

CONSUMED

Newsletter of the American Sociological Association Consumers & Consumption Section

Nicki Lisa Cole, Editor-in-Chief
Martha Coe-Galeotti, Managing Editor

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From the Section Chair: The Robust Opportunity Before Us *Dan Cook, Rutgers University - Camden*

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It is with great pleasure that I sit down and write this first Editorial for the Consumers and Consumption Section. A long time in coming, the formation of this Section represents an important moment in our profession if for no other reason than the evidence its existence furnishes about the vitality of perspective and research we bring to the study of social life. That it took well into the 21st century for this Section to come into being speaks not to a lack of scholarship or effort, but rather to conceptual lags and the drag of institutional momentum peculiar to what [George Ritzer](#) has called the "productivist bias" of American sociology.

Beginning in the 1980s and gaining force in the 1990s, the promise and reach of a social-cultural approach to consumers and consumption became evident in the works of Ritzer, [Sharon Zukin](#), [Juliet Schor](#), [Gene Halton](#), [Lauren Langmann](#), [Chandra Mukerji](#) and [Douglas Holt](#), among other US scholars. Yet, an institutional presence was lacking with virtually no sessions at ASA that sought to share research and

theory on commercial life. Such an absence was astounding to me as a graduate student when I began attending conferences in the '90s. I distinctly recall attending a [British Sociological Association](#) meeting and being asked why "North America" lacked any scholarly tradition in the sociology of consumption, especially with the US as a consumer behemoth. I had no response (and was a bit daunted by the prospect of representing an entire continent), but was convinced that a significant part of the problem was not for lack of scholarship or unimportance of the research area, but a conceptual and perhaps epistemological confinement to categories and subfields—a confinement which begets collegial isolation.

Beginning in the mid-'90s, a handful of people began to work through the ASA to offer Regular and Special sessions on consumers and consumption (check out [the program from 1996](#), dot-matrix printer and all). We held planning meetings and informal dinners with interested parties, set up what became the [Consumer Studies Research Network](#), published newsletters and hosted several pre-ASA mini-conferences—an informal set of arrangements that persisted for over a decade. In about 2010, it became clear that perhaps there was a critical mass of interest as papers on all facets of consumer life and society were presented at the ASA in many different types of sessions.

Shortly thereafter, Juliet Schor, [Laura Miller](#), [Joel Stillerman](#) and I formed the Organizing Committee to launch the Section, an important part of which consisted of drafting a proposal that made the case for the sociology of consumption as a distinctive area of research and subfield of sociology. I encourage everyone to [read this proposal](#), not because it represents any definitive statement on the subject but for an appreciation of the depth and breadth of research and thought that has been produced over the decades.

I relate this history in brief to underscore the point that organizations do not arise on their own and will not flourish without active engagement by members. But laboring to create organization for the sake of having one also invites stagnation. The Section will flourish so long as the focus remains decidedly on scholarship, on building collegial relationships, and on camaraderie that is so often missing from many aspects of professional life. What we now have before us stands as a ready resource and robust opportunity to build community, to address pressing issues and, perhaps, to help in the shift of a field from its centripetal myopia.

Your Section Leadership

[Dan Cook, Rutgers University-Camden, Chair 2013-14](#)

Dan is an Associate Professor of Childhood Studies who researches children's consumer culture with particular emphasis on the interaction between marketing practice and discourse, the construction of the child consumer as an object of knowledge, children as subjects via goods and consumption, including research in history, food, play, advertising and, recently, [motherhood and consumption](#).

[Sharon Zukin, Brooklyn College & CUNY Graduate Center, Chair-Elect 2013-14, Chair 2014-15](#)

Sharon is a Professor of Sociology who researches cities, shopping, and consumer culture, often focusing on gentrification and recently writing about race and restaurants in a gentrifying neighborhood of Brooklyn. She coordinates a transnational research project on local shopping streets in six major cities, from New York to Amsterdam and Shanghai, which examines how urban consumption spaces build globalization from the ground up.

(Cont'd p. 14)

From the Editor: Welcome!

Nicki Lisa Cole, Pomona College



In 2007 a call for submissions for the annual conference of the Consumer Studies Research Network appeared in my email. In the midst of my dissertation research on the ethical sourcing and consumption of coffee, I was elated to learn of what seemed like the perfect outlet for sharing my work in progress. The conference, which was hosted by Juliet Schor and her colleagues at Boston College in August of 2008, was then the most invigorating intellectual experience of my young career as a researcher, and reflecting back on it, I see it as a defining moment in my life.

