

Objects." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 25 (1995): 1611-1636.

Van Vliet, Bas, Heather Chappells, and Elizabeth Shove. *Infrastructures of Consumption: Environmental Innovation in the Utility Industries*. London: Earthscan, 2005.

ETHNICITY/RACE

Race refers to categories defined by phenotypes, physical or visual markers, that have been afforded significance over time. In contrast, ethnicity refers to groups defined by their shared history, cultural beliefs, rituals, and practices. Both race and ethnicity are socially constructed categories that serve as a basis of group membership. In terms of differences, racial categories are less malleable over time, and race, unlike ethnicity, is often defined externally, leaving less room for subjective conceptualizations. For convenience, race and ethnicity are used interchangeably in this entry.

The divergence of racial minorities' preferences and practices from that of the majority groups' is often explained as evidence of a subculture, their taste and traditions being rooted in cultural practices different from that of the majority group. But to fully account for the myriad ways that race and ethnic group membership produce both differences in taste and preferences and similarities in patterns of consumption, a more dynamic explanation is needed. This entry extends the discussion of the impact of class and culture on consumption to include a discussion of the consequences of racial alienation, segregation, and discrimination. Currently, three theoretical frameworks exist to account for the function consumption serves for racial minorities: consumption as a response to alienation, as a form of resistance, and a means to demonstrate one's social identity. Ethnographic evidence is cited to illustrate the impact of race on consumption, using the experience of African American consumers as a case study. Additionally, areas worthy of future research and evidence from the experiences of other racial groups are discussed in the concluding section.

Impact of Class, Culture, and Race on Consumption

In many ways, racial and ethnic minorities' preferences as consumers and the symbolic value they attribute to particular goods reflect prevailing mores and values

operating on a societal level. However, national contexts differ in the level of ethnic diversity, the degree to which they require minorities to assimilate, and the pervasiveness of racial stigma and inequality. Societies also vary markedly in the degree that they encourage consumption and emphasize values such as materialism and individualism. Often, racial and ethnic minorities have to engage multiple meaning systems and orientations, using goods to negotiate interactions with both in-group and out-group members. Cultural, class-based, and racial dynamics together affect how members of racial and ethnic minority groups engage in consumption. Consequently, racial and ethnic minorities' orientations toward consumption may diverge from the dominant culture in important ways.

For racial minorities, consumption practices are a means of affirming and reinforcing group boundaries. As Viviana Zelizer asserts, distinct cultural sensibilities are expressed through consumption and are often grounded in an ethnic identity. The celebration of unique aspects of a group's culture is often intricately tied to the consumption of particular goods, as goods are integral to the performance of social rituals that distinguish a group. For racial minorities, the social meaning goods convey may even carry a "double meaning," notes Dick Hedbidge. Additionally, scholars have argued that internal status hierarchies within groups are often maintained through distinct group practices and that social status is gained "not through adherence to monolithic consumption norms but through displays of localized cultural capital" (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 874).

In addition to helping minorities to maintain distinct cultural orientations, patterns of consumption reflect class relations. The impact of class on consumption has been extensively theorized in the sociological literature. It is argued that consumers use goods to draw class boundaries and use goods in interactions to determine social status. Furthermore, according to Pierre Bourdieu, consumption constitutes a class-based practice that facilitates the reproduction of economic inequality.

To the extent that racial minorities share material aspirations with the dominant culture, their desires and preferences are similar. Yet as members of racial and ethnic minority groups are often disproportionately located at the lower end of a society's socioeconomic spectrum, their access to economic resources affects their consumption. Thorstein Veblen argues that low-status groups emulate the elite in their tastes

and preferences. For Veblen, "standards of worth" and norms of "reputability" are determined by the "leisure class" and are then diffused "down through the social structure to the lowest strata" (1915, 57). Yet many scholars have criticized the top-down explanation of consumer tastes, as marginalized groups have also played a prominent role in shaping popular tastes and consumer preferences. For example, despite their low-status position, poor African American youth are instrumental in determining what constitutes popular culture in the United States. Furthermore, tastes are not static, and, as they evolve, preferences and practices that are initially seen as divergent over time may become mainstream, irrespective of the class origins of their original producers or creators.

