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FROM MASS CONSUMER SOCIETY TO A SOCIETY OF CONSUMERS:  
CONSUMPTION AND COMMUNITY IN LATE MODERNITY

by  
Matthew R. Colling

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

Department of Sociology  
Brigham Young University

August 2009

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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## ABSTRACT

From Mass Consumer Society to a Society of Consumers:  
Consumption and the Experience of Community in Late Modernity

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This study examines a *late-modernity* model of society where consumption is the conduit through which individuals meet society. This model is contrasted with Wilkinson's (1991) model that sees the *community* as the *place* where individuals make contact with society. Using Brown et al.'s (1996) *Outshopping Index*, residents of two rural Mississippi Delta communities were asked how often they shopped for 30 consumable items outside of their communities both in 1996 and again in 2007. Logistic regression demonstrates a significant interaction effect between year and outshopping such that outshopping was significantly and positively associated with community sentiment in 1996 but not in 2007. Such a transformation in the locus associated with consumption habits and community can be explained as an effect of globalization on rural residents during the period under observation. The results may be indicative of larger shifts in society as described by Bauman (2007), who argues that *late modernity* is a shift from mass consumer society to a society of consumers. This shift changed the

meaning of community, eroding its traditional function as a point of access to society.

Hyper-individualized consumption now serves this role. Though acknowledging that

*community* is not a phenomenon exclusive to rural communities, I contend that they serve as ideal natural laboratories for observing late-modern societal shifts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would also like to thank Josh Stovall for all his time spent in the Delta. He not only helped gather some of the data from which this thesis is built but also offered invaluable insight into the nature of rural life in the South. It was Josh who helped originally in the formulation of ideas that became the genesis of this project in 2006.

Finally, Ralph Brown has been one of the most honest, caring, and supportive personal friends I have ever had. Few are ever so lucky to know their mentors as well as I know Ralph. Concomitantly, likely few mentors have ever had to be as patient as he has with me as I felt my way through this Masters program on its entirely unorthodox trajectory. I owe much of my academic knowledge, wisdom, and worthwhile experiences, to a larger than life personality who has taught, listened, and guided me. He taught me that to test the logic is to be an academic; to react with pure emotion is to appear the fool. He showed me how to combine logic and emotion and to be able to express its powerful substance to others without just the use of my hands.

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## INTRODUCTION

Kenneth Wilkinson (1991:3) asserted that “part of the importance of the community is its role as the setting and the mechanism of empirical contact between the individual and society. Society is an abstraction one can experience only indirectly or symbolically. The empirical manifestation of society is interaction in localities.”

Wilkinson’s model envisioned people meeting society through active engagement in local institutions such as schools, churches, and shopping venues which in turn acted as conduits to societal structures such as education, religion, and the economy. These were the places where individuals interacted directly with broader social institutions, the places where social identities could be derived.

Recently, however, scholars have fleshed out some clear differences between Wilkinson’s (1991) modern twentieth-century conceptualization of community and society, and a later, less constricting and more flexible model of society and community experience. It is argued that globalization<sup>1</sup> has significantly changed various modes of societal interaction and that the effects of these changes constitute a different form of modernity. The elements that helped form an individual’s morality complex have changed as globalization has shifted society from modern to “late-modern” (Bauman 2007). Some argue that one’s identity is no longer built entirely through interactions with local institutions in communities as was conceived by Wilkinson, but rather, to a great extent, through consumption (Barber 2007; Bauman 2007; Cova 1997; Sennett 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> I use globalization in a sort of absolute and all encompassing form, representing a level of interconnectedness never before experienced on a societal, economic, or cultural level.

Sociologists who subscribe to this late-modern model have used terms such as *reflexive*, *liquid*, and *flexible* to describe its fluid, free and unstable nature. They no longer see spatial proximity as the fundamental condition that defines morality. These scholars argue that structural changes in society have altered the way individuals relate to processes such as consumption, commodification, community, and social identity. In fact, some argue that the modern project of individualization itself has turned late-modern institutions into for-profit models that facilitate the commodification of individual identity (Barber 2007; Bauman 2007; Beck 1992, 2002; Cova 1997; Ritzer 1999).

As institutions have targeted individuals rather than groups, there has been a shift in the community's role as the contact point of interaction between the individual and society. In order to explore this question, several theories of late modernity will be brought to bear on Wilkinson's notion of the community as the nexus between the individual and society. Specifically Bauman's *liquid modernity* (2005; 2007) and *society of consumers* arguments, Beck et. al's (2002) *risk society* and *institutionalized individualization* concepts, and Ritzer's (1999) *new means of consumption* ideas will be highlighted and contrasted with Wilkinson's assertions about community. This project will demonstrate how late modernity—the process of consuming goods and services and essentially commodifying nearly everything else including the self—is no longer simply an expression of one's individuality.<sup>2</sup> Instead, consumption process has become the new empirical contact point between the individual and society, “eclipsing” the previous role of the local community (see Stein 1960).

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<sup>2</sup> See Bellah et. al (1996) for an in depth analysis of how community traditionally helped shape individuality (143, 155)

Analysis of survey data collected in 1996 and 2007 in two Mississippi Delta communities indicates that the former linkage between consumption and the experience of community has changed such that participation in mass consumer society is no longer associated with one's experience of the local community. The findings support the notion that the individual in late modernity no longer experiences society through local community but rather through consumption. In Bauman's (2001b, 2007) words, we are no longer a mass consumer society, but an *individualized society of consumers* (see also Bauman 2001a, 2002; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

## BACKGROUND

### *From Tönnies' Totality to Bender's Bifurcation*

If as a society of consumers, we directly access society through consumption, bypassing local community, is place-based community as a *totality* a relic?

For the past century, social theorists have argued that modern social life is increasingly organized around activities of consumption versus production as initially envisioned by Marx (1990) (specifically, see Bauman 2005:82; 2007:25-26; Lo 1990; Castells 1983; Veblen 2007). The first rural sociologists focused on communities as service-trade centers that organized consumption activities for rural residents (Galpin 1915; Kolb 1923, 1925). Even before this, Tönnies (2002) commented on the effects of the market and emerging capitalist systems on social relations within communities. Tönnies (2002:33) noted that social bonds were “conceived of either as real and organic—this is the essential characteristic of the *Gemeinschaft* (community); or as imaginary and mechanical structure—this is the concept of *Gesellschaft* (society).” From Tönnies’ perspective, community (*Gemeinschaft*) happened in a place and embodied the totality of social experience encompassing “all intimate, private, and exclusive living together.” *Gesellschaft*, a much more amorphous concept, generally referred to “public life—it is the world itself” where “everybody is by himself and isolated, and there exists a condition of tension against all others” (Tönnies 2001:34, 65).

This *gesellschaft* type of society is typified by the early industrial world where the consequences of the capitalist market systems were beginning to alter and affect social bonds between individuals who now felt atomized in overpopulated cities. Polanyi (2005) argued that on a societal scale, it was no longer the economy that was subordinate to

society, as was the case before the *Great Transformation*, but rather society which had become subordinate to the logic of the market and its self-regulating systems. Polanyi would see *gesellschaft* as the condition where the market is disembedded from social life. More bluntly put, society is now run by the economy, for the social relations that once regulated the economy have become disembedded or detached and removed from it, making society an appendage or extension to the market rather than the other way around.

Bender (1978:60) noted that “the experience of community that developed is best understood as one dimension of life in a bifurcated society, and this phenomenon is what Tönnies originally sought to explain.” He asked whether the changes that occurred during the colonial period of American history, which “included increased geographic mobility, religious diversity, and the formation of distinct neighborhoods within towns, constitute[d] a diminution, or even a collapse, of community” (71). Bender answered that such changes did not destroy community but rather altered it, leaving it “somewhat reduced” (111). He ties Polanyi’s idea—that the market is disembedded from social life—explicitly to Tönnies notion of community, arguing that the market was disembedded from social life and then reembedded in the form of mass society. While *gemeinschaft* continued to be a defining feature of social relations, it was now split between the market, the political arena, and the local setting.

As the market and community became “alternative and competing patterns of order,” social experience was, in Bender’s words, “bifurcated” (112, 114). Thus, the subjective *gemeinschaft*-type personal interaction remained an integral part of the community experience, while traditional political and economic activities—which had

previously brought people together in the community setting—were siphoned off to a larger social sphere, that of the emerging mass society. Bender still maintained that “community can survive, as Tönnies and Durkheim knew, within the world of *Gesellschaft*” (147). But to do so, the concept of community now had to expand to encompass the subjective satisfaction from interaction regardless of where that interaction occurred, even if outside the local community, as Brown (1993) would later demonstrate.