I remember the day with vivid clarity, from the outfit I was wearing, to the late summer humid heat, to the mixture of anxiety and excitement I felt as I made my way into a packed room of strangers for the opening plenary session. All day, the speakers invigorated my commitment to and intellectual curiosity for studying consumers and consumption. I remember who I met and chatted with over lunch, and the feeling of gratitude I experienced after receiving feedback on my research at the dissertation workshop. I remember with such fondness the warm hospitality Julie showed to all attendees by hosting us for a lovely and lively dinner at her home at the end of the day, and the spirit of collegiality I felt as I left her house in the summer twilight.

This day is burned so clearly into my memory because it was the day that I found my people; the day I found in all of you a community of like-minded scholars and activists who see that there is much more to consumption than meets the eye. I found in this community senior scholars I could look up to and be inspired by, and junior scholars who would become colleagues, collaborators, and friends. Most importantly, as a then graduate student isolated from studies of consumption at her home institution, I found intellectual and political validation for this line of work that we are in.

The CSRN community, which has now grown into a section of the ASA, has not only challenged and strengthened my work as a researcher and writer, but has been an invaluable resource to me as a teacher. For all of these reasons it is an honor and a pleasure to serve as editor of your newsletter, which I hope will help maintain our connection as a community of scholars, and provide inspiration and validation to the students among us.

Continuing the tradition set by the editors of the CSRN newsletter, we aim to not only bring you important information about opportunities in our field, but also to laud the successes of our members, and to foster vibrant engagement amongst each other around our work and interests. In addition to announcements and section updates, in this inaugural issue we are proud to bring you the wisdom of Sharon Zukin as she reflects on her storied career and discusses her dream research project, and to introduce Emilie Dubois, a passionate young scholar-activist who is pushing consumer studies into new terrain with her dissertation, and in the process, raising important questions about what constitutes consumer activism today. We are pleased to feature an essay by C. Clayton Childress, who shares with us some insights from doing work that transcends the troubled border between consumption and production studies.

Our spring issue will focus on food and agriculture, as we lead into our similarly focused pre-ASA mini-conference in Berkeley. We enthusiastically invite your participation in this upcoming issue, as we seek two feature essays on related topics, and nominations for our senior and junior scholar features. In addition, we invite features that spotlight interesting happenings in consumer culture, and that showcase work being done by colleagues beyond our borders. Please express your interest in contributing via email to nicki.cole@pomona.edu.

To foster community engagement all newsletter features will be posted on our section website and open for discussion via comments. If you have yet to do so, please check out our newly launched website at <http://asaconsumers.wordpress.com/>. The site is your most up to date resource for section news and for opportunities in our field, including publishing, conferences, and awards. You can also follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Tumblr](#).

Welcome. We look forward to hearing from you.

SECTION NEWS

ASA 2013

We had a very successful line-up of sessions and roundtables at ASA 2013 with enthusiastic response from conference attendees. The Section had two paper sessions, one on Consumption and Inequalities (organized by Joel P. Stillerman) and one on Consumption and the City (organized by Laura Miller). Our Regular Sessions were also a great success. Sharon Zukin organized two fantastic panels that were held on Sunday, August 11th—"Food Shopping and Social Inequalities" and "Consumers & Consumption: Structure, Culture and Social Inequality." We also had roundtable sessions focusing on topics such as Ethical and Political Consumption, Global and Transnational consumption, Class Tastes and Markets, and Consuming Gender. We look forward to an even more exciting ASA 2014!

ASA 2014: Mark Your Calendars!

The Consumers & Consumption section will be organizing a mini-conference (and possible field trip) for ASA 2014. The focus of the conference will be on food and the date will be August 15. A call for participation and location will be forthcoming. Our section day will be August 17.

...and don't forget to continue recruiting new members!

ASA 2015 Sessions

Have an idea for an ASA session? Submit proposals for Special and Invited sessions by February 5, 2014. [Click here](#) to read the guidelines and submit a proposal. Contact Section Chair Dan Cook at dtcook@camden.rutgers.edu to see examples of successful proposals.

Now Accepting Submissions for our section's Graduate Student Paper Award!