Pattern of consumption among racial and ethnic minorities also reflect their past and present experiences of racial inequality and alienation. Racial segregation, stigma, and discrimination together result in feelings of exclusion and racial alienation, which impact racial minorities' consumer preferences, practices, and motivations. Sentiments of racial alienation range along a continuum from feeling incorporated and entitled to societal resources to feeling completely excluded from such benefits, according to Lawrence Bobo and Vincent Hutchings. Feelings of racial alienation are integral to a shared system of beliefs maintained by members of minority groups, helping to forge ties between group members. In their research, Bobo and Hutchings find that improving one's class status does not necessarily eliminate feelings of racial alienation. For example, the level of racial alienation increases as African Americans' incomes rise. The collective experience of societal maltreatment is more determinative of the level of racial alienation that exists for any particular group than individual-level factors, such as personal background and social position.

Racial alienation is rooted in historical conditions that have stratified groups and produced racial inequality. Historically, in the United States, prohibitions were placed on where and when minorities could engage in consumption. African Americans were subject to inferior treatment and often targeted for exploitation in retail and commercial settings. As such, much of the activism of civil rights movement focused on the fair treatment of consumers and gaining access to public places such as restaurants.

Exclusionary policies and discriminatory practices have direct and indirect consequences for racial

minorities' consumption. For instance, past conditions may have a durable effect on the practices and patterns of consumption exhibited by minorities today, even with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that outlawed legal barriers to free participation in consumption. Robert Weems suggests that in the 1940s and 1950s, blacks preferred to stay home and listen to the radio and refrained from going out where they might face discrimination. Even as discrimination in the market has lessened, practices, such as partaking in leisure at home to avert discrimination, may have become ingrained in the lives of blacks. In fact, research by Jeffrey Humphreys suggests that African Americans spend less money dining outside the home compared to nonblacks.

Combined with past experiences, present discrimination serves to broaden racial divergence in consumption. For instance, racial segregation, in terms of neighborhoods and friendship networks, produces social worlds in which different values and cultural orientations prevail, and as a result, patterns of consumption differ. Immigrants often reside in ethnic enclaves, and such residential patterns have been shown to impact consumption. For instance, Mexican immigrants who live in ethnic enclaves tend to have similar consumption patterns as those in Mexico. Their consumption is more likely to be tied to the "maintenance of their culture and family ties" (Wilson 2007, 70). However, because minorities live in segregated communities does not mean that they form the basis of a market segment or exhibit homogeneous taste and orientations. Yet there are clear differences in consumption among racial groups, which is attributable to differences in class, culture, and the experience of racial discrimination and alienation.

Theoretical Frameworks

While the literature on how race affects consumption is sparse, three theoretical frameworks exist to account for minorities' consumption: consumption as a means to defuse alienation, as a tool of resistance, and as an instrument to display one's social identity. These theories posit that consumption is not only a means of gaining social status, but, for minorities, it is also used to respond to social exclusion.

The first theoretical proposition suggests that racial minorities engage in consumption in an attempt to overcome alienation. Consumption becomes both a response to their stigmatized position and a way

to avert stereotypes. According to this perspective, minorities attempt to buy "respect" and "dignity" (Weems 1998, 27) and "consume conspicuously as a way of compensating for the humiliation and disappointments they incur" (Austin 1994, 156) because of their low status position. Minorities appear immaculate and wear expensive clothes to reduce the impact of negative stereotypes to such an extent that they are more willing to invest in visible markers of social status than similarly positioned whites.

The second theoretical proposition, consumption as resistance, suggests that minorities' consumption can be interpreted as a form of resistance to dominant society and mainstream cultural norms. Scholars, such as Dick Hebdige, argue that subordinate groups use goods subversively. The consumption as resistance framework suggests the opposite of the consumption as alienation perspective, which argues that minorities use goods to demonstrate their adherence to mainstream values and norms. In contrast, it asserts that minorities consciously use consumption to symbolically protest social stigma and poor treatment based on race or ethnicity.

