

## Shaping the discipline: autobiographical accounts of scholarly stars, part III

[...] instinct of workmanship. They like to see others spend their life to some purpose, and they like to reflect that their life is of some use (Veblen, 1898, p. 189).

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### Introduction

The *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing (JHRM)* has frequently welcomed submissions that highlight the significant roles performed by a constellation of individuals within our discipline. It has published issues focusing upon Stanley Hollander, Don Dixon, Danny Monieson, a number of major female contributors, as well as more recently a series of autobiographical contributions by marketing luminaries. For instance, in two previous special issues, Brian Jones and I have commissioned key figures in our discipline to reflect upon their careers (Tadajewski and Jones, 2017a; Tadajewski and Jones, 2017b). Specifically, we asked them to recall their formative years, the influences on their intellectual development, personal turning points, extrapolating from their experiences any lessons that current and future scholars might appreciate. We continue this pattern in the current issue and the one that will follow it later in the year.

After all, academic life is often far from easy. The learning curves we face are steep; the performance requirements can be demanding (Tadajewski, 2018), and not everyone is gifted with mentors to help guide them through the pitfalls of this career path. So, not only is there intrinsic value in exploring the lives of those who have walked before us (Jones, 2011), their experiences can provide us with shortcuts it could otherwise have taken us some years to register, if we appreciate them at all. Since we were only able to skim the surface of those who had made what we – and those we consulted – thought were major contributions previously, it was appropriate to continue this thread of scholarly investigation. As such, in 2018 we contacted a variety of people we felt were well placed to further the agenda we had initially kindled, with the idea of compiling two further volumes of autobiographical accounts.

We are extremely grateful to have received manuscripts from high profile individuals, whose range of contributions are likely to interest a number of different audiences. Scholars closely associated with marketing history, marketing theory and consumer research all offered up their insights, observations and recommendations based on their academic lifecycle. As is usual with these introductions, we will outline a sample of the insights being proffered by our contributors, but move between their accounts to illuminate what are consistent themes or where the various papers complement each other in some way.

### The academic landscape

The first manuscript is by Eric Shaw. Shaw needs little introduction. His publication on the history of marketing strategy (Shaw, 2012) has been one of the most frequently downloaded submissions to the *JHRM*. However, of course, he has done so much more; more, indeed, than many readers will have registered. As he documents in his autobiography, Shaw has a vision of the university where exposure to research, teaching as well as administrative service are all valuable. He has inhabited all three worlds, often simultaneously, and succeeded in reaching the upper echelons of university life. More than this, he has been an active consultant, engaging in financially remunerative as well as pro bono work. Like



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Jaworski (2018), he underlines the value of consultancy in terms of its potential fertilization of academic research and as a means to enliven our pedagogic practice.

Shaw admits he was not an especially engaged student for many years. What was important was finding a subject he enjoyed (i.e. marketing history and systems theory). From this basis, he delved deeply into it, preparing himself with an assiduousness that – once again – is a common theme across many of the autobiographical accounts published in the pages of this Journal thus far. It is a point that is illuminated in Shelby Hunt's manuscript where he goes to extraordinary lengths to develop his research programs and improve his teaching.

It is sometimes hard to conceive of where these high-flying scholars found and continue to find the time to accomplish all the tasks they set themselves. Perhaps, like Belk (2017), long hours are important; the same can be said of co-authors. Shaw (2019, this volume), Belk (2017), Holbrook (2017), Hunt (2019, this volume), MacInnis (2019, this volume), Fischer (2019, this volume) and to a lesser extent, Witkowski (2019, this volume) have all engaged with numerous co-authors subsequently increasing their intellectual outputs. Eileen Fischer, as a case in point, indicates how highly motivated co-authors helped forward her research agenda, maximize publications, and encouraged her to think in new and novel ways. Having a community of likeminded scholars surrounding her, whose interests were a mirror – such as gender, entrepreneurship and theoretical traditions like institutional and assemblage theory – pushed Eileen to work extremely hard in multiple directions. Indeed, her professorial chair, despite the fact that most marketing academics will think of Fischer as a core contributor to consumer research (manifested in her co-editorship of the *Journal of Consumer Research* for a period), is actually in entrepreneurship. She, like Hunt, Shaw and Witkowski have all pursued research programs which have provided distinct foci of attention, thereby cementing their position within particular communities of scholarly inquiry as each additional publication in an area reaffirms the status of the contributor.