[The Sociology of Consumers and Consumption Section Student Paper Award](#) goes to the graduate student whose paper makes the best original contribution to the understanding of ideas about, and practices of, consumption. The sociology of consumption, broadly defined, includes subjects dealing with theoretical and/or empirical questions related to consumers, commodities, and/or consumer markets, and engages with a larger body of research on these topics. As long as the central focus is consumption, the paper may be influenced by disciplines and sub-fields ranging from the sociology of culture, the environment, and the body; and economics, political economy, and economic sociology; to comparative, historical, and political sociology. The competition is open to both published and unpublished article-length papers (roughly 25 double spaced pages in length without tables or references) written by a graduate student in the last two years (2012 or 2013). The Committee, consisting of [Amy Hanser, University of British Columbia](#) (chair), [Zsuzsanna Vargha, University of Leicester](#), and [John Lang, Occidental College](#), will accept sole-authored and multiple-authored papers as long as the applicant is the lead or senior author. No student-faculty collaborations can be accepted. The Committee will select the paper that demonstrates the most thoughtful, competent or innovative analysis of a theoretical or empirical issue bearing upon some aspect of the sociology of consumption. Please send all papers electronically to the committee chair, Amy Hanser at athanser@mail.ubc.ca by March 1, 2014.

Announcing new resource and opportunity for open collaboration!

Nicole Biggart and Kelsey Meagher invite researchers and students to check out and contribute to a web resource that includes theoretical and empirical material on consumption and exchange. [The Systems of Exchange](#) website describes a typology of types of exchange systems and examples of the exchange of goods and services including solar panels, water, excess clothing and much more using this framework. The four qualitatively different ways of ordering economic exchange captured in the systems of exchange typology—[Price](#), [Associative](#), [Moral](#) and [Communal](#)—show how exchange embedded in different types of social relations can take on different meanings and practices.

Here's to You...

[Joseph N. Cohen's](#) research on the rising cost of living in the US was [featured in The Guardian, Consumer Affairs](#), and on [San Francisco's KCBS radio](#). Joseph is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Queen's College, City University of New York.

[Melissa Aronczyk](#) published a new book with Oxford University Press titled [Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity](#). Melissa is Assistant Professor in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University.

[Nicki Lisa Cole](#) was interviewed about the human and environmental costs of Apple's Chinese supply chain [on The Morning Mix with Project Censored on Berkeley's KPFA radio](#). Her chapter on this research, co-authored with Tara Krishna, was published in the edited volume [Censored 2014: Fearless Speech in Fateful Times](#) (Seven Stories Press). [Publisher's Weekly](#) called the chapter "brutal yet essential reading," and [TruthOut](#) named the book Progressive Pick of the Week on its debut. Nicki also had a 4-part series on Apple's brand and ad campaigns [featured on Sociological Images](#) this summer. The series was rerun by [Work in Progress](#), the blog of the ASA section on Organizations, Occupations, and Work, and portions of it were run on [Pacific Standard](#) and [The Sociological Cinema](#). Nicki is a visiting scholar in sociology at Pomona College.

[Rebecca Elliott's](#) article, "[The taste for green: the possibilities and dynamics of status differentiation through 'green' consumption](#)," was published in the June 2013 issue of *Poetics*. Rebecca is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of California, Berkeley.

[Mikael Klintman](#) published a book with Palgrave Macmillan in 2012 titled [Citizen-Consumers and Evolution: Reducing Environmental Harm Through Our Social Motivation](#). Mikael is Professor of Sociology at Lund University, Sweden.

Martha Coe-Galeotti was awarded a research fellowship for study at the Strelka Institute for Architecture, Media and Design in Moscow, Russia. She will be in Moscow for 9 months looking at various aspects of urban routines, including retail, dwellings and cars. Martha is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at New York University.

Submit Papers for ASA 2014 in San Francisco!



We have a robust line-up of sessions at the upcoming meeting of the ASA, including several co-sponsored sessions (one with Culture and one with Body and Embodiment), and open call sessions to which you can submit. [Online submissions](#) open December 6 and close at 3:00 PM EST on January 14, 2014. [Click here](#) to view the full call for papers.

Section News, Continued

Regular Session on Consumers and Consumption

Session Organizer: Judith Taylor, City University of Toronto

Section Session: Consumers and Consumption: Creating, Perpetuating and Naturalizing Inequalities

Consumption scholarship makes clear that inequality is more complex than income. Consumption can serve as a site where individuals may display their wealth, hide their privilege, and seek upward mobility. We are seeking papers that contribute to this line of research, adding to our understanding of how consumption and consumer culture serve to create, perpetuate, and naturalize social inequalities. *Session Organizer: Keith R. Brown, St. Joseph's University*

Section Session: Bodies and Embodiment in Consumer Culture (co-sponsored with Section on Body and Embodiment)

Body image and bodily assessment are deeply connected to consumer culture, often in contradictory ways. Consumer culture can incorporate critiques of narrow bodily standards, while perpetuating hegemonic notions of feminine and masculine beauty. This session explores consumer culture's connection with beauty, the embodied experience of difference (along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, etc.), as well as disparate forms of bodily practice and display.