Last, the third proposition, consumption as social identity, contends that social identities are fashioned through consumption. For minorities, consumption is used "to express and transform their collective identity and to acquire social membership, i.e., to signify and claim that they are full and equal members in their society" (Lamont and Molnár 2001, 31). Additionally, consumption helps to distinguish a group's characteristics and values. Members of stigmatized groups engage in an internal identification process, using goods to identify with other in-group members, as well as an external identification process, using goods to demonstrate their shared values and membership in the larger society.

Each of the aforementioned approaches has also been criticized for being underdeveloped, as minorities' experiences in the market and as consumers is not fully accounted for. Regina Austin criticizes the consumption as alienation perspective, arguing that it (1) over emphasizes and interrupts racial minorities' actions as a response to whites, (2) fails to address internal differentiation and conflict within racial groups along class lines, and (3) ignores the importance of consumption in individual's conception of the "good life." Michelle Lamont and Virag Molnár's criticism of this approach parallels the third critique made by Austin; they maintain that

the consumption as alienation approach "downplays the subjective meaning that consumers attach to their consumption practices" and assumes that consumption results from repression (2001, 34). Austin criticizes the consumption as resistance perspective for overemphasizing the idea of symbolic protest. Lamont and Molnár similarly argue the consumption as resistance perspective projects consumers as being too powerful, overestimating their ability to challenge dominant narratives.

While the aforementioned theoretical propositions are presented as separate and competing frames, consumers likely use consumption in a variety of ways, demonstrating evidence for each of the approaches. While none of the approaches has been thoroughly tested, examples from a wide range of ethnographic accounts illustrate their usefulness. In the following section, the experiences of African American consumers are reviewed to demonstrate that these frames are used in the everyday lives of racial and ethnic minorities. While the experiences of other groups may parallel that of African Americans, the examples presented here also illustrate how local conditions and factors unique to specific groups structure patterns of consumption, creating divergence.

African American Consumers as a Case Study

Ethnographic accounts examining the everyday lives of African Americans provide compelling evidence for the consumption as alienation, resistance, and social identity frameworks, as well as areas worthy of theoretical elaboration. The case of African Americans is a suitable example because, as Lizabeth Cohen has noted, even while African Americans have historically been restricted from full participation in economic life, they nonetheless have remained active consumers. By examining patterns of consumption exhibited by African Americans, insight can be gained with regard to how race, class, and consumption interact.

According to the consumption as alienation approach, racial minorities consciously display material goods with the goal of averting discrimination. In her account of the black middle class, Karyn Lacy, in *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class* (2007), illustrates the myriad ways middle-class blacks create public identities based on their class standing in an effort to avoid racial discrimination. To limit negative and alienating experiences in public settings, particularly while

shopping, she finds that members of the black middle class put their class status on display. Her respondents "dress with care" and are always mindful of their self-presentation because they anticipate they will be treated badly and have "unpleasant" shopping experiences if they are not dressed formally or donning expensive brands. Through their clothing, they demonstrate their "respectability to white strangers" and "signal that they 'belong' in the store" (76). In public settings, indicators of social status, such as one's level of education, are not easily detected, heightening the role of consumption. While whites may similarly "portray distinct identities as a way of signaling social position" (39), Lacy argues that because of the stigma of race, "blacks who have 'made it' must work harder, more deliberately, and more consistently to make their middle-class status known to others" (3). Lacy's work evidences that blacks use consumption to respond to stereotypes, specifically the stereotype that all blacks are poor.

Additional accounts provide evidence of how African Americans use consumption to actively contest their stigmatized position in society. For poor blacks, consumption provides a means to prove "themselves to be worthy" (Austin 1994, 154). Carl Nightingale asserts this idea, arguing that the poor ghetto youth he studied, as a consequence of social stigma and alienation, use conspicuous consumption to demonstrate to others they can achieve the American dream. He finds that the young boys fervently use consumption as a means of gaining a sense of self-worth. Similarly, the young mothers depicted in Elijah Anderson's *Code of the Street* (1999) use consumption and goods to achieve social status, adorning their babies in expensive clothing and footwear. As he states, "The teenage mother derives status from her baby; hence her preoccupation with the impression that the baby makes and her willingness to spend inordinately large sums toward that end" (165). Similarly, Mary Pattillo-McCoy reveals in *Black Picket Fences* (1999) that one of her respondents, Neisha, perceives other women in her neighborhood as her social inferiors if they either choose or cannot afford to dress their babies in the latest fashions. These young, poor black women use consumption in ways that do not conform to mainstream projections of what is appropriate, yet they consciously display goods as a means of coping with marginalization and of attaining social honor in communities in which there is little to go around.