For us, what was surprising about these autobiographies is how often we learn about facets of an individual's life that were – sometimes much later – important and which we would never have known about otherwise. For Zeithaml (2017), it was her job as a lifeguard that helped focus her attention on the importance of service and customer satisfaction. For Shaw, after initially dropping out of college, he went into the business world, operated an ice-rink very successfully, whilst registering the importance of publicity and celebrity as tools of promotion. Like Levy (2017), Shaw benefitted from the G.I. Bill and the educational opportunities this provided, but not substantively until – and this is a major shocker in the paper – Shaw lived as a hippie up to the time he recognized that in spite of being able to voraciously consume philosophical literature (a stream of work that weaves throughout his academic oeuvre), his life was not headed in any discernible direction. This led him to return to university. In Shaw's case, hard work at college paid off. He was fortunate to have excellent mentors, access to an enviable collection of books on marketing history, connections to people operating at the forefront of sister disciplines and a considerable degree of scholarly self-awareness regarding the theoretical traditions he wanted to utilize (i.e. systems thinking). Linking a fascination with marketing history with systems thought would ultimately connect him (no pun intended) to three figures who have, in their varied ways, changed the structure of marketing thought, namely, Stan Hollander, Don Dixon and Bill Lazer.

Hollander's contributions are manifold and have been detailed in this Journal previously (Hollander, 2009), so we will skirt them here. Suffice to say he encouraged many academics to persevere with their historical studies, facilitated publication opportunities and built the infrastructure that enables us to gather biennially, that is, the Conference on Historical

Analysis and Research in Marketing (CHARM). Dixon, of course, revolutionized our understanding of marketing thought in the pre-twentieth century period, most notably the theoretical associations between marketing and economics via his meticulous readings of the publications of Alfred Marshall (among many others). Bill Lazer – again, another person to grace the pages of the *JHRM* (Lazer, 2013) – was a towering institutional figure in the American Marketing Association, but has been rediscovered as having articulated a more critical interpretation of social marketing. This has been adopted by critical social marketers (Gordon, 2018). Both Hollander and Lazer offered Shaw intellectual support, with Lazer and Shaw continuing to meet for brunch to the present day.

What is especially valuable in Shaw's account is that it is peppered with advice for those at various stages in their career. Whether you are contemplating taking an historical approach to your Ph.D. thesis, are in the middle of your doctoral studies, or thinking about trying to publish historical scholarship, being asked to consider undertaking service roles, run a major conference, work as faculty chair or participate in higher administrative functions, his advice is balanced and thoughtful. For those seeking to renegotiate their role, his suggestions about salaries and teaching loads are useful. In summary, Shaw encourages all of us – at whatever stage of our career – to be wary about ossification or otherwise assume that the institutional and external environment will remain in stasis. Life is punctuated by change and preparing for it is the best way of dealing with the surprises that confront us along the way.

Our next contribution is by another prominent marketing and consumption historian, Terry Witkowski. Terry has justly earned considerable recognition for his historical studies on gender and consumption, often transforming the way we understand the interplay between the different members in the household on consumption matters in the process. Indeed, for both of us, his writing in this vein is nothing short of revelatory. The same can be said of his incorporation of visual methodologies in his publications. Whether we are talking about paintings or posters, Terry has managed to draw insights from sources that are far too infrequently used within our subject area. For this alone he deserves kudos.

In his paper, Terry details his early upbringing – notably those features of his life experience that would subsequently inform future publications on correspondence educational offerings for polish immigrants – as well as his detailed study of the early retailing experiences of small entrepreneurs, namely his parents (Witkowski, 2009). Good fortune resonates throughout the pages of his paper, particularly when he describes attending a movie screening when someone started shooting. As the reader can probably anticipate, Terry escaped unscathed. He also reminds us that there is a life beyond writing publications, whether this is watching films, television, reading comics or immersing himself within his multiple collections of antiques and guns.