Session Organizers: José Johnston, University of Toronto and Kristen Barber, Southern Illinois University

Section Roundtables

These sessions will be one hour in length, followed by our section business meeting.

Session Organizer: Michaela DeSoucey, North Carolina State University

Sociology of Culture Section Session: Cultural Consumption in a Changing World (co-sponsored by our section)

Consider such cultural objects as music, food, film and books. Theories regarding cultural capital or cultural omnivorism (among others) have emphasized how the consumption of such cultural objects is embedded in and shaped by the positioning of people in the broader society (e.g., their class position). This session welcomes papers dealing with cultural consumption particularly those addressing the dynamic and / or shifting nature of that consumption. *Session Organizers: Laura Braden, Erasmus University Rotterdam and Timothy J. Dowd, Emory University*

Special Session: Cultures of Getting & Spending: Inequality from Market Interactions and Classifications

This Special Session looks at "hard times" and economic inequality through a cultural lens. Papers examine various ways in which inequalities are produced, managed and distributed through a range of practices, including consumer classification schemes, debt profiles and financial services. Together, they address finance and financialization as part of a broader terrain of consumption, interrogating how inequalities are coming to be structured in new and consequential ways for the lives of families and individuals. Organized by Zsuzsanna Vargha, University of Leicester and Daniel Thomas Cook, Rutgers University. Participants include Frederick Wherry, Yale University; Kristin Seefeldt, University of Michigan; Anthony Alvarez, California State University—Fullerton; Zsuzsanna Vargha and Rachel Sherman, New School for Social Research; Marion Fourcade, University of California at Berkeley; and Kieran Healy, Duke University.



Feature: “What Production Studies Can Learn from Consumption Studies”

C. Clayton Childress
University of Toronto

Kjerstin Gruys Wins 2013 Graduate Student Paper Award

Juliet Schor, Boston College

The committee selecting the best graduate student paper was pleased to award the inaugural prize to [Kjerstin Gruys](#). Gruys, a doctoral candidate at UCLA, did ten months of fieldwork as a clerk in a plus-size women's clothing store in a mainstream shopping mall. The paper, which was published in *Social Problems* in 2012 (vol. 59, no. 4), is entitled “[Does this make me look fat? Aesthetic Labor and Fat Talk as Emotional Labor in a Women's Plus-Size Clothing Store](#).” Gruys found deep ambivalence in her site. On the one hand, the national chain built its brand around valorizing “real” bodies and fighting the slenderness ideal. On the other, the customers remained deeply invested in stigmatized ideas of large bodies, eliciting aesthetic labor from the employees as they engaged in “fat talk.” They used their status as customers to reify differences among women, particularly hierarchies of race and body size. The committee, comprised of [Juliet Schor](#) (Boston College), [Amy Hanser](#) (University of British Columbia) and [Olga Shevchenko](#) (Williams College), was impressed with the paper's theoretical framing, its rich ethnographic material, and its sophisticated applications of consumption theory. We found it a worthy first paper in a very strong field. On behalf of all section officers and members, we congratulate Kjerstin on an outstanding paper!

The most important day in my brief life as a sociologist happened six years ago when I was a graduate student. I had recently finished my MA thesis on the mid-1990s transition on daytime television from “Trash Talk” shows (e.g. *The Jerry Springer Show*) to “Syndi-Court” shows (e.g. *Judge Judy*). It was a failed project of the “neither here nor there variety” in which I could never quite figure out what wasn't working as I desperately tried to misuse my content analysis for something it wasn't. As I'd guess almost all graduate students come to realize at some point, I had finally learned enough to know that I actually knew very little. In hindsight, I'm thankful for how little I knew, because otherwise, the most important day in my brief life as sociologist never would have happened.

I was gearing up to begin my dissertation, which for a variety of reasons, I had decided would be on books. As I sat in an advisor's office, I told her that I wanted to study novels. “Interesting,” she said halfheartedly. “So, do you want to do a production study or a consumption study?” It was a life changing moment. Someone smarter than me would have known the answer. A more experienced and well-read sociologist would understand not only the deep importance of the question, but also the subtext of it.

My response was sincere, I had of course thought about it, but out of a fair degree of ignorance I said the thing that would change everything: "Uh, both?"