Wilkinson’s (1991: 5) thesis that “the community has not disappeared and has not ceased to be an important factor in individual and social well-being” certainly continued to remain a viable model for depicting the importance of locality as individuals meet society. “People still live together in places, however fluid might be the boundaries of these places. They still encounter larger society primarily through interactions in the local society.” Hummon (1990:xiv) referred to these “interactions in localities” as “commonplaces about communities [which] may well represent a fundamental way that Americans conceptualize and interpret society and the self.”

Following Bender’s and Polanyi’s logic, Brown (1993) showed that shopping habits could serve as ideal indicators of how a bifurcated society changed residents’ perceptions of the characteristics of their communities, making the experience less bound by geographical borders and more determined by economic realities (see also Clark 1990; Faragher 1986; Strasser 1989). Indeed, other sociologists had already argued that social networks which bound people and thus communities together far transcended the geographic boundaries of traditional local communities, thus demanding a reconceptualization of the role of the local community (Fischer et al. 1977; Fischer 1982;



Wellman 1979). Shortly thereafter, an interesting empirical test both accounted for bifurcation, and revealed the persistent connection between the market and the community in modern life.

Brown, Clark, Hudspeth, and Odom (1996) explored the impact of common consumption habits—people shopping together regularly—both inside and outside the local community. They related consumption habits to social experience, measured through community satisfaction and attachment by expanding Kasarda and Janowitz's (1974) "Systemic Model." They found that while "demographic variables such as income, sex, and age account for some variance in community satisfaction and attachment, they don't measure important social psychological factors that influence the experience of community in the context of a consumer economy" (Brown 1993:399). Thus Brown et al. (1996) demonstrated that although residents often met their consumption needs extra-locally, the act of shopping outside the community for goods and services available locally ("outshopping") did not negatively affect their subjective ties to their community. In fact, it strengthened them as residents continued to experience high levels of community satisfaction, despite the fact that they shopped for many of their goods and services outside their local community (Brown et. al 1996). Thus Brown's (1993) attempt to resolve the seeming contradiction that Bender had identified suggests that though bifurcation removed from the local community many key social interactions that used to be part of the *gemeinschaft* experience, these now extra-local social interactions still did not diminish the subjective experience of local community.

In terms of personal relations to the economy Brown et al. (1996) found that people's ability to meet personal consumption needs in extra-local markets was essential

to maintaining their identity in a mass consumer society (106; see also Brown 1993; Ewen 2001; Strasser 1989). They argued that community satisfaction was primarily predicated on having an adequate, stable income. Participating in mass consumer society through consumption of goods and services, even if not within residents' own locality, i.e., outshopping, was an integral feature of community, allowing the community to remain the contact point linking the individual to larger social institutions. Yet it was only persons with sufficient incomes who formed strong links to mass consumer society, while poorer residents tended to cultivate an even stronger sense of local attachment manifesting perhaps a more functional cognitive dissonance of being "stuck" in place. Thus, access to mass consumer society was in part dictated by whether one enjoyed a high quality of life within the community of residence (see also Lo 1990). "In a consumer economy, many rural residents see themselves as consumers first and residents of their community second" (Brown 1993:400).

Apparently, the experience of community in mass consumer society must be understood as a social-psychological condition (Bell 1992; Hummon 1990) that links one to larger social institutions (Brown 1993). Thus, the importance of community is not necessarily the place itself; Bender had already shown that the economic and political aspects of social life no longer "resided" in the local community. Rather, community became the subjective experience that took place in a specific location. Though strained, the concept of community still existed as an explanation, if nothing else, of the subjective experience of interaction (Bender 1978). But is this still the case? In a late-modern globalized world where Bender's "bifurcation" of society has arguably become more akin

to a multi-faceted of society, to what degree is one's subjective experience of community still tied to the consumption of goods and services in the form of outshopping?

Though advocates of field-theory may continue to see local community as an important link that helps define individuals, some sociologists, especially Europeans (Zukin and Maguire 2004: 174), have begun to recognize the growing distance between spatial and moral proximity (see Bauman 2007; Barber 2007; Beck 1992, 2002; Cova 1997; Sennett 2006). The mass society within which modern people consume goods and services, along with the nation state, are both giving way under pressures of globalization. The day-to-day economic realities of life are being removed ever farther from the community, often beyond the borders of the nation state, and into a global market that is redefining, once again, the relationship between people on the one hand and production and consumption on the other.<sup>3</sup> This redefinition changes the meaning of consumption, potentially affecting the relationship between consumption and the experience of community. Specifically, the role of transnational corporations, and the global-market system that supports them, has become much more pervasive (Korten 2001), becoming the primary means by which the late-modern individual now “purchases” and maintains a social identity.

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<sup>3</sup> One might argue that Marx's concept of alienation is taken to its extreme in the late-modern modes of consumption. In a global market, it becomes difficult for consumers to be cognizant of the conditions under which the products which they consume are produced. As the late-modern consumer chooses to buy items extra-locally, typically in large big-box stores—which acquire them from foreign countries—confidence in these products wanes, as evidenced by the many episodes of tainted products from China.

### *From Bifurcation to Liquification*

Late modernity is characterized by *complete* globalization of the free market via the free flow of goods, services, and capital on a scale never before possible (Postman 1992; Friedman 2007). With unprecedented awareness of, and access to, goods and services, late-modern social reality has become linked both symbolically and systemically to activities of consumption. Globalization has provided residents of even the most rural community access to consumer goods on a broader scale than ever before (Artz and Stone 2006:1297).

Though rural communities have for centuries provided urban areas with items such as food staples and raw commodities—maintaining a relative connection to larger society in this way—not until the 1990s did rural people begin to enjoy similar access to mass consumer society’s goods and services (Flora and Flora 2008). This shift in consumption practices took place in part via the diffusion of big-box stores and megamalls in mid-size cities which attracted consumers from surrounding towns (Flora and Flora 2008; Stone 1988). Vendors such as Walmart, Home Depot, or Target offered not just more convenience—as far as distance for rural shoppers to travel—but also lower prices and wider selection in products and services than could be found in smaller communities (Stone 1988). These vendors were far different from the smaller Sears and JC Penny outlets that were sometimes located nearer to rural towns (Artz and Stone 2006; Flora and Flora 2008). The big box stores and megamalls carried with them “star power” or the ability to magnetically attract residents out of their local town settings. In order to save money, many rural residents have been willing to split their purchases across local and extra-local areas. They buy daily services like groceries and gas and non-name brand

items locally and travel to the big-box stores and megamalls, to purchase big-ticket items and nationally advertised name brands (Brown et al. 1996).

Globalization facilitated the massive distribution of products and services through big-box stores and megamall venues which constantly reorganize to efficiently move even more products to consumers. The addition of Walmart Supercenters to the overall Walmart business strategy in the 1990s is a good example (Stone 1992; Stone 1997; Barnes et. al 1996). The chain's Supercenter strategy was aggressively pursued between 1993-1998, offering everything from fuel through groceries, banking services, electronics, vision centers, salons, portrait studios, restaurants, auto service, and more (Fishman 2006; Stone 1992; Stone 1997; Barnes et. al 1996). Though Walmart continued to maintain a small-community focus in the early 1990s, the corporation's strategy of expansion via Supercenters outside of the southeastern United States became a significant new source of revenue that made economic sense to pursue. The shift to larger one-stop-shopping outlets exemplified the Walmart phenomena that dominated the 1990s (Fishman 2006; Stone 1992; Stone 1997; Barnes et. al 1996). The transition could be compared to that which occurred in many mid-size American cities during the 1980s, as malls located on the periphery of cities and pulled customers out of downtowns to their indoor walks of commerce.

Ritzer (1991) offers a useful concept to illustrate how these megamall settings differed from ordinary large stores of the past. Shopping malls have become the "places where people go to practice their 'consumer religion'" (Ritzer 1999: 8). He calls this "new means of consumption" a way by which corporations enchant consumers into buying their goods and services in an "almost dizzying proliferation of settings that

allow, encourage, and even compel us to consume.” (Ritzer 1999: 2) He dubs these new settings *cathedrals of consumption*, noting that for many people they have “sacred, religious character.” Malls are seen as fulfilling peoples’ need to connect with each other . . . . Malls provide the kind of centeredness traditionally provided by religious temples . . . . People gain a sense of community as well as more specific community services” (Ritzer 1999: 8-9). Collectively these settings play a “central role in greatly increasing, and dramatically altering the nature of, consumption.” (Ritzer 1999: 9)

Essentially, then, these *cathedrals of consumption* have become places where *community* is experienced. “Real” or “authentic” community (Freie 1998) is being replaced by a new form of consumption, consumption that is fun, convenient, cheap, transient, temporary, and as liquid as it is a memorable experience outside of the small community. Through these cathedrals and the consumption experience they offer, people express and experience society.