Academics looking for research projects might want to take note of this fact. While intellectual interests may be generated by reading the literary outpourings of our peers, they can also be a reflection of our upbringing (e.g. Terry's parents' decision to change their furniture style), travelling with our families (e.g. to Gettysburg National Military Park) and our personal passions. Those looking to see quite how significant these can be need only consult Terry's paper or Morris Holbrook's (2017) autobiography which firmly pressed home the centrality of musical appreciation to his career and publishing production line.

Usefully, Terry's manuscript provides us with a glimpse into the backstage of historical research. What we mean by this is that he highlights how it can often come about through serendipity. All of which reminds us that our academic publications reflect a final, polished representation of a very complex process that reflects hard work, luck, multiple iterations between the data and wider sources, combined with considerable self-reflection, the criticism

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of colleagues and referees and the negotiations that go on during the stages prior to acceptance.

Fascinatingly, Terry is exceptionally honest – much like [Gould \(1991\)](#) – about his unwillingness to fight in Vietnam and university education was for him, like many others, a way to ensure deferment, hopefully until the end of the war. In relating his selection decisions about which academic institution he should attend, Terry pinpoints a figure whose name has repeatedly appeared in these autobiographical accounts ([Holbrook, 2017](#)) and narratives about the Consumer Behavior Odyssey ([Belk, 2014](#)), Hal Kassarjian, as influential in shaping his subsequent choice. As an aside, we are well aware that Professor Kassarjian has long since retired, but it is about time that someone undertook an oral historical study with him as the central figure, writing this up for the *JHRM*. He has been such a central node in our discipline that it would make an important contribution.

Equally, Terry openly discusses his other consumption habits. Where [Gould \(1991\)](#) relates his experimentation with various energy and potency enhancing drugs, Terry mentions the relaxation and enjoyment provided by wine – something most academics will fully appreciate – combined with a limited level of LSD and an ongoing use of cannabis. While some may frown that such habits should not feature in an academic article, we must remain cognizant that academics are people and like many others on this planet need to find ways to deal with the busyness and stresses associated with modern life. Excising these kinds of consumption choices from our autobiographies or pretending we do not feel the anxiety and worry that plagues even the very best academics to have walked the planet – C. Wright Mills being a good example ([Mills and Mills, 2000](#)) – is expurgation at best, complete misrepresentation at worst; and it makes all those who do not live absolutely ascetic and perfect lives even more guilt laden.

In his conclusion, we are given a tantalizing indication that Terry is going to continue pursuing research for some time to come, with another book project appearing on the horizon. What collections will furnish the insights for this volume, who knows. It might be stimulated by a gift someone close to him is ruminating about offering right now.

Where Eric Shaw's paper provides considerable guidance about all facets of academic life, offering his insights on research, teaching, service and consulting, Shelby Hunt proffers equally detailed and highly valuable advice, but focuses his attention on scholarship, most notably the advice given to him that he should develop programs of research. Underwriting his personal narrative is what [Veblen \(1898\)](#) would term an instinct of workmanship. Put slightly differently in the language of [Mills \(1956/2000\)](#), he is an intellectual craftsman, with his books and papers carefully arranged in a logical, rigorous and extremely clear fashion. He uses language – again to return to Veblen – in a similar manner, very, very precisely. This has made him a formidable force for those who seek to undermine any of Shelby's manifold projects: a misreading here, misinterpretation there, and Hunt unravels his interlocutors' statements with polite aplomb.

There is no doubt that Shelby has been an influential force in reconnecting marketing to philosophy, enhancing the way we understand the role of marketing in society and the impact of society on marketing, modifying our understanding of the ethics of marketing and marketing managers, as well as via his reflections on marketing theory. With respect to the latter, he is well known for Resource-Advantage Theory along with substantive contributions to relationship marketing. His manuscript will be of importance for those just starting their academic careers, particularly PhD students and early career researchers who should take his recommendations in terms of developing a program of research seriously.

A program of research enables an academic to become deeply knowledgeable about a specific area or, in Shelby's case, a number of overlapping areas. As Hunt's career trajectory

reveals, approaching scholarship in this way enables an individual to achieve a high level of competency, identify important research questions that remain unanswered, and provides the opportunity to maximize the benefits of immersion in a given literature (i.e. a stream of publications). Additionally, it facilitates cross-fertilization. Reading deeply and widely helps an individual make connections between otherwise disconnected literatures, as well as across disciplines.