By the grace of my initially concerned advisors, "both" is what I did. I spent about six months shadowing, interviewing, and surveying an author and her network as she wrote a book, another six months conducting an organizational ethnography of a publishing house while they edited her book, and then about another six months following the book through the review process, into bookstores and twenty-one book groups across the United States. At the end of this I circled back again to the author as she took what she had learned from the process and applied it to her next book. Somewhere along the way I realized I wasn't just studying the relationship between production and consumption, but was actually studying the relationship between three interdependent fields with their own norms, values, orientations and power relations within. Yet there were also "circuits" that passed through these fields, and people who specialized in translating the values of novels as they crossed into new fields. Projects are "pitched" from one field to another, which we sometimes actually even refer to as a "pitch" in some media industries. While after the fact this all may give the false impression of neatness, the process was far from neat, and the conclusions were something I stumbled upon along the way.

In truth, studying the relationships between creation, production, and consumption is not without its challenges. Beyond the exciting work on "contact points" between fields (e.g. Hsu, et al 2009; Miller 2007; Peterson 1999), for the most part we've split babies (although, see Griswold 2000 for an excellent counter-example). While I've heard people say that scholars of



production and scholars of consumption are on different "teams," I suspect this might be an overstatement, as any mention of teams implies that these two groups are competing, or even on the same field, or playing the same game at all. Instead, as Paul DiMaggio (1987) noted 25 years ago "the divorce of reception and production studies has led to an

estrangement between the sociology of art and the study of social organization...that a more integrative position can help bridge" (p. 442). Sadly, in the intervening two and one half decades I don't think much has changed. Based on my initially oblivious foray into an integrative project, I can offer three brief suggestions for what production scholars can learn from consumption scholars. These are incremental steps of course, which hopefully might provide a path away from the "here or there" relationship of production and consumption studies, and toward a "here and there" relationship.

Three Things the Study of Production Can Learn From the Study of Consumption

1. *Nobody Knows Anything*: The oft-repeated maxims that "all hits are flukes" (Bielby and Bielby 1994) and that "nobody knows anything" (Caves 2000) about how successful a new media product will be are core to understanding media industries. Simply by knowing that, as a general rule, fixed costs are high and profitability is unlikely, we can get exceptionally far in describing how decisions are made in these industries. Yet, these maxims are not the result of failures within media industries or organizations, and instead emerge out of the consumption process. As we've learned from Matt Salganik's creative work on artificial music markets (Salganik, et al. 2006, Salganik and Watts 2008;

see also De Vany and Walls 1999), the easy assumption that “quality” should predict “success” is misguided, and bandwagon effects within communities of consumers are likely driving the unpredictability of success, at least from the perspective of producers (see also Bauman (2007) for the related concept of “swarms”). Consumption scholars are those best equipped to port the suggestions from Salganik’s lab experiment into naturally occurring field sites. Even better, consumption scholars can take their lessons back to production scholars. Knowing precisely why nobody knows anything, and figuring out if there is actually anything that anyone might know, are both consumption questions that production scholars need the answers to.

2. *Demographically Conditioned Patterns of Taste*: From consumption studies we know that tastes – be they engagement with, or stated preferences for, some cultural objects over others – are demographically conditioned. Different people comprised of different intersecting demographic attributes have different orientations to and affections for different media objects. Regardless of one’s perspective as a Bourdieusian or a feminist standpoint theorist, among consumption scholars this is a basic but indispensable observation and we have a wide variety of methods to test it, understand it, and tease it out. Yet it turns out that like consumption, once you open up the “black box” of media production, there are actually people in there. As production scholars know, these people also rely on their personal tastes when making decisions, as do viewers, readers, and listeners. Using the findings and methods from consumption studies, there is very little preventing researchers from analyzing the demographic attributes of creators and decision makers within media organizations to see how they align (or don’t align) with what is ultimately produced out of their respective industries.

3. *Meaning Making*: From excellent work on

consumption we know that agentic and sometimes idiosyncratic processes of meaning making are core to reception practices. While the old, hoary ghosts of mindless automatons have been exorcised from work on consumption, we could still do a better job at treating media producers in parallel fashion. Although the existence of agency has been accepted, we still see a massive disconnect around sense and meaning-making between production and consumption studies. On the production side, from Bourdieu at his most mechanistic to various neo-institutional field theories, the roles of agency and meaning-making – issues that consumption studies have attended to in spades – are still somewhat underprivileged. As Ana Alacovska (2013) has shown of travel guidebook writers, Kasper T. Vangkilde (2013) has shown of fashion design teams, Leschziner and Green (2013) have shown of both culinary and sexual fields, and Alison Gerber (2013) is showing of artists, deliberate and non-dispositional processes of sense and meaning-making are deeply infused within production processes, be it for non-prestigious manual writing in the case of guidebooks, the creation of new fashion lines or new recipes in the production of clothes or food, or pricing in the case of artists. Yet one cannot overstate the head-start that consumption scholars have in this line of research. Production scholars would do well to take on these lessons, lest well-equipped consumption scholars decide to expand their reach and do it for them.