As late-modern cathedrals of consumption evolved, so too did corporate business models. Marketing strategies gradually shifted away from a preoccupation with the logistics of distribution as it was realized that the real power of marketing and profit-making existed primarily in the selling of ideas and images; the essence of the “new means of consumption” (Ritzer 1999). The goods and services themselves, and the logistics of their distribution, were now secondary to the brand they represented (Klein 2002:16). Brand names such as Nike and Levi’s, already established as integral product lines embedded in the larger distribution Supercenters, were now able to concentrate on creating brand recognition, distributed in the form of an idea or an image. Identifying with these ideas and images became akin to belonging to a “brand community,”

eventually becoming a primary means by which people found their places in a diffused yet virtually (internet) connected society (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001).

It may be argued that individual identity is now largely defined by the brands one consumes. “[T]he individual turns towards objects and services, that is to say the system of consumption in order to forge an identity” (Cova 1997:305; see also Bauman 2007). This shift has particularly affected rural communities as logistically their mainstreets cannot meet the late-modern consumer’s demands for mass variety in niche markets and accessibility.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, local places may no longer function to the degree they once did as venues of status-making; residents increasingly turn to extra-local destinations to meet their consumer and status demands (Brown et al. 1996:106).

Shopping was no longer a duty that had to be performed, it became an event. Part of the purchase of the consumer item is the experience of shopping for it.

Americans have embraced a consumer oriented culture in which shopping has become a social event through which to varying degrees we define who we are and where we fit in society (Prus and Dawson, 1991). Fittingly, such status generating activities tend to correspond more to the high glitter places, malls, and Wal-Marts than rural mainstreets.

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<sup>4</sup> The recent development of local markets such as “farmers markets”— which attempt to bring consumption back to the local community—is an effort to reduce rural communities’ outshopping trends. Yet the fact that many “farmers markets” are regionally advertised, bringing people in from places outside of the local community would suggest that they are yet another form of counterfeit community (Freie 1998).

Cova (1997:305) has stressed that late modernity, or postmodernity, has created the postmodern<sup>5</sup> consumer who is able to create an identity based on conspicuous consumption choices not tied to any specific location such as a community of residence (see also Bauman 2007; Simmel 1950). In an effort to create an identity of the self, modern individuals try to liberate and define themselves through differentiation, a process “supported by the market economy...the strongest force behind the destruction of old communities” (Cova 1997: 299).

### *Consumption, Individualization and Branding*

#### *Consuming Materialism*

Does an overabundance of consumer choice stimulate a capitalist market system while at the same time hindering natural relationships between individuals? To answer this question we must trace the roots of how the meaning of consumption has changed since classical theorists such as Marx, Weber, and Simmel, first took up the issue. Their theories were often driven by generalized anthropological observations which went to support grand theories and meta-historical ideas without the benefit of empirical testing (Zukin and Maguire 2004). Interestingly, though it has been over a century since some of the classical community theorists first formulated their ideas, much of the contemporary sociological literature still fails to address the divide between research on the economy and the larger effects that consumption has on individuals, relative to society. According to Zukin and Maguire (2004: 174):

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<sup>5</sup> Postmodern in this context is consistent with the terms “late-modern” as some scholars refer to it, and “liquid-modern,” as Bauman (2007) uses the term.



One practical problem is that consumption is a huge topic that overlaps different institutional areas and both the public and private spheres. It is impossible to devise a single analytic framework to grasp its many historical forms and influences or the diverse theoretical perspectives that either praise or condemn it (see Slater 1997). By the same token, the division of intellectual labor among sociological fields makes it difficult to attach consumption to specific areas of the discipline.

Despite these problems, a review of the ways consumption influences the individual in society, according to classical and contemporary theory, is appropriate here. As part of the transition to modernity the economic organization of society moved from family and community to factory and industry society (Clark 1990; Polanyi 2001). Consumption and production, once removed from the local community, were re-embedded in a mass consumer society (Vidich and Bensman 1958).

Marx's (1884/1981) early writings focused more on the means of production rather than the means of consumption, which made sense in the context of the growing industrial society in which he lived. As the West has grown more affluent over the past 200 years it has shifted much of its production to less affluent countries (Ritzer 1999: 55). The West is now primarily a consumer-based society rather than a society of producers. Thus, the importance of understanding the "means of consumption" has grown, as can be observed through corporations' unrelenting efforts to better understand consumers' changing habits, desires, and preferences.

Marx and Simmel both distinguished between subsistence consumption and luxury consumption (Marx 1884/1981: 479; Simmel 1950; Smith 1789/1994). Marx did

not, however, distinguish between the actual end product that was consumed, and the many conduits through which it passed before it reached the consumer. Simmel (2004) began to conceptualize “means of consumption” as a construct for understanding the consumer but Baudrillard (1998) effectively used it in relation to the super “drugstore” that offered consumers the plethora of goods and services all in the same place, our modern day Walmart Supercenter (Ritzer 1999: 57). Baudrillard, relating consumers to Marx’s exploited proletariat, argued that capitalism had created an exploitable and controllable class of consumers, a class dependant on the controlling and exploiting class of producers. In short, the existence of an exploited, controlled class of consumers allowed the class of producers the means by which they could continue to exploit (Baudrillard 1991: 65). “Consumers can be said to be exploited by the *new* means of consumption by being led to buy more than they need, to pay higher prices than need be, and to spend more than they should” (Schor 1998: 20).

Why does the contemporary consumer class allow itself to be exposed and so easily manipulated? In a society ostensibly founded on the principles of freedom of the individual, how is the public manipulated to buy products and services that do not seem to deliver what they promise? Kasser (2002: 29, 43, 61) states that “even though such luxury goods seem far beyond what is required to live, a number of psychologists and social scientists suggest that people who highly value materialistic aims are driven by unmet needs for security and safety.” For Kasser (2002: 61-62, 64) the consequences for the individual of this yearning to consume are generally negative as a focus on “materialistic values appear[s] to bleed over into relationships, tainting them in ways that damage the quality of connectedness and decrease the ability to satisfy needs for

intimacy, closeness, and connection . . . ‘crowd[ing] out’ other meaningful pursuits, as the time we ‘spend’ earning and consuming often means [the] neglect of our spouses, children, friends, and community.”

Expanding on this paradox of an overabundance of choice, Beck (2002: 16) argues that we spend much of our time making “decisions, possibly undecidable decisions, certainly not free ones, but forced by others and wrested out of oneself, under models that lead into dilemmas. These are decisions which put the individual into the center of things and disincentiveize traditional ways of life and interaction.” This overabundance of choice that epitomizes late modernity is part of the freedom that must accompany an individualistic consumer culture which, according to Bauman (2007, 2001), can crowd out all other forms of living.

How much, then, does the desire or appetite to consume drive purchasing habits and influence people’s satisfaction with life? Reflecting back again on the classical sociologists, Weber’s use of the term “Protestant ethic” (1958), including its focus on the individual and aversion towards consumerism (a practice associated with hedonism), was constructed around a set of religious taboos and entitlements related to damnation and salvation. As such, consumption for the individual was to be tethered, controlled, and carried out with the voice of God in mind, always guiding one’s actions. Yet Weber failed to separate the actual act of consumption as the element which embodied social meaning from the broader phenomenon attached to the economy and markets (Weber 1946). Being content and feeling blessed by God was expressed through a careful display of one’s wealth. Ostentatious display did not show humility and thus early Protestants guarded their desires to consume. The meaning behind consumption was entangled in

devotion to God (expressed through manual labour and in many other ways), acceptance of his blessings (displayed through one's wealth among other things), and careful considerations given to fellow Protestants' perceptions, as the expression of blessings and devotion were balanced.

Simmel (1957) was the first to articulate a difference between attraction to things and consumption of them. His argument was that the sensuality or longing to consume the latest fashions and trends is only an attraction to novelty which is effectively realized in a separate act when one purchases and consumes the goods and services (Simmel 1957). Consumption became the physical expression of our modern social life but it was driven by an entirely separate culture of irrational longing to satisfy an insatiable appetite. According to Slater (1997: 74-77), Durkheim also worried about the dangers that such a materialistically centered lifestyle could have: "if modern society and especially the economy unleashes consumers' boundless desires, it destroys the moral basis of social order." Veblen (2007) echoed this sentiment with his work on "the leisure class," also criticizing "status consumption" (see also Zukin and Maguire 2004).

Though there is little recent sociological literature on the association between consumption and community or society, there is substantial work in journals of consumer research where we find a focus primarily on the individual. These consumer research journals have few macro-theoretical applications or references to the relation between the changing society and the individual. According to Zukin and Maguire (2004: 174), market researchers'

pragmatic interest in pegging consumption to specific purchases, and in reducing consumers to typological versions of "economic man," is only beginning to be

challenged by a more complex understanding of how men and women use consumption to construct social relationships and how consumption is shaped by the “supply side” of economic institutions and culture.

Furthermore, there seem to be few data sets that contain both economic and community indicators explicitly linking consumption habits to feelings of community sentiment.

