

Mindfulness (Rosenberg)

Submissions so superior to those of, say, Week 1. You have been working hard, engaging with the reading, revising and re-writing. This is so encouraging, gratifying, and rewarding. Keep it up!!

Also, how really terrific and important our work on Friday was, your contributions were: Sarah, Maria, Sterling, Morgan, Moraima, Ashley, Kayla, Sage, Madeliene (I hope I'm not leaving anyone out).

With this reading, we look to Erika Rosenberg and social psychology, and we look specifically at consumerism and the ways that this distinctly Western approach to something that at least feels fulfilling, albeit fleetingly, makes us vulnerable to the manipulations and persuasion of advertising and commercial messages, marketing, and public relations.

But what IS mindfulness? Let's define it.

- Deliberate, self-aware attempts to be a somewhat detached observer of the self, with a motivation to better be able to recognize the character of what we think and do.
- "Mindfulness is an open-ended enquiry into our experience" (Chodrin)
- The "skill that allows one to keep thoughts and emotions in perspective" (Rosenberg)
- "Mindful people are more aware of their thought processes, more deliberate in their choices, less susceptible to the pervasive influence of others" (Rosenberg)

Can you recall from your memory a particular consumer behavior you engage in often that has some connection to your understanding of self? (this would be a beginning of mindfulness)

What is the most mindless purchase or consumptive behavior you can think of from your own life?

What was the biggest takeaway for you from the reading?

One for me: That inner emptiness, low self-esteem, conspicuous consumption, lack of personal convictions, drug abuse, and eating disorders make me more vulnerable to a range of dangers, including "charismatic political leaders" and advertising.

What are the threats of consumerism to the "self," to self-hood?

Another: “There is no empirically demonstrated relationship between happiness and ownership” (115).

Thinking about consumerism, what is it that we actually “need,” as opposed to merely “want” or “desire”? What does or should, “Give us this day our daily bread” mean?

- Yogi Browning and tennis balls
- Chick-fil-A and waste
- New cars, even hybrids, and carbon
- Air Jordans and sneaker culture (symbols AS substance)
- Americans’ crippling debt

From “Upstart Crow,” Romeo & Juliet episode:

“I just need a simple potion that will render a person seemingly dead but from which they will fully recover at the appropriate moment.”

“Well, we have Play Dead. Or else you could buy my own brand of the mixture, which is exactly the same but half the price.”

“Hmm . . . I think I’ll stick to the popular brand, thank you. I’m happy to pay a little more for the nebulous sense of comfort that a public brand imbues.”

How do we, or should we, connect mindfulness to action (from the theater of the mind to the world of doing)?

Our elephants really like mindless behavior. It’s the teeny rider begging us to attend to the content, the reasonableness, the justification to act that commercial messages persuade us with. And our minds habituate behavior, and quite easily, short-circuiting the need for conscious evaluation. Habitual behavior as a consumer is difficult to recognize, in other words, because it is habitual. How do you see this in yourself? In your peers?

To Rosenberg’s point about habituated behavior, how are you re-structuring consciousness (117)? Or, how might you? To find enjoyment, a more authentic enjoyment, which require “the internal conditions of the mind”?

- “I am being thankful.” From a Jamaican worship community
- “I have learned to be content.” Paul, from prison.
- Flow! It’s back! (Csiksentmihalyi)

What do we think of the Marxist critique of commercialism, consumerism, and capitalism? That they produce only a faux individualism and a faux fulfillment?

CYMBALTA case study (quote from p. 114)

- Pathos, ethos, logos
- Aspirations and fears, or dreams and dangers, or hopes and harrowings, or some other really alliterative pairing that I haven't thought of yet
- "You are inadequate unless you consume X" OR "Buy X and be happy"
- One-click buying and frictionless consumption (Amazon)
- Exposure to 1,500 commercial messages per day on average - AVERAGE!!
- Khaki pants from Bangladesh
- "Haul" videos and posts and Instas
- Training children, mostly daughters, how to shop, browse, consume, buy
- A day at the mall
- Engagement rings (the size of the rock = the degree of love)
- The cereal aisle, the soda and beer display cases
- QVC, HSN, and so many home-shopping channels
- Consumerism as "lite" entertainment
- Engagement with commercial messages as social animals - any ad that implicitly or explicitly focuses on social interaction will "unconsciously" engage the mind

Meditation and yoga: Awareness, nonjudgmental observation, nonconceptual awareness (no labeling). Example: Pain. Tie-in: Kayla's question about why we must so quickly decide, take a position, choose. Perhaps we should suspend the impulse to decide, declare, and label such that we can be more mindful, deliberate, and reasonable, while at the same time being less reactionary, less driven by outrage and demonization. (Atlanta spa shootings.)

Maybe meditation, mindfulness, and solitude are answers.

What does any of this have to do with compassion? Isolation? Community and connectedness? Aristotle!

- The Berry experience
- Overcommitment
- The tyranny of the urgent
- The wilderness
- Why our final projects are (largely) about flow

The "sacred," ineffable, hierophany¹ They're back, too! (119)

- Emotional competence
- Moral development
- Interconnectedness
- Contemplative skills
- Hazards of consumerism with respect to the "sacred" (Arden's friend's family)

- Looking at the sky
- Practice of seeing things afresh (Sterling)

Solutions?

- Meditation, contemplation and solitude
- Education (media literacy, visual literacy)
- Community and connectedness
- Alternative habits in place of consumerism, shopping, and acquiring

Madeliene's sentence:

To quietly rebel against the threads of consumerism that tightly coil around every aspect of life in a deeply individualistic and capitalistic American culture . . . an unquestioned aspect of American culture.