The second theoretical perspective, consumption as resistance, asserts that blacks use consumption to resist dominant cultural norms, and by doing so, consumption can be used as a means of both pleasure and protest. The work of Elizabeth Chin, examining how poor, urban black children engage in consumption, lends support to the consumption as resistance framework. She finds that the children she observed use consumption for expressive and social purposes. For them, consumption is "a sphere of creative play" and also a "realm in which they can construct critical assessments of the world around them" (2001, 178). For the children in her study, consumption becomes a means of both resisting and reinterpreting the world around them.

St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, in their classical work *Black Metropolis*, first published in 1945, provide additional evidence for this perspective. They suggest that blacks place a premium on "enjoying life" irrespective of their economic position, and they go on to argue that "having a good time" also functions as an "escape from the tensions of contact with white people. Absorption in 'pleasure' is, in part at least, a kind of adjustment to their separate, subordinate status in American life" (1993, 387). In her work, Pattillo-McCoy provides evidence that African Americans use consumption to "have a good time." She states that young people in Groveland, the community she studies, use "fashions to resist and reinterpret their racially marginalized position" all the while "having fun" (1999, 148). She demonstrates the ways in which young people take mainstream brands and radically change them, such that their style demonstrates "a blatant use of popular fashion for locally significant ends" (163). Pattillo-McCoy provides support for the claim that consumption for African Americans can be liberating and used creatively to subvert dominant culture and taste. Her work also demonstrates the importance of the local context in shaping the meaning attributed to material goods and how people use those material goods.

Similarly, one of Lacy's most interesting findings is that middle-class African Americans see themselves as responsible consumers, but "responsible spending doesn't mean doing without luxuries" (2007, 133). While Lacy does not spell out what set of goods are encompassed in African American's conception of the good life, she does suggest that African Americans are more likely to indulge themselves with creature comforts that are associated with a

middle-class lifestyle. While they believe in spending responsibly, middle-class African Americans also consume because they believe that having certain material goods makes their lives more enjoyable. Interestingly, the middle-class African Americans in her study state that they are less concerned with frugality than their middle-class white counterparts but do not see themselves as invested in material things as lower-class African Americans. In fact, they actively criticize African Americans who they believe are living beyond their means or not earning a living legitimately. Lacy's work evidences just how members of racial groups maintain perceptions of internal differences that exist, particularly along class lines.

Lamont and Molnár provide evidence for the third theoretical proposition, that consumption is a means for demonstrating social identity. They find that African American marketing executives promote consumption as a means of expression of group membership and collective identity. It becomes a part of what makes African American culture distinct. But these executives also assert that African Americans should and do use consumption to demonstrate their allegiance to "mainstream" middle-class values. They argue that through consumption, African Americans "affirm and gain recognition of their full membership in U.S. society" (2001, 36). Yet, as Lamont and Molnár argue, it is problematic that consumption is defined as a means of gaining entry into American society, as they state of the exclusiveness inherent in such a criteria: "Equating social membership with buying power makes it largely unreachable for a large number of whites and blacks alike" (42).

In many ways, blacks' protest of discrimination in the sphere of consumption was tied to claims of national identity and rights associated with American citizenship, lending support for the consumption as social identity perspective. Historically, minorities have used the sphere of consumption collectively and individually to fight for greater racial equality in the United States. In her account of the rise of the "consumer republic," Cohen describes the various collective strategies African Americans employed to assert their citizenship. During the civil rights movement, African American communities used their purchasing power for political ends, boycotting stores, movie theaters, and other public venues in protest of racial prejudice. Cohen describes African Americans' political activity as part of a larger ideological shift in which consumption became associated with national

prosperity and equal citizenship. Equal access to consumer goods is associated with a middle-class lifestyle, which was seen as essential to maintaining democracy. African Americans' struggle for the right to shop was necessary, as the ability of all citizens to spend freely was rendered vital to American prosperity.