*Individualization in a Consumer Society*

If indeed scholars are speaking of a qualitative, measurable shift in the meaning associated with community sentiment and identity as they relate to consumption, then I might expect that an empirical test using economic indicators could confirm such a shift. But before testing this hypothesis, a clear definition of individualization must be offered in order to understand how the individual relates to not only her/his community but also to society. Beck (2002: 9) bluntly puts it this way:

Let us be clear what ‘individualization’ means. It does *not* mean individualism. It does *not* mean individuation—how to become a unique person... On the contrary, individualization is a *structural* concept, related to the welfare state; [it] means ‘*institutionalized* individualism.’ Most of the rights and entitlements of the welfare state, for example, are designed for individuals rather than for families. In many cases they presuppose employment. Employment in turn implies education, and both of these presuppose mobility. By all these requirements people are invited to constitute themselves as individuals: to plan, understand, design themselves as individuals and, should they fail, to blame themselves. Individualization thus implies, paradoxically, a collective lifestyle.

In other words, individualization removes traditional functions of community leaving the individual to find place in society on her/his own.

The individual is turned . . . into the bearer of rights (and duties)—but only as an individual. The opportunities, hazards and ambivalences of biography which once could be coped with in the family unit, in the village community, and by recourse to the social class or group, increasingly have to be grasped, interpreted and dealt with by the individual alone (Beck 2002: 74-75).

In a society of consumers one is given a do-it-yourself *kit* to help develop and market one's identity. "This is what the concept of 'individualizing process' means. The difference is that today human beings are being 'released' not from corporate, religious-transcendental securities in the world of industrial society, but *from* industrial society into the turbulence of world risk society" (Beck 1992: 74-75). In other words, we are moving from solid modern security into liquid-modern freedom, risk, and reflexivity. In such a society, there is a tendency to approach social relations through market risk assessment parameters. Education is marketed as a commodity that if paid for will yield an expected return upon completion but individuals must risk finding their own way upon this path. Sennett (2006) describes employment as an ephemeral practice whereby people start looking for a new job the first day they acquire their current job. Unless people "design" themselves to meet the changing demands of the market there is no longer any reasonable expectation of a lifelong employment position. In essence, in such a risk society, the individual is consumable by choice.

'Individualization' therefore means that the standard biography becomes a chosen biography . . . as Giddens says, a 'reflexive biography.' Whatever a man or

woman was and is, whatever he or she thinks or does, constitutes the individuality of the individual. That does not necessarily have anything to do with civil courage or personality, but rather with diverging options and the compulsion to present and produce these ‘bastard children’ of one’s own and others’ decisions as a ‘unity.’ (Beck et al. 1994: 15)

Presenting oneself to society as unified while maneuvering through a liquid life (Bauman 2005) is part of the contradiction that a late modern individual faces. When one fails to deal with this contradiction, one is told to consume more. Much like the individual, community itself has been given a market value and commodified (Freie 1998).

A transformation toward liquid modernity has been enabled by the development of a global marketplace and a virtually (internet) connected world (Friedman 2007; Stiglitz 2006). While brand names and products have been advertised on national television for decades (Ewan 2001), it is only very recently that new technologies unfettered from location have removed many of the remaining obstacles to mass consumption for rural residents.

Bauman (2007) argues that the defining feature of modern mass consumer society was that it produced and consumed its own products.<sup>6</sup> Mass society was the social and

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<sup>6</sup> Bauman characterizes early, *solid* modernity as being populated by a “society of producers.” The society of producers resided within the modern nation state, within which a mass consumer society emerged for the distribution of goods. In late, *liquid* modernity, the nation state has been permeated by a global economy, and a more flexible form of capitalism has driven the transformation of the society of producers into a “society of consumers” who no longer produce for and consume from a state-bound mass consumer society, but instead, in the West, consume primarily from a global economy dominated by ungoverned multinational corporations.

economic engine that moved production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services across the local to the larger national market. While national in scale, people still produced for the same market from which they consumed goods and services.

As globalization allowed producers to move their production capital outside of national borders, American society began to shift from being a society of producers to one primarily of consumers. Corporations profited from this shift by creating alluring, but artificial images which appealed to the increasingly “liquid” identities of individuals, convincing them that particular brands provided freedom and self definition within mass society. “In the solid modern era of the society of producers, gratification seemed indeed to reside primarily in the promise of long-term security, [now, in the liquid modern era, gratification was found in] the immediate enjoyment of pleasures” (Bauman 2007:30). Corporations were quick to latch to the shift in consumption habits and began to rigorously follow, survey, and market their products according to the quickly shifting tastes of their “consumers” (Korten 2001; Strasser 1989).

### *Branded Individuality*

In a society of consumers, consumer products no longer simply represent the physical items of consumption; they have increasingly become the embodiment of ideas or concepts which imbue identity *through* their consumption. Thus emphasis in the consumption of the products of late modernity has shifted from practical physical needs to social necessity in status attainment. Not surprisingly, Frank (2000) found that people were more concerned about how much money they had *relative to their neighbors* than how much money they actually had. He further found that people preferred to make less money if it meant having more money than their neighbors. Thus it is not the consuming



of the thing itself, but rather the image or idea the things represent *relatively*, that gives individuals their status in society.

Indeed, in liquid modernity, *all* reality is subject to commodification and branding, from human emotions (Hochschild 2003) and individuality (Klein 2002:8), to the selling of community as a deceptive, but appealing, simulacra (Freie 1998).

Consumption becomes:

a means to invest in one's own social membership, which in a society of consumers translates as 'saleability,' The crucial . . . purpose of consumption in a society of consumers is not the satisfaction of needs, desires and wants, but the commoditization...of the consumer. [T]he passing of the consumer test is a non-negotiable condition of admission to the society that has been reshaped in the likeness of the market-place. [Thus] to enter the society of consumers [people] must meet the conditions of eligibility defined by market standards. They are expected to make themselves available on the market and to seek...their most favourable 'market value.' While exploring the marketplace in search of consumer goods, they are drawn to the shops by the prospect of finding the tools and raw materials they may use in making themselves 'fit for being consumed'—and so market-worthy. (Bauman 2007:56-57, 62)

Cova (1997) makes a similar point, that one of the:

consequences of individualism is that the postmodern individual . . . is on a never-ending identity quest . . . for the meaning of their life. Everyone constructs themselves and their life like a work of art. In the absence of traditional or modern references—a consequence of the decomposition of traditional communities—the

individual turns towards . . . the system of consumption in order to forge an identity. (305)

The popular terms *human*, *social*, and *cultural capital*, which stem from Bourdieu's (1984) use of the term "cultural capital", have captured this phenomenon of individuality being embedded in purchased social identity. Access to one's various "capitals" has become, in essence, an individual's brand name, produced to be sold as various marketable skills, titles, trades, networks, education, manners, etc. One's "capitals" now serve to connect the individual to society and in turn offer society yet one more thing to be commodified and consumed. Thus in late-modern society, is it no longer community but rather *individuality*, expressed through personal consumption and commodification of the self, which acts as the conduit and access point to society?

Networks such as *Facebook*, for example, allow people to be "friends" with potentially hundreds if not thousands of people, none of which have to live nearby. One can "stay in touch" with people without having to ever physically interact with others. Though to a small degree this was always possible with the existence of long distance telephones and letter exchanges, the rate, speed, and volume at which we now interact is unprecedented. But how authentic or real are these virtual interactions? How do they affect our feelings of connectedness to place-centered community sentiment?

In contrast to some of the arguments made by Wellman, Hampton, Isla de Diaz, and Miyata (2003) that highlight the positive benefits of virtual networking and internet communities, I contend that the *Facebook* phenomenon—a direct corollary of a globalized world—is merely another form of counterfeit community (Freie 1998). Though networks like this are essential to participate in and with society, they are media

that encourage one to bypass traditional conduits of community. Virtually connecting individuals is a superficial form of interaction akin to the act of consumption in late modernity, despite how “useful” and “convenient” such devices may be. People construct an identity of how they wish to appear to others attaching certain photos, phrases, movie preferences, etc. to a profile in order to attract the attention. In essence, one has to advertise the self as a commodity, tantalizing others to check out her/his profile. People thereby can consume a simulacra or sliver of an individual’s life as it is expressed through various attachments, causes, news stories, comments, and images.

Today, social identity, and its linking power to larger social institutions, may be obtained by *branding* oneself not only through social media such as Facebook, but also through the consumption of advertised images and ideas. If this is the case, access into and experience of society and its institutions may no longer be mediated through place-based communities and their identity-imbuing powers (Hummon 1990), as articulated above, but realized through acts of non-place-specific consumption.

In late modernity, then, is non-place-specific consumption the link that now connects individuals to larger social institutions and to society? Or has the link between consumption of goods and services and the experience of community been replaced by something else, as rural communities are incorporated even more into global markets? If the link has been replaced does the place-based community still act as the empirical contact point between the individual and the institutions of society as theorized by Wilkinson (1991)?