Shelby's paper deftly illuminates the importance of cross-disciplinary reading, inter-disciplinary research and being able to communicate our ideas to multiple disciplines if we are to increase our impact. And Hunt has certainly managed to do that as one of the most frequently cited academics in the management literature and he outlines how he achieved this in detail in relation to the development and promotion of Resource-Advantage Theory.

Hunt's instinct of workmanship and levels of motivation and perseverance would appear to have their genesis in family life. His early years were not easy and marked by tragedy, but, in this case, multiple tragedies served as exemplars. For example, watching his father recuperate against considerable odds and deal with pain left its imprint. If someone you love can beat considerable odds in terms of survival, then the trials and tribulations that we will all inevitably face at some point, unless we are exceptionally fortunate, become obstacles to be overcome, not weights that sink us. Debbie MacInnis' autobiography illustrates these points well, where she shares the health concerns that her family has faced, her "general anxiety", and the difficulties she confronted and overcame with teaching and public speaking by virtue of preparation, organization, commitment and experience.

As he reveals, Shelby worked as a youth, often putting in long hours. This is certainly an ethic he has maintained throughout his academic life and one he shares with many other scholarly stars (Belk, 2017; Holbrook, 2017; Levy, 2017). The same can be said of the modesty he articulates. Very few of the really productive academics that have written their autobiographies so far have claimed anything other than being fairly decent students who had to work hard to achieve any measure of success. Hunt says pretty much the same thing.

Unlike many academics – but commensurate with Shaw to some extent – Hunt left university, shifting into industry (i.e. a power company, but he was placed in the plastics department), where he acted as a sales representative. An interest in moving back to academia never left him and he eventually enrolled at Michigan State where he met many of the leading figures of the time and who have since become legends in their own right – Hollander and Lazer appear again as well as Bud LaLonde (a name that should be familiar to marketing historians). Importantly, when discussing his moves to different institutions, Hunt underscores the centrality of collegiality, of helping others, and the value of support networks – as do Fischer and MacInnis. Indeed, with regards to MacInnis, the depth of her concern for PhD students is exceptional and demonstrates a level of humanity we would all do well to emulate.

Hunt subsequently outlines his various research programs moving from franchising and distribution publications through to his latest work. He indicates that academics should remember that while targeting so-called top-tier journals is undoubtedly important, so is a focus on specialist outlets. As teachers, we are paid – in the main – by the public purse and he makes the point that we should not let our insights languish in filing cabinets if they have the potential to advance debate in our subject.

Being deliberately provocative for a moment, Hunt's output may cause readers to wonder whether he was driven solely by self-interest, focusing on his research while delivering acceptable enough teaching courtesy of standard textbook packages. Nothing could be further from the truth. He devoted substantial time and effort in terms of making his course offerings accessible, yet challenging, enabling students to transform their views of the topic

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at hand. This is made apparent in his discussion of his experiences when teaching marketing theory. Hunt used original readings from philosophy thereby avoiding the problems that accompany secondary readings (i.e. poor or incorrect interpretations). However, it soon became apparent that students were failing to fully comprehend some of the core themes of the course.

Some would despair and simplify material. Not Shelby, he produced his own papers to demonstrate how the materials being discussed in the course could be critiqued using insights derived from the philosophy of science. In a virtuous circle, class discussions improved markedly and he submitted the paper to the *Journal of Marketing*, where it was ultimately accepted. Here teaching and research are firmly interlinked; a lesson that is applicable today as it was during Hunt's long (and continuing) academic career. This paper, along with a number of others, would ultimately form the core of various iterations of his influential Marketing Theory books. The process of intellectual production thus appears to follow this path: personal interest, course allocation, initial course delivery, sketching material to help inform student understanding, publication of said work, further research in the domain, which culminated in a book that went through a number of iterations, each with definite Wittgensteinian labels (interested readers should think about the notebooks recording the content of Wittgenstein's lectures). It is here we depart from Hunt's paper. There is simply far too much ground – and all of it of great interest – for us to cover, so we will leave readers to enjoy the journey themselves.

