining, describing, and explaining consumer culture and behavior in sociological, psychological, philosophical, and anthropological terms. (Ecotheology Ecotheology Ecotheology) In *Shop 'til You Drop*, Arthur Asa Berger has done it again. With a sense of humor and sagacious aplomb that is always just below the surface, he is nevertheless able to say profound and insightful things that make us reflect on things as they are. I know of no other work in the field of cultural studies that provides such a penetrating analysis of the roots of consumerism, unraveling its mythic-religious roots, its meaning structures, and its many ritualistic aspects. Berger's book has finally explained to me why shopping, in and of itself, holds such enormous appeal. It is one of those 'good reads' that entertains at the same time that it enlightens. (Marcel Danesi, University of Toronto)

Shop 'Til You Drop by Arthur Asa Berger dives into American society's prevalent consumer culture and explores the psychology behind making purchases. Berger believes consumer culture is an increasingly interesting and relevant topic, and

he says it “plays an important role in our lives, in our families, and in all the institutions of society, such as religion, politics, and the arts.” Readers will appreciate the fast-paced, informative nature of this book, especially since Berger manages to pack extremely interesting knowledge into a mere 125 pages. While *Shop til You Drop* could work for students pursuing a wide range of topics (advertising, social psychology, marketing, consumerism, etc.), it is also an easy read for anyone interested in the behavior and psychology that Americans exhibit as consumers. Berger begins with discussing the demographics and psychographics of Americans that make up the consumer culture, ranging from descriptions of different economic classes to varying age groups, including children and teenagers. He discusses the trends, patterns and meanings behind these notions. One section of the book I found particularly interesting was when Berger gave analyses of the inner desires customers have that drive them to make purchases. Some buy items to show their creativity, others feel they deserve a reward, and others wish to flaunt brands as a sign of success. Nearly all are persuaded to spend money in order to save money. All of these incentives are examples of successful marketing strategies. Berger notes the way product placement and brand name have strong influences on consumers. A study mentioned in the book questioned why most consumers choose Coca-Cola over Pepsi, although most of them prefer the taste of Pepsi when blindly drinking the two sodas. Berger emphasized how important a popular brand name is to customers, who often choose brand over taste or quality. The examples in the book were easy to grasp, and were usually references of relatable, everyday situations. Berger argues throughout the book that consumerism reflects Americans’ narcissism, mentioning the subconscious ways we purchase materialistic items in order to receive gratification. He uses everyday examples and gives the audience unique interpretations of seemingly meaningless interactions. For example, Berger explains the idea that the very act of buying something in store is gratifying to a customer, who “for a moment or so, [has] an interaction with a person who acknowledges that [he/she] exists.” The author wants readers to realize that in a world where we are taught that our infinite wishes can be fulfilled with consumerism—whether it be a product, service, or a vacation—we should not allow materialistic items to dominate our existence. Berger builds on this throughout the book and describes how the marketing and advertising industries have such a powerful influence on our everyday lives as humans, not just as consumers. He expresses his concern that “we become so wrapped up in our new and continually changing lifestyles that we lose our identities.” Because of the slightly sarcastic tone regarding consumerism, I did feel a bit guilty about my personal spending

habits, and maybe even a bit cheated by marketers whose enticing strategies so often reel me in. However, I appreciated Berger's approach, and still found the book insightful. I encourage anyone interested in our nation's consumer culture to check out this book. I found it eye-opening, and I will definitely be more conscious of the buying habits of myself and others after reading. The book included many statistics and examples to support the psychology behind consumerism, but its casual tone and fast-paced analyses will appeal to amateur readers and students alike. This was an informative, exciting read that can certainly suit both educational and self-reflective purposes.

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