Though these are broad macro-level questions about society that would likely require extensive data from urban settings to test empirically; I take a different approach.

Using longitudinal data from two rural communities in the Mississippi Delta, I explore how fundamental social shifts have potentially redefined the concept and role of “community,” and residents’ ability to maintain close-knit social ties and links to a global society. Though my findings are limited to the setting from which the data are gathered, this is nevertheless an interesting empirical inquiry from which I will draw broader societal implications.

### *The Mississippi Delta*

At least since Gans’ (1962) acknowledgement of an “urban village,” community has been conceptualized as an experience that exists in both rural and urban settings, but traditionally, it has always been viewed as more a rural phenomenon. Consequently, while acknowledging that community is not exclusively a rural phenomenon, rural communities can serve as natural laboratories in which we may observe changes in community sentiment that may already be taking place in urban society. Significantly, the size and often isolated geographic locations of rural places function as key factors in measuring residents’ extra-local consumption practices. In other words, shifts in consumption practices that began in urban settings, may manifest themselves more clearly in rural areas. That is, the inertia behind these changing trends will not only transform a rural setting faster, but also later.

The Delta is “one of the most catalogued and written about part[s] of the Black Belt” (Falk 2004:5). It has been referred to as “the most Southern place on earth” (Cobb 1992), in part due to its extremely rural population, high levels of poverty, and reverence for tradition (Duncan 1999; Fitchen 1995; Summers 1995). Indeed, the Delta lags behind

the rest of America in almost every social and economic category (see Galbraith, 1958; Summers, 1995; Wilkinson 1991).

For example, using U.S. Census figures, the estimated median household income for the United States in 2003 was \$43,318, while in the Delta it was \$22,516 (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). The percentage of individuals living below the poverty line in 2004 for the United States was 12.7 percent. In the year 2000, 60 percent of the Delta's population lived in rural areas while 62.8 percent of that rural population was black. Among that same black population, 60 percent live in poverty while the Delta's counties list an overall poverty rate of over 40 percent (Fitchen 1995; Center for Community and Economic Development 2003).

Thus, with the South's cultural lag, if macro-level societal shifts in consumption trends have occurred and affected community sentiment in urban settings, I might expect to observe and measure similar changes in the Delta not only later but also over a relatively shorter period of time. Extending this argument, the Mississippi Delta is an ideal location to study the emerging effects of late modernity and non-place specific consumption on community experience. Essentially, I am testing whether the effects of Bauman's (2005, 2007) "liquid modernity" could manifest themselves in the Mississippi Delta. Or in other words, has a decade of globalization influenced community sentiment in two extremely rural American communities?

In 2007, the same Mississippi Delta communities that Brown et al. studied in 1996, were again selected for observation. The same indicators and viability index used by Brown et. al (1996) to measure consumer trends and community sentiment were again employed in 2007.

Though acknowledging that there are many possible variables that affect community sentiment, the viability index serves as a comprehensive empirical test that helps to expand on the traditional Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) systemic model. It adds a geographical element that accounts for the places where a wide variety of goods and services are consumed. When these outshopping and inshopping variables are regressed with community sentiment variables, they account for some economic realities that influence community sentiment, something missing from the traditional models. If this test is indeed a more comprehensive test of community sentiment, and if globalization has had a measurable impact on community sentiment in rural communities over the decade under observation, then I expect the findings to support arguments made by Bauman (2005, 2007), Barber (2007), Beck (1992, 2002), Cova (1997), and Sennett (2006) among others, regarding the changing meaning of consumption.

#### HYPOTHESES

If participation in a mass consumer society is still integral to a positive experience of community in late modern life,

- 1) I should see a positive association between outshopping and community attachment and satisfaction in both 1996 and 2007.

On the other hand, if this tie between the experience of community and how people consume has been redefined,

- 2) I should see a positive association between outshopping and community experience in 1996 disappearing by 2007.

If participation in mass consumer society has affected community sentiment negatively, such that there is a reversal of the trends found by Brown et. al (1996),

- 3) I should see a positive association between outshopping and community attachment and satisfaction amongst 1996 respondents, but a negative association among 2007 respondents.

## DATA AND METHODS

Data were collected from two communities in the Delta region of Northwest Mississippi—Franklin and Lee (pseudonyms), both county seats—along with their adjoining hinterlands.<sup>7</sup> A randomized cluster sample was used for the sampling method in the two communities in order to maintain racial and economic proportionality. Both communities were surveyed using this sampling technique in 1996, and re-sampled and surveyed in the spring and summer of 2007. Both surveys were able to maintain a sample size of roughly 5-10 percent of the population from each community. According to the U.S. Census, Lee had 1,758 residents in 1990 and 1,551 in 2000. In Franklin, the population in 1990 was 2,257, decreasing to 2,198 by the time of the 2000 census (U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

In both years, a sample frame for the two communities was constructed by mapping the streets in each town and identifying each residence located within the city limits and, using State Highway Department County Maps, identifying all residences within a ten-mile radius of each city's center. Within the city limits, each town was partitioned into quadrants with each street being assigned a number and divided into sections according to its actual number of blocks. To select the sample, streets from each quadrant were randomly drawn. After each street was selected, a number representing a street block or segment was also randomly drawn. All households on selected blocks

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<sup>7</sup> The “hinterlands” were operationalized as the area within a ten-mile radius of the community centers.

were contacted for interviews. Household members over 18 years of age, whose birthday fell closest to the date of the interview, were surveyed. This process was repeated until a minimum of 75 respondents were interviewed in each town's city limits

In the hinterlands, all land survey sections that fell, in whole or in part, within the ten-mile radius were identified and all residences in them enumerated. Sections were randomly selected and every household within the selected sections entered into the final sample. This was repeated until a sample of at least 50 respondents was achieved in each community's hinterland. Depending on what the census records showed for hinterland populations for 2007, I adjusted this number accordingly. Overall response rates for Lee and Franklin were, respectively, 83 and 91 percent in 1996, and 91 and 88.6 percent in 2007. When residents refused, the interviewers continued to the next house in the same selected section and the refusals were incorporated into the response rates listed above. Graduate students from Mississippi State University, trained in appropriate survey collection procedures, conducted the interviews in 1996. Delta State University graduate students conducted the survey in 2007.

### *Dependent Variables*

*Community attachment* can be understood as both a tool for measuring the rootedness of individuals in a local community, and as a gauge with which to track social change (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Theodori and Luloff 2001). Community attachment “refers to two distinct things (Brown 2003:245). The first is how sentimentally rooted a person is in a particular geographical community; the second is how general changes in that rootedness can be used as a measure of social change.” I use community attachment in both ways in this study, measuring individuals’ levels of attachment to their



communities, and also how those levels have changed over time in response to the emergence of the global marketplace, among other things. Community satisfaction, however, “refers to people’s subjective evaluations of their own well-being as measured by how well their local community meets their personal needs” (Brown 2003:303).

Two separate indicators were used for both community attachment and community satisfaction. Community satisfaction indicators included evaluations of residents’ community rating (“Imagine the ideal community in which you would like to live. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being farthest from your ideal and 5 being closest to your ideal, where would you rank your present community?”) and a global measure concerning their life in the community (“On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being dissatisfied and 5 being satisfied, how satisfied are you with living in your community?”). For community attachment, the two questions dealt with how well respondents felt they fit into their communities (“On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poorly and 5 being well, how well do you feel that you fit into your community?”), and how much they felt they had in common with other residents in their communities (“On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being nothing and 5 being everything, how much do you have in common with most of the people in your community?”). (See Table 1 in the appendix for descriptions of all variables used in the analyses.)

### *Independent Variables*

*Primary independent variables.* As the objective was to describe the association between outshopping and community sentiments and whether this association has changed over time, two variables, *year* and *outshopping*, and their interaction, were required. *Year* is

the survey year and is coded “1” for the 2007 respondents and “0” for the 1996 respondents.

To measure *outshopping*, respondents were asked to indicate whether they ever purchased each of 30 listed consumer items. Items replicated those used by Brown et al. in 1996. If respondents had purchased a particular item, they were asked how often they purchased it in their local community (possible responses were “Never,” “Once in a While,” “Most of the Time,” and “Always”). To create the *outshopping* variable, the number of responses of “Never” were summed for each respondent, so that the possible range for outshopping would be from zero to thirty. This provides a variable that measures the number of consumer items that each respondent shops for *exclusively outside* their community (see Table 4 in the appendix for a description of these data). This contrasts with Brown et al.’s (1996) measurement, which summed the number of answers of “Never” or “Once in a While,” but provides a purer measure of outshopping.<sup>8</sup>

*Systemic model and control variables.* Community attachment has generally been understood to be a consequence of long-term socialization in a local community made up of friends, family, and informal associational ties (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974). While Kasarda and Janowitz dealt specifically with community *attachment*, others have extended the systemic model to explain levels of community *satisfaction* as well (e.g., Brown et al. 2000; Sampson 1991). I deal with both attachment and satisfaction, and will control for the systemic model’s hypothesized covariates in assessing the effects of

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<sup>8</sup> Using the Brown et al. (1996) version of the outshopping variable yields very similar results, with all the coefficients in the same direction, though some of the associations come out as non-significant. This occurs because the response “Once in a while” to the question of how often the respondent shops for the item within his or her community conflates a certain amount of inshopping with outshopping.