In addition to providing support for the aforementioned frames, ethnographic accounts indicate where there is room for improvement in the understanding of minorities' consumption. Such research suggests additional ways minorities use consumption and it also raises important concerns, such as the detrimental role consumption plays. Four areas for theoretical elaboration should be noted. First, minorities may refuse to engage in consumption, and when and why they forfeit spending is of equal importance. Second, it is imperative to note which groups or social spaces shape and inform minorities consumer's decisions and why. Third, future research must account for the structural conditions that racial and ethnic minorities face, which shapes both their consumption and the social significance of goods they purchase. Lastly, the negative consequences of consumption are worthy of thorough examination.

Continuing with the case study of the African American experience, historically, African Americans have refused to spend their money in places where they have been discriminated against. In her research, Jennifer Lee finds that African Americans often employ strategies of avoidance in which they refused to "patronize businesses that do not treat them fairly" (2000, 371). Their refusal to shop or spend money, though not organized on a collective level, has implications for other decisions they make. For instance, some middle-class blacks in Lee's study remark that discriminatory retail experiences in nonblack neighborhoods was a "chief reason why they prefer living in predominantly black communities" (371). While discrimination "narrows blacks' choices with regard to where to consume and hinders their ability to enter into efficient commercial transactions," it might also result in blacks simply refusing to make certain purchases (Austin 1994, 150). Whether African Americans, or other minorities, withdraw from the market because of individual experiences of discrimination or because of inferior goods and services, it is important to note why consumers use this strategy, how frequently they do so, and how effective it is. Furthermore, how does the decision to withdraw from the market in one sphere shape preferences and choices in other spheres?

Theoretical elaboration is also needed to understand to what degree racial and ethnic minorities' preferences are shaped by the consumption of similarly situated in-group members, high-status in-group members, or whites of equal or higher status. Austin suggests that status hierarchies within the black community have a significant impact on how and why African Americans consume. She asserts that "blacks in general do not pay that much attention to white people" (163). Pattillo-McCoy provides a more nuanced perspective, arguing that African Americans' actions are not geared toward any one group but that they buy certain goods to send a message simultaneously to those who are both socially proximate and distant. As she states of African Americans who own Cadillacs, "The driver buys it to signify first to himself or herself, then to friends, and finally to 'the white man,' that he or she has made it" (1999, 148). In her research on Korean and Chinese second-generation immigrants, Lisa Sun-Hee Park similarly notes that her respondents' consumer choices often reflected a desire to "prove their 'Americanness'" or to appear like a "normal American family" (2005, 2-3). But their consumption was also important within their families and the broader immigrant community, as it demonstrated upward mobility and social advancement. While such evidence suggests that racial minorities' consumption is affected both by in-group and out-group values, without further investigation, there is no way to know which group most significantly shapes patterns of consumption exhibited by racial and ethnic minorities.

The degree to which consumption can be detrimental is a question worthy of further investigation. If consumption is crucial in demonstrating upward mobility, racial minorities may be induced to consume when it is not in their long-term financial interests to do so. As Pattillo-McCoy notes, African Americans use "material goods to level the playing field, buying things they often cannot afford in order to give others the impression that they can" (1999, 147). Drake and Cayton similarly found that the lives of Bronzille's residents were organized around "getting ahead" (1993, 388). "Getting ahead" entails a commitment to economic advancement, of which the consumption of certain goods is emblematic. As they state,

In its simplest terms this means progressively moving from low-paid to higher-paid jobs, acquiring a more comfortable home, laying up something for sickness

and old age, and trying to make sure that the children will start out at a higher economic and cultural level than their parents. Individuals symbolized their progress by the way they spend their money—for clothes, real estate, automobiles, donations, entertaining. (388)