Debbie MacInnis has achieved considerable fame by virtue of research in advertising and her conceptual contributions on a variety of topics. The breadth of her achievements is staggering. Like Eric Shaw, Terry Witkowski, Shelby Hunt and Eileen Fischer she engaged in extensive service commitments, both to multiple institutions and more broadly to the academy via conference organizing, co-editing the *Journal of Consumer Research*, producing a longstanding textbook, as well as being the President of the Association for Consumer Research to name just a few of her activities.

Her account reminds us that life is not a linear path, but one marked by many twists and turns, some positive, some negative. She is extremely honest about the choices she made and why she made them. For example, MacInnis states that "I consider myself lucky and not special in any way. I have worked hard, but I have also been fortunate to be in the right place at the right time in many of the things I have done". Moreover, reflecting on career options led her to avoid certain posts for monetary reasons; because of the potential for burnout; as a function of the highly competitive nature of some programs; and due to the fact that the opportunities as a marketing professor looked bright and were consistent with her research skills.

She explains that she is highly introverted. This has certainly not prevented her from many different types of external engagement. For instance, she has been involved in consulting and served as an expert witness on multiple occasions – a task she disliked due to its adversarial nature, but which she believes made her a better critical thinker. Here MacInnis' experience differs slightly from Eric Shaw's. MacInnis describes the role as an expert witness as paying relatively poorly; Shaw found that it could be financially lucrative. Even so, Debbie does acknowledge that she finds working at her desk most enjoyable. This is one of the life lessons she offers to new scholars. While you should certainly expose yourself to all the possibilities that academic life has to offer, it is still important to register which are most consistent with your personality and life goals. This, in turn, should better help a budding academic structure their time. In MacInnis' case, this means shielding her mornings as this is the time of day when she feels most efficient and effective as a researcher.

Starting from an early age, MacInnis was an avid reader, consuming books at the local library with regularity. This has been a pattern throughout her life: deep immersion in the subject matter at hand has always been her calling card. Reading her autobiography reminds us that appropriate training – training that suits our intellectual predilections – is one of the linchpins of success. Where Witkowski articulates his disinterest in positivistic modes of theory development, testing and the computational exertions this required before the production of powerful desktop personal computers, MacInnis is his counterpoint.

Her account details the extensive nature of her training in psychology, combined with a variety of methodological and statistical techniques that made her a highly desirable candidate for a position as a marketing Ph.D. student. Lest the reader think she is only skilled in one school of thought, that is, highly quantitative research, she also outlines her interest in qualitative methods. This began quite early in her career as a graduate student when she was involved with a research team at the University of California (Berkeley) that was applying a multi-method approach. One of her tasks was coding qualitative data. This interest was further stimulated by Russ Belk and colleagues when they were involved with what became known as the Consumer Behavior Odyssey (Belk, 2014) and interviewed MacInnis about her possessions and reasons for dispossession. As she points out, their innovative methodological approaches, notably videography, would later be something she would support more formally as President of the Association for Consumer Research.

For those in the middle of their Ph.D.'s or otherwise commencing their academic careers, MacInnis discusses how she revised for her comprehensive exams (that form part of the PhD process in the USA). Her discussion resonates with that provided by Belk (2017) when he referred to creating detailed card index summaries of all the books and articles he had read (Mills, 1956/2000). Debbie's approach, while not quite as structured as Belk's is still an exemplar to be followed:

The third year in the Ph.D. program involved considerable time devoted to comprehensive exams. At the time, the field of consumer behavior was relatively new, and the only journals we read on a regular basis were JCR, JM, and JMR, which meant that *anything* published in these journals was fair game for comprehensive exams. Our questions were closed book and open ended, and we had absolutely no idea what they might cover. The good news is that this exercise was incredibly helpful to me in developing my conceptual thinking skills. I remember reading and re-reading articles, putting articles together with other articles, and thinking about how they were similar and different as well as what each offered the other. I thought about how the different literature[s] reflecting diverse research streams might be brought together to raise new questions and theories. I had piles of file folders filled with papers, construct definitions, related constructs, overarching models, research questions, and more. I needed to take a nap each day because I was thinking, thinking, thinking [...] all the time! (MacInnis, 2019; emphasis in original).