*outshopping* and *survey year*. These covariates are grouped by Kasarda and Janowitz's measurements of *length of residence*, *lifecycle stage*, and *social position*.

While *length of residence* is typically measured as the number of years an individual resided in a community, this operationalization has certain shortcomings. First, because the number of years an individual has lived in a community is a function of his or her age, each resident's length of residence is effectively measured on a different scale. Second, and related to the first problem in these data, years resident in a community is strongly correlated with *age* ( $r = .574, p < .001$ ). Because *age*, as an indicator of lifecycle stage, and *length of residence* are both included in the systemic model, this collinearity may cause problems with the estimation and interpretation of the coefficients. To avoid these problems, I used the proportion of one's life spent in the community, which was calculated as the quotient of the number of years resident in the community divided by age. Our measure is uncorrelated with age ( $r = -.056, p = .204$ ), and places each respondent on a similar scale.<sup>9</sup>

Two variables measure the effect of lifecycle stage: *age* and *marital status*. *Age* is measured on a continuous scale. *Marital status* is coded "1" for married, widowed, or living together, and "0" for all others. Social position is measured by *education*, recorded on a six-point scale ranging from (1) "grade school or less" to (6) "graduate degree."

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<sup>9</sup> The scale is similar, it is not exactly the same. The range of the *length of residence* measure is from nearly zero to 1.0, but the lower end of the range decreases as age increases. This difference is negligible.

I also control for *race* and *sex*. *Race* is coded “1” for black respondents and “0” for white respondents.<sup>10</sup> *Sex* is coded “1” for females and “0” for males. *Town* of residence is also included in the analyses, with Lee coded “1” and Franklin “0.”

### *Modeling Strategy*

While dependent variables measured on an ordinal scale are typically treated by social scientists as though they were continuous, an effort was made here to use ordinal logistic regression to estimate the models shown below. However, three of the four variables failed a test of the proportional odds assumption, suggesting that treating them as ordinal would be inappropriate. Multinomial logistic regression models were estimated for each dependent variable to explore the reasons for the violation of the proportional odds assumption. The findings lead to the conclusion that the primary distinction being made by the dependent variables was between those respondents who scored in the highest categories on each dependent variable (i.e., those who were the most attached or satisfied), and all other respondents. Accordingly, I dichotomized each dependent variable so that those who were most attached or satisfied (those who answered with a 5 in the original coding scheme) were coded as “1,” and all others (whose answers ranged from 1 to 4 in the original coding scheme) were coded as “0.” Dichotomizing the variables allowed for the use of binary logistic regression, which is not only easier to interpret, but also lends itself more readily to various diagnostic tests.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the

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<sup>10</sup> The single Hispanic respondent was combined with white respondents.

<sup>11</sup> Diagnostic tests were performed on the final models and uncovered just a few influential cases for each dependent variable. Investigation of these cases revealed that they were often older, long-term residents, who were estimated to have high probabilities of being coded as “1,” but whose actual scores were “0.” This was largely due to the recode, as these respondents generally answered with the second highest levels

findings in the binary logistic regression models are substantively very similar to those from the ordinal logistic regression models.

While I present several measures of fit for each model, the goal is not to find the best-fitting model, but to test the hypotheses. This requires testing the significance of *outshopping* and *year*, and the interaction effect between them, while also controlling for the variables from the systemic model. Below is a series of hierarchical binary logistic regression models for each measure of community attachment and community satisfaction. The first model estimates the univariable relationships between each measure of community satisfaction and attachment and our primary independent variables, *outshopping* and *year*. The second model estimates a multivariable model that includes *outshopping*, *year*, and their interaction effect to see if the effect of *outshopping* varies across the two survey years prior to controlling for any other variables. The final model tests whether the findings for the interaction effect persist once other theoretically important determinants of community attachment and satisfaction are controlled. The goal of the analysis below is to determine whether the effect of outshopping on the experience of community has changed over a period of time characterized as the incorporation and submersion of rural America into the global market.

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of attachment or satisfaction (a “4” in the original coding scheme). The models were re-estimated without the influential cases, which generally resulted in slightly better-fitting models, but no substantive differences. Because the cases were reasonable observations, and because their exclusion made no difference to the interpretation of the models, they were left in the data and are included in the estimates below.

## FINDINGS

Tables 2 and 3 present the odds ratios from the logistic regression models predicting community attachment and community satisfaction, respectively. Model 1 for each measure of community attachment and satisfaction represents the univariable effects of both of the primary independent variables.<sup>12</sup> The findings show that *outshopping* is positively associated with both measures of community attachment and one measure of satisfaction. No association was found between *outshopping* and *life in the community*. The findings also indicate that there is no significant difference between 1996 and 2007 survey respondents in the odds of being more rather than less attached to or satisfied with one's community.

Model 2 for each dependent variable in Tables 2 and 3 is essentially an extension of the univariate tests, but includes an interaction effect between *year* and *outshopping* so the distinct effects of *outshopping* for each survey year may be estimated (See Tables 2 and 3, Appendix). For all four dependent variables, the interaction effect is statistically significant, indicating that the effect of *outshopping* on community sentiments does differ between survey years. This difference could be the result of the two survey years being composed of two separate populations with distinct characteristics, thus to fully test hypotheses 2 and 3, that the effect of outshopping on community attachment and satisfaction differs between 1996 and 2007, Model 3 includes controls for variables

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<sup>12</sup> I present the univariate odds ratio to test the univariate effects because of the dichotomous measurement of the dependent variables. Tests of differences in means would be inappropriate because the dependent variable is not measured continuously. Logits can be calculated by taking the natural logarithm of the odds ratio (for example, taking the effect of *outshopping* on *how well fit* in Model 1 of Table 3, the natural log of the odds ratio of 1.054 is .053).

described by the systemic model of community as important determinants of attachment and satisfaction, as well as controls for *race* and *sex*. Once these controls are included in the models, the interaction effect remains significant for all four dependent variables. The effect of outshopping on community attachment and satisfaction differs significantly between 1996 and 2007.

Because the 1996 respondents are coded as zero for the analysis, the odds ratio for *outshopping* in Model 3 for each dependent variable represents only the odds ratio for the 1996 sample.<sup>13</sup> Each odds ratio is significant and above 1.0, indicating that amongst 1996 respondents, higher levels of *outshopping* are associated with higher levels of community attachment and satisfaction. The odds ratio for the interaction effect is below 1.0 for each dependent variable (a negative effect), which results in odds ratios for *outshopping* that are lower for 2007 than for 1996 (see note 13 for an example). Furthermore, none of the odds ratios for *outshopping* for the 2007 respondents are statistically significant (*how well fit*: odds ratio (OR) = .992,  $p = .801$ ; *how much in common*: OR = 1.013,  $p = .667$ ; *life in the community*: OR = 1.007,  $p = .819$ ; *community rating*: OR = .988,  $p = .716$ ).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The odds ratios for lower-order terms in an interaction must be calculated using the odds ratio for the interaction effect itself. For example, in Model 3 of Table 2, the odds ratio for the effect of a one-point increase in *outshopping* on *how well fit* for the 1996 respondents is calculated as  $1.132^1 \times .877^0 = 1.132$ . The superscript “1” for *outshopping*’s odds ratio (1.132) represents a one-unit change in *outshopping*, while the superscript “0” for the interaction effect’s odds ratio (.877) represents the code for 1996 in the variable *year*. For the 2007 respondents, who are coded with a “1,” the odds ratio changes to  $1.132^1 \times .877^1 = .993$  (due to rounding error, this is off by one thousandth from the actual estimated odds ratio of .992).

<sup>14</sup> The models estimated and presented in Tables 2 and 3 only test the significance of the *outshopping* coefficients for the 1996 respondents (see note 13 for more discussion of this). The significant interaction effect indicates that the 1996 and 2007 coefficients are different, so to test the significance of *outshopping*

This difference between the 1996 and 2007 respondents in the effect of *outshopping* is substantial. For example, amongst 1996 respondents, again moving across the interquartile range of *outshopping* while holding other variables constant, the odds of a respondent feeling that he or she has more rather than less in common with most fellow community residents (*how much in common*) are estimated to increase by about  $(100 \times [1.151^7 - 1] =)$  168 percent. In contrast, amongst 2007 respondents, the estimated increase is only about  $(100 \times [1.013^7 - 1] =)$  9.5 percent.