Consumption serves as a means of demonstrating upward mobility within the black community; even when limited (legitimate) opportunities exist, this desire to consume remains, sometimes producing deleterious consequences. The works of Drake and Cayton, Anderson, and Pattillo-McCoy all reveal the harmful role consumption can play. Drake and Cayton argue that "maintaining a 'front' and 'showing off' become very important substitutes for getting ahead in the economic sense" (1993, 389). For those with little other opportunities, like the young women who make up Anderson's "Baby Club," consumption can reinforce counterproductive social norms. Pattillo-McCoy provides an account of a young man named Tyson, who at the age of sixteen was lured into selling drugs by the fast money he could earn and then use to consume. As she notes, "Tyson felt he was a man because he could use his drug profits to buy whatever he wanted. And the first things he wanted were clothes and shoes" (1999, 159).

Experiences of Other Racial and Ethnic Groups

Similarities exist across racial and ethnic groups in how material goods are used simultaneously to maintain group boundaries, to structure social relations with fellow in-group members, and to gain social acceptance among out-group members. Research on Korean and Chinese second-generation immigrants has revealed that a premium is placed on the consumption of high-status goods because of the social status such goods convey within the group. Additionally, material goods are used to demonstrate social citizenship and membership. Similarly, Sathi Dasgupta found that among Indian immigrants consumption of high-status goods is perceived as instrumental in their efforts to gain acceptance in American society. The work of Raj Mehta and Russell W. Belk on Indian immigrant families also illustrates the importance of consumption and the use of goods to preserve one's ethnic heritage. Families studied reflected a desire both to adapt to their new context and to preserve various aspects of

their culture of origin. Research on racial and ethnic groups presents clear evidence for the social identity framework, though more research is needed to determine the applicability of the consumption as a response to alienation and consumption as a form of resistance frameworks to the experiences of ethnic immigrants in the context of the United States and more broadly.

Conclusion

Sociological theories of consumption posit that on an aggregate level, consumption is a means by which people demonstrate their social status and group membership. On a microlevel, objects and goods are acquired because they maintain symbolic value, which people use to "construct identities and relations with others who inhabit a similar symbolic universe" (DiMaggio 1994, 44). The preferences and decisions of racial and ethnic minorities as consumers are shaped by their experience of alienation, their resistance, and their desire for leisure and entertainment. But consumption also plays an important role in the construction of racial and class-based identities. Minorities' conception of consumption is a product of pervasive cultural repertoires, but it also is a product of their social and economic context and the particular set of conditions they face as a consequence of stigma and discrimination. Experiences of differential treatment along racial and ethnic lines, combined with differences in class and culture, result in minorities' distinct practices, preferences, and motivations with regard to consumption.

Cassi L. Pittman

See also Conspicuous Consumption; Ghettos; Identity; Leisure; Resistance; Social Distinction; Social Exclusion; Subculture

Further Readings

- Anderson, Elijah. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1999.
- Arnould, Eric J., and Craig J. Thompson. "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research." *Journal of Consumer Research* 31, no. 4 (2005): 868-882.
- Austin, Regina. "A Nation of Thieves: Securing Black People's Right to Shop and to Sell in White America." *Utah Law Review* 1 (1994): 147-177.
- Bobo, Lawrence, and Vincent L. Hutching. "Perceptions of Racial Group Competition: Extending Blumer's Theory of Group Position to a Multiracial Social Context." *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 6 (1996): 951-962.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Chin, Elizabeth. *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer's Republic the Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Vintage Books, 2004.
- Corrigan, Peter. *The Sociology of Consumption: An Introduction*. London: Sage Publications, 1997.
- Dasgupta, Sathi S. *On the Trail of an Uncertain Dream: Indian Immigrant Experience in America*. New York: AMS, 1989.
- DiMaggio, Paul. "Culture and Economy." In *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, edited by Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg, 27-57. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Drake, St. Clair, and Horace R. Cayton. *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture the Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Humphreys, Jeffrey M. *The Multicultural Economy, 2008: Minority Buying Power in the New Century*. Athens, GA: Selig Center for Economic Growth, Terry College of Business, University of Georgia, 2008.
- Lacy, Karyn R. *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Lamont, Michele, and Virag Molnar. "How Blacks Use Consumption to Shape their Collective Identity: Evidence from Marketing Specialists." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 1, no. 1 (2001): 31-45.
- Lee, Jennifer. "From Civil Relations to Racial Conflict: Merchant-Customer Interactions in Urban America." *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 1 (2002): 77-98.
- Mehta, Raj, and Russell W. Belk. "Artifacts, Identity, and Transition: Favorite Possessions of Indians and Indian Immigrants to the United States." *Journal of Consumer Research* 17, no. 4 (1991): 398-411.
- Nightingale, Carl. *On the Edge: A History of Poor Black Children and Their American Dreams*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.
- Park, Lisa Sun-Hee. *Consuming Citizenship: Children of Asian Immigrant Entrepreneurs (Asian America)*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Pattillo-McCoy, Mary. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

