

Gideon Reuveni, Nils H. Roemer, eds.. *Longing, Belonging, and the Making of Jewish Consumer Culture*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. xi + 233 pp. \$146.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-18603-3.



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The study of Jewish consumer culture has been steadily gaining momentum in the consumer behavior, tourism, and consumer culture theory literature of the past two decades. However, as Nils Roemer and Gideon Reuveni state in *Longing, Belonging, and the Making of Jewish Consumer Culture*, very little has been written about Jewish consumption from the historical perspective. Roemer and Reuveni present a very compelling volume, comprised of ten chapters that examine a broad spectrum of specific contexts related to Jewish consumption. The chapters themselves are wide-ranging and take the reader through an array of venues, ranging from prewar Germany to the present-day United States. In this regard, the editors have shown the dynamic nature of Jewish consumer culture in the modern, globalized landscape.

Chapters, such as the one written by David Brenner, shed light on Jewish consumption practices as part of the politics of representation whereby consumers and their buying behavior assist in framing identity. Brenner's chapter adds

to the existing discussion in the consumer studies literature that examines relational work and agency. Along similar lines, David Biale's chapter explores contributions from the Jewish community that have made their way into macro-oriented American consumption practices. Biale forces us to think about what were once uniquely Jewish objects, such as the bagel, and how these objects have changed along cultural borders. Joachim Schlor also presents us with thought-provoking questions on material items. In this respect, both Biale's and Schlor's writings on materialism echo consumer culture theorists like Russ Belk, Sidney Levy, and Aaron Ahuvia who have long explored meaning of objects. Has the bagel lost its Jewish identity in modern American society? Is there a distinctive Jewish fashion? Going beyond ritualistic items, Biale and Schlor force us to consider what comprises Jewish consumer culture. Biale's chapter is particularly fascinating and controversial, and I hope that he continues his work beyond the chapter presented here.

Veronica Grodzinski's piece in the volume also explores the angle of relational work and identity as she examines German Jewish art collectors and their decision to collect French avant-garde art when non-Jewish European art collectors had distinctly contrasting collections. Grodzinski presents a compelling story line, one that demonstrates the paradox between the desire to assimilate and the need to hone specific pioneering consumption behaviors. Sarah Wobick-Segev presents an interesting contrast in her examination of space, consumption, and leisure among Berlin Jews at the turn of the twentieth century, focusing on Jewish belonging and affirmation of a distinct identity. This is similar to Michael John's contribution, which focuses on Jews in Linz and Salzburg pre-World War II. These works fit nicely with Elana Shapira's piece on modern design. Shapira offers an extensive and detail-laden chapter that ties together identity construction, modernism, and acculturation in an examination of three prominent, groundbreaking Jewish entrepreneurs.

Jeffrey Shandler presents a particularly interesting and very well-written chapter on consumer culture and American Jews. Bringing in examples ranging from *HEEB* magazine to Adam Sandler, Shandler presents the market as a place that aides American Jews in constructing their sense of self. Shandler presents some challenging questions for Jews in America today, suggesting that consumption, for some Jews, acts a replacement for *halakhah*. Some may disagree with Shandler's assessment; however, the strength of the arguments presented in his chapter are rather convincing and thought provoking. Shandler offers, perhaps, the boldest chapter in the book, and one that will absolutely spark a great deal of debate both inside and outside of the academy.

While much of the volume is rich in detail, the individual chapters would greatly benefit from the addition of standardized abstracts, which only exist for selected chapters. There

tends be a great divide between the disciplines of history and consumer studies and abstracts would make the valuable works contained in the volume more accessible to those scholars outside the field of history. Additionally, there exists an opportunity to present a richer discourse on Jewish consumer culture whereby historians, and consumer culture theorists can jointly add to the base of knowledge. I would love to read literature of a more interdisciplinary nature that integrates the type of detailed historical research found in this volume with the theoretical contributions of consumption scholars such as Jill Klein, Aviv Shoham, and Abraham Pizam. Jewish consumer culture has indeed been explored for many years and I was hoping that this volume would build more on the existing literature. Further, bringing in a richer discussion of consumer acculturation would add an additional dynamic to many of the chapters, given that Jews post-Diaspora have often had to navigate between their close-knit communities and their host cultures. While some authors here have found acculturation to be an important aspect in their works, the variable played only a background role in much of the discussion, and some of the chapters would have greatly benefited from its more prominent inclusion.

Historians studying Jewish consumer culture may also wish to augment their writings with a move towards a greater emphasis on theory building. While some in this volume engage in theory, others only scratch the surface. Future researchers in this realm will benefit by a further immersion in the literature found in the consumer culture theory (CCT) tradition. As Eric Arnould and Craig Thompson mention, consumers are often at the center of a plane in which they have the power to exert agency and pursue identity goals through a relationship with culture and context-specific ideologies.[1] CCT provides a wealth of tools and introspection that foster a more rigid and focused attention to structure-agency tensions present in the construction of identity, in this case, an identity that has been

challenged by not only the diaspora of the Jewish people, but by still-present confounding tensions whereby the group's very existence is at stake. This might leave some of us wondering how Jewish consumers may utilize the concept of consumption to attempt to rectify past injustices and help further fasten a collective identity. Poststructural and/or postmodern approaches to studying Jewish consumer culture may further satisfy the need to examine the layers of cultural meaning that structure consumer actions. The literature surrounding CCT is rich and extensive, and I was somewhat disappointed to see very little integration of CCT thought in many of the chapters. Jewish consumer culture is a dynamic field that presents significant implications that stretch far beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. Blending and bridging theory from a variety of fields will facilitate a richer and broader discourse that will help us achieve a clearer answer to our unanswered questions.

Overall Reuveni and Roemer offer a rich volume that will provoke thought and discussion in a variety of venues. It is an important work and I look forward to reading more from the contributing authors.

Note

[1]. E. Arnould and C. Thompson, "Consumer Culture Theory (And We Really Mean Theoretics): Dilemmas and Opportunities Posed By An Academic Branding Strategy," in *Consumer Culture Theory*, ed. R. W. Belk and J. F. Sherry Jr. (Elsevier, UK: JAI Press, 2007).

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