A better way to illustrate an interaction effect is by graphing it. Figure 1 shows the slopes for *outshopping* for the 1996 and 2007 respondents for each dependent variable. In each graph, it is clear that *outshopping* is more strongly associated with attachment and satisfaction amongst the 1996 respondents. Also clear is that while the slope is strong and positive in 1996, it is nearly flat in 2007, showing that *outshopping* has no substantively important effect on community attachment and satisfaction amongst 2007 respondents (see Figure 1, Appendix).

While based on the odds ratios the effect of *year* appears to be nonsignificant for two of the four dependent variables in Model 3 (*life in community*, *how much in common*), this is simply an artifact of the coding of the variables and the inclusion of the interaction effect. The odds ratio for *year* represents the size of the difference between 1996 and 2007 respondents in the odds of being more rather than less attached or

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for the 2007 respondents, the coding for *year* was reversed and each model re-estimated. This approach produces results identical to those shown in Tables 2 and 3, with the exception that the odds ratio for *outshopping* represents the 2007 estimate instead of the 1996 estimate, and the odds ratio for the interaction effect is inverted.



satisfied only among those people who did not exclusively outshop for any consumer items (i.e., they scored as zero on the outshopping variable). As is clear from the graphs in Figure 1, for all four dependent variables, as *outshopping* increases, the difference between survey years first decreases to the point of zero, and then increases. The findings in Tables 2 and 3 show that the difference between 1996 and 2007 respondents is statistically significant at the low end of the *outshopping* scale for *how well fit* and *community rating*, but as the lines in Figure 1 approach one another, this difference ceases to be significant. All things being equal, amongst respondents who do not exclusively outshop for anything, 2007 respondents' odds of feeling their community is closer to their ideal or that they fit into their community well are higher than those of the 1996 respondents. This difference disappears, however, as *outshopping* approaches about five or six. For all four dependent variables, the difference between 1996 and 2007 respondents in the odds of being more as opposed to less attached or satisfied becomes significant at higher levels of *outshopping*, with 1996 respondents having higher odds than the 2007 respondents of being more rather than less attached or satisfied.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The odds ratios for *year* shown in Tables 2 and 3 only describe the effect of *year* when *outshopping* equals zero. To test the significance of *year* at the high end of the *outshopping* scale, *outshopping*'s coding was reversed and the models re-estimated. In these re-estimated models, the odds ratio for *year* represented the difference between 1996 and 2007 in the odds of being more rather than less attached or satisfied amongst respondents who exclusively shopped outside their home community for twenty-four consumer items (This is the maximum score in the *outshopping* scale. While the possible range of the *outshopping* scale is zero to thirty, the observed range only stretches from zero to twenty-four).

### *Missing Data*

As is typical of survey data, the Survey of Quality of Life in the Mississippi Delta has some missing values. For the models presented above, listwise deletion was used to deal with missing values, with the number of missing cases due to missing values ranging from about 1.5 to 8.4 percent of the total sample. Because missing data can produce biased coefficients and standard errors (Acock 2005), I assessed the effects of missing values in our analysis by re-estimating each of the final models with a multiply imputed data set created using Von Hippel's (2007) method of multiple imputation with deletion. Multiple imputation works by generating a set of plausible values that represent a distribution of plausible values (Rubin 1987). Stata's *ice* command (Royston 2004, 2005; StataCorp 2008) was used to create thirty new data sets in which plausible values were imputed to replace each missing value. Stata's *mim* command (Carlin, Galati, and Royston. 2008) was then used to analyze the multiply imputed data sets. All of the variables used in the analyses above, as well as several auxiliary variables, were used in the imputation process, but cases with missing values in the dependent variable were dropped before analysis because they contribute no information to parameter estimates (Von Hippel 2007; Allison 2002).

The models estimated with the multiply imputed data were consistent with the models presented here that are based on listwise deletion. In particular, the findings for hypothesis 2 persisted in the multiply imputed data for all four dependent variables, as the coefficients were of very similar size, and the significance tests provided identical results. I show the estimates based on listwise deletion because the diagnostics were based on them, and because fit statistics are difficult to calculate with the multiply

imputed data. Our missing-data analysis suggests that our findings are probably not a result of biases due to missing data (further details are available from the authors).

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The findings clearly support the second hypothesis as non-local consumption rather than community has apparently become the conduit through which individuals in these two Mississippi Delta communities connect to the institutions of society. In the mid 1990s outshopping was a significant predictor of community sentiment in the Mississippi Delta, but it no longer was so by 2007.<sup>16</sup>

There are potentially several explanations to explain the change in significance between outshopping and community sentiment. Perhaps the increase in computers and the availability of the internet has kept people more in the home and able to communicate with others. From 1996-2007 there has been an explosion of virtual communication media available to people, allowing an overabundance of choice in modes, types, and people with whom to interact. This could potentially have changed peoples' community sentiments as they relate to outshopping.

Alternatively, the influx of mega churches and television evangelists has certainly increased during the period under observation. Perhaps people are staying home and watching church on television rather than attending worship services in their local

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<sup>16</sup> The summer of 2007 was a fortuitous time chosen to complete the survey. Had I waited only a few months, the data likely would have been dramatically skewed putting into question the validity of the claims drawn from it in regards to outshopping. Oil prices significantly spiked through the end of 2007 and into the summer of 2008 (US Retail Gasoline Prices 2008). Abnormally high fuel prices could have influenced people's outshopping habits. The assumption of continuity would have been jeopardized and the findings would have been more questionable.

communities. Those who have mobility may be traveling to mega churches much the same way they travel to megamalls and big-box stores; such a trend would also likely affect community sentiment.

The model might also simply be picking up socioeconomic divisions that segregate those who are mobile from those who are not. Perhaps if I had stratified consumers who outshop by income levels I might have found that individuals who have reasonably high levels of income are also those who are primarily detached from their communities. Yet, even if this is the case, the findings still indicate that rural residents who outshop—rich or poor—no longer associate these activities with their feelings of community sentiment.

One explanation in line with the hypothesis could be attributed to the effects of globalization on rural settings, a phenomenon which may have shifted, altered, or redefined certain social definitions. Though I am not the first to argue that globalization has transformed late-modern social landscapes from a “solid” to a more “liquid” nature (Bauman 2007; Cova 1997<sup>17</sup>), the findings of this empirical test certainly merit a closer look by community sociologists who argue that place-based interactions matter in late modernity. Community sentiment may no longer be a phenomenon primarily tied to participation in a mass consumer society, as was the case only a decade ago in the Mississippi Delta. The link between outshopping and the experience of community has been redefined and community, in its function as the conduit through which people perceive, experience, and remain attached to the wider context of society, has also been

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<sup>17</sup> Cova uses the term “liquid self” in reference to the postmodern individual and consumer in the same context as Bauman’s references to liquid life.

altered. Perhaps we have shifted from mass consumer society to a “society of consumers,” “the kind of society which ‘interpellates’ its members *primarily in their capacity of consumers*” (Bauman 2007:52).

In Franklin and Lee, *outshopping*—or rather ‘consumption’ as defined in a Bauman-like liquid modern era—allows residents to express themselves to, and interact with, society *without* it being tied either directly or indirectly to how they experience their local community. This represents a phenomenal reversal from just ten years earlier when outshopping was still mediating residents’ community experience reinforcing Bender’s (1978) view of a bifurcated society, a society where the community—despite losing its economic and political importance—still remained a vital link to larger social life.

These Mississippi Delta residents have moved from the mass consumer society into a society of consumers,

[t]he kind of society that promotes, encourages, or enforces the choice of a consumerist lifestyle and life strategy and dislikes all alternative cultural options; a society in which adapting to the precepts of consumer culture...[is] a condition of membership (Bauman 2007:53; 2008:88-89).

The findings in Franklin and Lee seem to support the notion that the consumption/community link envisioned by Bender (1978) and Brown (1993) has, in a *liquid* modernity, been replaced with the purchase of social identities independent of localities.

## CONCLUSION

Wilkinson's ideas were partly based on a modernist perspective that contended with classical arguments which interpreted community as something that was being *lost* to society. Looking closer, Wilkinson was simply reacting to an outmoded line of reasoning. Instead of discussing the demise of community I have offered instead a different place for it. I have argued that structural changes in society, change that put the burden of identity formation on the individual, have altered community leaving it unable to function as Wilkinson described. The institutionalization of the individual (Beck 2002), in a society of consumers precludes *community* as an approach to creating one's own "biography." As such, community reveals itself now mostly in its counterfeit manifestations leaving it thus reduced to a concept used constantly as a marketing gimmick, bought and sold and added to the assortment of consumer goods and services available for consumption. It is not simply a case of genuine community not existing so much as genuine community being reduced. In its place many things have emerged, counterfeit community being only one of them. If in these two Mississippi delta communities, consumption is now linking residents to society, it can be assumed that part of peoples' identity is being formed without community at all, whether genuine or counterfeit.