This list is surely incomplete, although I hope it serves its purpose in signaling that integrative positions in the study of production and consumption are not only possible, but also might be fruitful.

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Introducing Emilie Dubois

Nicki Lisa Cole, Pomona College

[Emilie Dubois](#) is destined to be a change-maker. Driven by her working class roots and experience growing up in the post-industrial community of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, she is revolutionizing how sociologists approach and understand the phenomenon of “connected consumption.”

Emilie, a doctoral candidate in [sociology at Boston College](#) who works closely with [Juliet Schor](#), was driven to our field by class inequities. She took her first sociology class at [Columbia University](#) while working in admissions at [Columbia Business School](#). Appalled by the directive to give preference to wealthy candidates, Emilie sought conceptual tools to help her understand the situation she found herself in. She enrolled in “Power and Politics in Organizations,” experienced in her words a “massive consciousness shift,” quit her job, and applied to graduate programs in sociology. Now, Emilie is in the midst of her dissertation research and works on Schor’s research team for the [MacArthur Foundation’s Connected Learning Research Network](#). The team is studying the phenomenon of “connected consumption,” which Emilie explains is a new system of exchange premised on “economic connections that are not mediated by an organization in a demonstrative way.”

With Schor’s MacArthur team Emilie has studied the phenomenon of “time banking.” She explains that the [time banking](#) model of exchanging services, which Schor considers a part of a growing “new economy,” “extracts the middle-man and creates a peer-to-peer exchange market.” What is unique, and in the context of capitalism, quite radical, about this phenomenon is that all labor is valued equally within these

localized systems of exchange. Mediated by online forums, members can join, post the skills and services they offer, and then are able to access the range of services offered by others. By giving their labor to another, a member accrues hours they can then “spend” on the services of another for anything from legal advice, to hair cutting and styling, or simple companionship. By conducting interviews and ethnographic fieldwork as a time bank member Emilie contributed to the team goal of “determining how the syntax of exchange works in these peer-to-peer marketplaces.”

Emilie’s dissertation research focuses on the digital dispersion of information that has facilitated the growth of connected consumption, which decreases the distance between producers, distributors, service providers, and consumers. She hopes to be able “to make a claim regarding the changed way that we share consumer information, which is having impacts all along the class scale, not just within the subsection of Whole Foods shoppers.” Breaking from Schor’s approach to studying the spread of the “eco-habitus” consumer culture and lifestyle (stay tuned to the [Journal of Consumer Culture](#) for a paper on this from Schor and her team), which has seemingly cohered as the norm in studying ethical and sustainable consumer practices within our field, Emilie is

“I have one chance at a career, and I want one with an impact for people that I really care about.”



interested in new consumer practices that are marginalized by an epistemological focus that often privileges the practices of the middle and upper classes, as well as urban dwellers. Her dissertation will include analysis of "[just between friend sales](#)"--peer sourced digitally networked yard sales popular with stay-at-home moms throughout the rural south--and the practice of "[extreme couponing](#)."

Emilie makes a compelling case for why such practices should be considered along with other now more common ones, like renting property via [Airbnb](#) or calling on [Lyft](#) or [Uber](#) rather than a taxi, as a part of the new economy of connected consumption.

"I see the digital element of connected consumption as pivotal to its existence, therefore, I would claim that something like extreme couponing would be a connected consumption practice. It's ecologically very at odds with an eco-habitus, it's traditionally done not in urban centers, but in disparate rural areas, however it is motivated and facilitated by the digital sharing initiative. The networks set up information blogs, and the primary way in which most extreme couponers are able to gather their information and share tactics is through these disparate networks that have a digital basis. The information distribution made possible by peer-to-peer online forums can have really unique forms that allow consumption to be connected and tactics for consumption to be shared amongst people who do not fit into the liberal hipster archetype that is sometimes associated with the movement. I see the sharing of information and tactics for consuming that create ways to work around the prices set by large corporations and decrease the monetary impact of consuming as the key elements of connected consumption. When you think of it in that manner it opens up other activities like [Ikea hacking](#) to consideration on a theoretical level, as consumptive practices that are connected, that are peer-to-peer, that do serve the same purpose of taking power away from larger corporations yet do not reduce overall rates of consumption."