- Veblen, Thorstein. *Conspicuous Consumption*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006. First published 1915.
- Weems, Robert E. *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Wilson, R. T. "Acculturation and Discrimination in the Global Market Place: The Case of Hispanics in the U.S." *Journal of International Consumer Marketing* 20, no. 1 (2007): 67-78.
- Zelizer, Viviana. "Culture and Consumption." In *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, edited by Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg, 331-354. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography is the description, interpretation, and analysis of a culture or social group, or of particular social practices, processes, or problems, through field research in naturally occurring settings. Ethnography is the core research practice of social and cultural anthropology and is commonly used in sociology and cultural studies, as well as in studies of science and technology, health, education, crime, and, increasingly, in consumer research, design, and product development. The method of participant observation is central to the practice of ethnography.

In anthropology, conventionally, ethnographic fieldwork is a long-term, comprehensive social immersion, usually in a culture alien to that of the researcher. This is contrasted with sociological ethnography, which usually involves more bounded periods of fieldwork and relatively discrete cultural forms and often takes place in the researcher's own society.

Within ethnography, participant observation is commonly supplemented with interviewing, as well as other research methods including, but not limited to, textual analysis and the interpretation of visual representations and material artifacts. However, the practice of ethnography cannot be reduced to particular research methods, or even a single methodological position. As John Brewer notes, different theoretical and philosophical frameworks compete over what ethnography is and how it should be practiced, due to their commitment to different understandings of the nature of society (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology). While sociologists are far from reaching consensus, British sociologists Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, and Sara

Delemont have described the "ethnographic imagination" as implying a commitment to the interpretation of social action, an understanding of social organization, an analysis of the realization of macrolevel processes in local social contexts, and a recognition of the complexity and multiplicity of cultural meanings in observed social action (2003, 113-115).

The History of Ethnography

Ethnography began in the 1890s in anthropology and sociology. Classical ethnography was based on a natural science model of social research. The anthropological ethnographic monograph developed as a distinctive genre of writing with a claim to scientific veracity, as distinct from, for example, travel writing or journalism, as well as accounts of ethnographic fieldwork that foregrounded the experience of the author, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). Canonical ethnographic monographs, such as *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* by Bronisław Malinowski (1922), *Coming of Age in Samoa* by Margaret Mead (1928), or *The Nuer* by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), as well as Franz Boas's works on the Kwakiutl of the Pacific North West from 1895 onward, offered total overviews of geographically bounded cultures while also serving as vehicles for advancing general anthropological understanding.

In sociology, the major early current was found in the Chicago School of ethnography. Between 1917 and 1942, numerous ethnographies were produced, chiefly by students of Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, that portrayed the diverse social worlds of mainly urban, everyday life and the symbolic interactions of specific communities and groups, often the marginalized and deviant (see Deegan 2001). The Chicago style of fieldwork was to have lasting influence. The inheritors of the tradition in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Howard Becker, Anselm Strauss, Blanche Greer, and Leonard Schatzman, addressed the tendency to a lack of methodological reflection among the early ethnographers by producing major methodological works.

The Reflexive Turn

Classical ethnography assumed a largely unproblematic stance to issues of representation and methodology. The "postmodern," "literary," or "reflexive turn" in ethnography from the mid-1980s onward