What might pique the attention of marketing historians is that despite the fact that Debbie certainly does not situate her work in this vein, she nonetheless does indicate the value of being historically minded. MacInnis' positions taking an historical perspective as highly valuable in a field that can often be viewed as always looking towards the future. By contrast, she calls for us to also look backward when developing theory. In reference to a co-authored paper entitled "Revitalizing Dormant Ideas" she writes:

[...] we examined the notion that, although we tend to look toward the latest research as a means for developing novel theories and insights, some of the most important theories were actually based on ideas that were ahead of their time. In short, not all good ideas come from thinking about what is happening now or what's happening in the future; rather, some of the most brilliant ideas might be developed by mining theories that were otherwise dormant (MacInnis, 2019).

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The final paper in this issue is by another former co-editor of the *Journal of Consumer Research*, Eileen Fischer. Her career trajectory is somewhat unusual in our discipline, with her university background initially being in English literature. However, exposure to other subjects – specifically psychology and sociology – encouraged her to rethink the intellectual career she was embarking upon, leading her to transfer institutions as an undergraduate. As a result of this shift, she united her interests in English literature with a minor specialization in psychology (and eventually via a Masters in Management Science in the faculty of Engineering she went on to her PhD in Marketing). Importantly, this period in her life reaffirmed the feminist values her mother had inculcated. Since she was able to undertake a work placement regularly during her undergraduate degree, Eileen was exposed to the corporate climate of large bureaucracies.

Unsurprisingly, one of these environments “was saturated with sexism”. While she had other more positive work experiences, this negative event, combined with reading material derived from organization studies, helped her identify what she did and did not want in a work environment. A highly structured role and deeply hierarchical for-profit firm was not necessarily the best place for Fischer, as she desired “autonomy”. Becoming a professor seemed to be an ideal career option. This autonomous streak was reflected in her PhD research. Although we have already remarked that MacInnis was involved with qualitative methods during her time as a graduate student, it was still quite unusual for this type of approach to be adopted as part of a PhD thesis. Fischer, even so, deliberately incorporated a qualitative element in a mixed methods study of consumer gift giving. Once again, we are reminded about the valuable support of an open-minded mentor in facilitating this unorthodox strategy.

However, as Fischer quickly appreciated, not all members of the marketing academy were open to these types of approaches and this remains the case today to some extent (Thompson, 2019). While an experience at an American Marketing Association conference pressed this point home, attendance did mean that Fischer met the co-author that would help her legitimize (for many scholars who would follow in their footsteps) feminist theory and its applicability for consumer research, namely Julie Bristol. At the same time, Fischer’s work was branching off into another distinct pathway towards entrepreneurship. Therefore, what we see here is a good example of the merits of research programs (Hunt, 2019, this volume), with Eileen enjoying the pursuit of entrepreneurship studies alongside interpretive consumer research. This continues to be the case today.

The latter community, of course, has played a prominent role in promoting, justifying and cementing the position of alternative ways of understanding the consumer, combining novel conceptual and theoretical perspectives (i.e. forms of gender and intersectional theory), often using qualitative methods. It has literally expanded the epistemological panorama of how we can understand why people purchase, consume and dispose of consumption items or the reasons behind their participation in service experiences. Fischer signals the importance of this community of scholars for her intellectual development: it “gave us tribal identities within our larger professional organization associations. That helped me, at least, overcome somewhat the marginalization I often felt at ACR or AMA conferences” (Fischer, 2019). This community has, as Fischer points out, further affirmed its status within the firmament via the relatively recent founding of the Consumer Culture Theory Consortium, the organization that actively promotes interpretive and critical research via its annual conferences, and which Eileen supported as Vice President and President respectively.

In addition, Fischer was active in terms of institutional service, functioning as an Associate Dean for Research, MBA program director, marketing department chair as well as the department chair for entrepreneurial studies. These were not brief roles taken to buff up



her CV. Median tenure in each position was a decade! In her conclusion, she summarizes a number of insights garnered from her career. For most of us reading these papers, the suggestions that are provided by academics who have reached the pinnacle of their vocation will be invaluable. We cannot recommend them highly enough.

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