Emilie is interested in understanding what happens when the exchange logic breaks down in the new economy, given that traditional routes of recourse are absent in these "pre-regulatory" marketplaces. She asks, "When will the legal world catch up with this specific type of new exchange?" Emilie observes that so far, "Most of the pushback against these types of movements, like Airbnb and Lyft, have come from those owners of the means of production, in traditional Marxist sense, who are concerned about losing some revenue due to the emergence of peer providers."

Emilie plans to produce her dissertation as a series of case-focused academic articles, and following that, as an accessibly written book to be distributed via a trade press. "For me it's really about applied results. It's about tangible results. It's about providing some insight into the social world; especially as we experience it through the consumer marketplace, through the marketplace for goods and services, for our labor, for our lives. That's the most compelling part of sociology to me."

Look for the results of Emilie's research in the forthcoming volume *Practicing Plenitude*, set to be released as a college level teaching text to be paired with Schor's book [Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth](#).



A CONVERSATION WITH SHARON ZUKIN

[Sharon Zukin](#), chair-elect of the section on consumers and consumption, is a professor of sociology at [Brooklyn College](#) and the [Graduate Center of the City University of New York](#). She started out as a political sociologist, became an urban sociologist, and now combines those interests with studies of institutions, spaces and cultures of consumption. She has received the [C. Wright Mills Award](#), the [Robert and Helen Lynd Award](#) for career achievement in community and urban sociology, and the [Jane Jacobs Award for urban communication](#). Her most recent book is [Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places](#), and her most recent article looks at restaurants and racial identity in a gentrifying area of Brooklyn.

Nicki: You began your academic career in political science. How did you come to study consumer culture and its implications?

Sharon: During the 1980s, I was excited by new historical work, and by new translations of historical work, that show how ideology is shaped

by material cultures of consumption. Most important, I read the social theorist [Walter Benjamin's](#) essay "[Paris, Capital of the 19th Century](#)" and learned about his meticulous archival research on the development of consumer culture in Paris in that era. Benjamin could connect a bustier in a shop window with ideology-- I wanted to write like him!

I was also impressed by the anthropologist [Sidney Mintz's](#) terrific historical study [Sweetness and Power](#). Mintz shows how, during the Industrial Revolution, the global commodity chain of sugar connected African slaves on Caribbean plantations with English factory workers. You suddenly grasped how all of British capitalism depended on persuading vast numbers of people to drink tea with sugar.

Nicki: What troubles you most about consumer culture today? If anything, what delights you?

Sharon: The worst thing about consumer culture today is the way it invades and permeates our lives, transforming the human capacity for pleasure into an insatiable desire to buy. DORITOS® and Frappuccinos®--note the trademarks!-- turn us into addicts with highly specific cravings. New media like Facebook and Twitter are also addictive—and they track our every keystroke.

Anyone who has read my book [Point of Purchase](#) knows I am delighted by farmers' markets. But after I read Michèle de la Pradelle's wonderful study [Market Day in Provence](#), I realized I am easily taken in by the air of conviviality and even social intimacy that, according to de la Pradelle, the local vendors and resident shoppers carefully construct!

As someone who has lived in big cities all her life, I revel in the visual pleasures of products on display—in shop windows and outdoor markets and on other people's bodies. It's the lack of

balance between display and manipulation that disturbs me.

Nicki: You have a long, storied career, and have won some impressive accolades for your work. What are you most proud of?

Sharon: Right now I'm proud to be a part of our new ASA section and to have been entrusted by other members with one of the guiding roles. I'm grateful for this huge vote of confidence.

I also admit to feeling really proud when my book [*Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*](#) won the [C. Wright Mills Award](#) from the [Society for the Study of Social Problems](#). To have my work associated with Mills—such a powerful, critical writer!—was very gratifying.

Nicki: Absent any constraints, what is your dream research project?

Sharon: Actually, I am completing a transnational research project that in many ways has been a dream. During the past three years, I have worked with colleagues in six major cities around the world to study local shopping streets. We carried out parallel studies, funded by patching together student assistantships and a lot of good will, in New York, Toronto, Amsterdam, Berlin, Tokyo and

Shanghai, focusing on two neighborhood shopping streets in each city, including streets in immigrant communities. And we have met together in three annual workshops: in New York, Shanghai and Amsterdam.