As local community sentiment, mediated through participation in a mass society, no longer appears to be a primary empirical contact point between the individual and society's institutions, the local community is consequently losing much of its previous social significance. As our local communities increasingly shed their traditional production and consumption functions (Warren 1978) they may also increasingly fail to

imbue their residents with identity and connections to larger social realities. This function appears now to be that of the global market. Recently, psychologists have begun to warn that the loss of communal identities due to *uber*-self expression through consumption—our liquid selves—carries potentially devastating ramifications to the ability to formulate and maintain stable value sets, especially at the community level (Kasser 2003).

Indeed, Freie (1998) warned that a “society of consumers” who use consumption as opposed to community as their means of social interaction perpetuates the growth of *counterfeit communities* where the best we can hope for is the commercialized reproduction of “real” communal relationships in our “neighborhood bar and grill”—Applebee’s, or at Cheers—“where everybody knows your name.” All of these communities maintain elements of predictability, security, and familiarity. All are simply smaller and *warmer* cathedrals of consumption endemic of an affluent society’s ability to commodify that which cannot be commodified.

Bauman (2001a) expands on Freie’s claims by equating early-modern community with security, a state of mind that allowed one to feel “solid” and secure in the atomized living arrangements that characterized such a transformative era. As we shifted into late modernity, our desire for “individual expression” became late modernity’s model of “freedom.” This new form of individual expression, however, comes at the expense of transforming genuine community (something solid and secure) into counterfeit community (something liquid and undefined). Unfortunately, we cannot recover the feeling of security through our communities of place because they have been discarded in favor of counterfeit community, as consumption too has been freed from its local community moorings.

Filling the void are ideas and concepts of identity expressed through the consumption of brands which appeal to the late-modern individual's desire for freedom while also providing the illusion of security. This false sense of security comes in the form of belonging to a community, a counterfeit "brand community" in some cases (Bauman 2001a; Freie 1998; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Individuals are increasingly obliged to find their place and relevance in society through consumption items, habits, and means by which they self-brand and sell their image to society. By definition, consuming means to use up. If what individuals have to offer are *relative* expressive qualities that have a short shelf-life and market value late-modern life may be bound by the same liquidity that drives the global capital markets which sustain it. Where does such a liquid life and wholesale embrace of a culture of consumption leave us? "[T]he individual has never been so free . . . and never so alone and cut off from the spirit of community" (Cova (1997: 299).



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APPENDIX

TABLE 1. Variable descriptions and Descriptive Statistics

	Community Attachment	Mean	SD
How Well Fit	On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poorly and 5 being well, how well do you feel that you fit into your community? Recorded on a scale of 1 (poorly) to 5 (well).	4.424	1.012
How Much in Common	On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being nothing and 5 being everything, how much do you have in common with most of the people in your community? Recorded on a scale of 1 (nothing) to 5 (everything).	3.907	1.164
Community Satisfaction			
Community Rating	Imagine the ideal community in which you would like to live. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being farthest from your ideal and 5 being closest to your ideal, where would you rank your present community? Recorded on a scale of 1 (farthest) to 5 (closest).	3.572	1.338
Life in Community	On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being dissatisfied and 5 being satisfied, how satisfied are you with living in your community? Recorded on a scale of 1 (dissatisfied) to 5 (satisfied).	4.154	1.176
Independent Variables			
Outshopping	See discussion in the text.	6.070	5.309
Survey Year	2007=1, 1996=0	0.388	0.488
Length of Residence	Years resident in the community divided by age.	0.660	0.331
Age	In years.	50.209	18.569
Education	Ranges from 1 (grade school or less) to 6 (graduate degree).	3.098	1.264
Marital Status	Married or Widowed = 1, Other = 0	0.646	0.479
Sex	Female=1, Male=0	0.653	0.476
Race	Black=1, White=0	0.589	0.493
Town	Lee=1, Franklin=0	0.419	0.494

TABLE 2. Logistic Regression Modeling Community Attachment with Outshopping and Survey Year (odds ratios).

	How well fit			How much in common		
	Model 1	Model 2 (N=541)	Model 3 (N=508)	Model 1 (N=536)	Model 2 (N=536)	Model 3 (N=503)
Outshopping	1.054 **	1.115 ***	1.132 ***	1.040 *	1.103 ***	1.151 ***
Survey Year	1.257	2.386 **	2.236 *	0.772	1.423	1.436
Outshopping × Survey Year		0.875 ***	0.877 **		0.891 **	0.880 **
Length of Res.			2.009 *			1.235
Age			1.020 **			1.022 ***
Education			0.969			0.851 *
Marital Status			1.516			1.296
Sex			0.762			0.971
Race			1.233			1.945 **
Town			0.642 *			0.789
Constant		1.261	0.311 *		0.509 ***	0.119 ***
Loglikelihood		-327.031	-294.556		-355.037	-311.938
Model $\chi^2$		19.420 ***	45.410 ***		20.990 ***	59.670 ***
Hosmer-Lemeshow		7.730	4.480		6.900	5.090
R <sup>2</sup> <sub>McF</sub>		0.017	0.037		0.018	0.055
R <sup>2</sup> <sub>M&amp;Z</sub>		0.057	0.126		0.049	0.150
BIC		679.235	657.648		735.211	692.301

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed).

Notes: R<sup>2</sup><sub>McF</sub> is the adjusted McFadden's R<sup>2</sup>. R<sup>2</sup><sub>M&Z</sub> is McKelvey & Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup>, which is a good estimate of the R<sup>2</sup> that results from OLS regression (McKelvey and Zavoina 1975). Lower Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) values indicate better-fitting models. A non-significant Hosmer and Lemeshow test suggest good overall fit, as does a significant Model chi-square test.

TABLE 3. Logistic Regression Modeling Community Satisfaction with Outshopping and Survey Year (odds ratios).

	Life in the community			Community rating		
	Model 1 (N=538)	Model 2 (N=538)	Model 3 (N=507)	Model 1 (N=540)	Model 2 (N=540)	Model 3 (N=507)
Outshopping	1.018	1.050 *	1.090 ***	1.040 *	1.104 ***	1.171 ***
Survey Year	0.974	1.473	1.390	0.887	2.030 **	2.384 *
Outshopping × Survey Year		0.931 *	0.924 *		0.869 ***	0.844 ***
Length of Res.			1.847 *			2.047 *
Age			1.032 ***			1.025 ***
Education			0.775 **			0.641 ***
Marital Status			1.200			1.207
Sex			0.877			0.953
Race			1.316			0.988
Town			0.625 *			0.672
Constant		1.008	0.273 *		0.314 ***	0.160 **
Loglikelihood		-366.658	-314.558		-333.008	-279.619
Model $\chi^2$		5.350	66.380 ***		21.420 ***	83.280 ***
Hosmer-Lemeshow		7.410	11.410		5.290	8.410
R <sup>2</sup> <sub>McF</sub>		-0.004	0.064		0.020	0.096
R <sup>2</sup> <sub>M&amp;Z</sub>		0.013	0.161		0.050	0.220
BIC		758.468	697.629		691.183	627.752

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed).

Notes: R<sup>2</sup><sub>McF</sub> is the adjusted McFadden's R<sup>2</sup>. R<sup>2</sup><sub>M&Z</sub> is McKelvey & Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup>, which is a good estimate of the R<sup>2</sup> that results from OLS regression (McKelvey and Zavoina 1975). Lower Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) values indicate better-fitting models. A non-significant Hosmer and Lemeshow test suggest good overall fit, as does a significant Model chi-square test.

*TABLE 4. Outshopping Variables (N = 544)*

Commodity/Service	Percent who exclusively outshop for the commodity/service
Food/Groceries	5.88
Banking/Lending	12.68
Clothes for Adults	43.93
Clothes for Children	25.37
Maternity Clothes	11.95
Laundry/Dry Cleaning	9.38
Adult's Shoes	56.07
Children's Shoes	29.41
Infant Supplies	11.40
Non-prescription Drugs	11.58
Prescription Drugs	7.90
Other Medical Supplies	8.64
Home Improvement and Decorating	26.10
Furniture	39.71
Lumber/Hardware/Construction Supplies	18.38
Lawn and Garden Supplies	23.16
Agricultural Supplies	12.87
Sports Equipment	25.74
Entertainment	31.80
Automobiles	50.92
Car Repair	23.71
Gas and Oil Products	8.09
Major Appliances	35.66
Appliance Repairs	18.01
Shoe Repairs	11.40
Legal Services	15.26
Beautician or Barber	10.48
Fast Foods	9.38
Tobacco	5.88
Alcohol	6.25

FIGURE 1. Interaction effect between year and outshopping.