Coordinating this project has given me great pleasure, starting with travel to each research site. I have learned a huge amount of not obvious information about each city and about the social relations and visual discourses of shopping streets.

Now we have a contract to publish our multi-authored book and create a website for it, and the dream project faces the reality of meeting deadlines and making sure the individual projects turn into a coherent narrative. We will succeed if our work inspires people to support their neighborhood shops and store owners, and local consumer culture survives the dual onslaught of homogenizing chain stores and competition from online sales.

I believe a dream project should tackle significant issues, promise transformation...and require travel outside of familiar zones.

YOUR SECTION LEADERSHIP, CONTINUED

[Laura J. Miller, Brandeis University, Secretary & Treasurer, 2013-16](#)

Laura is an Associate Professor of Sociology whose research focuses on the intersection of cultural and economic factors within industries characterized by moral commitments to their products. She is writing a book that examines the relationship between the natural foods industry and natural foods as a social movement.

[Martha Coe, New York University, 2-year Student Council Member, 2013-15](#)

Martha is a doctoral candidate in sociology at NYU. Her research focuses on urbanism, consumption and security. She is currently a research fellow at the Strelka Institute for Architecture, Media and Design in Moscow, Russia looking at everyday routines and urban culture in contemporary cities.

[Nicki Lisa Cole, Pomona College, Council Member, Editor of Newsletter & Section Website, 2013-15](#)

Nicki is a Visiting Scholar in Sociology who works as a public sociologist, freelance writer, and blogger. She researches social, economic, and environmental inequalities embedded in and generated by global supply chains, consumer awareness of and ambivalence toward them, and consumer interest in ethically marketed and certified products. She is founder and head writer of the public sociology blog [21 Century Nomad](#).

[Josée Johnston, University of Toronto, Council Member, 2013-15](#)

Josée is an Associate Professor of Sociology who studies the sociology of food and ethical consumption, with a particular focus on the intersection of social movement projects and corporate discourse.

[Ashley Mears, Boston University, Council Member, 2013-15](#)

Ashley is an Assistant Professor of Sociology who researches the cultural foundations of markets, with a focus on valuation, culture industries like fashion and nightlife, and gender inequalities. Her book [Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model](#) was published in 2011 by University of California Press.

[Amy Hanser, University of British Columbia, Council Member, 2013-16](#)

Amy is an Associate Professor of Sociology who has studied China's emerging service sector and consumer culture, and is now focused on researching the implications of an emerging consumer culture for structures of inequality in urban China.

[Ethan Schoolman, University of Michigan, Council Member, 2013-14](#)

Ethan is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the School of Natural Resources and Environment & the Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise who conducts independent research on the environmental impacts of local food systems, while also coordinating qualitative research for the USDA-funded [Food Access in Michigan](#) project (Dr. Dorceta Taylor, P.I.).

[Jeremy Schulz, University of California, Berkeley, Council Member, 2013-14](#)

Jeremy Schulz is a Visiting Scholar at the UC Berkeley Institute for the Study of Societal Issues. After earning his PhD at UC Berkeley, he launched a project exploring stances towards educational debt as an NSF Fellow at Cornell. His other work addresses sociological theory, work, family, culture, consumption, and qualitative methods. His articles include 'Talk of Work' in *Theory and Society* and 'Zoning the Evening' given the Shils-Coleman Award from the ASA Theory Section.

"What Consumption Studies Can Learn" (continued from page 8)

As Klaus Nathaus and I have argued in a different venue (2013), another avenue for connection between production and consumption might center on genres, which both scholars of production and scholars of consumption –in addition to creators and consumers themselves – take interest in. Importantly, we can make these connections on the micro and meso-levels, and work to reintegrate the studies of production and consumption without relying on the macro-level paradigmatic statements of Parsons on the one hand, or the Frankfurt school on the other. One of the few things I can say with authority is that there's no shame in starting small. In fact, starting small has its advantages. From my fieldwork on the creation, production and consumption of literature, I can also say that more often than not novel solutions to seemingly intractable problems require some integration. They take less "or" and more "and."

Editor's note: This feature article is now running on our website and open for comments. We hope you will join the conversation.

[C. Clayton Childress](#) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at University of Toronto. His work on books has been published in [American Sociological Review](#), [European Journal of Cultural Studies](#), [Historical Social Research](#), and the [Journal of Business Anthropology](#). A book-length monograph on the creation, production and consumption of *Jarrettsville*, a 2009 work of historical fiction, is under contract with Princeton University Press.

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