

[Navigating the Changing Landscape of Scholarly Book Publishing in Literary and Cultural Studies, Part 2](#)

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A post from [Feeding the Elephant: A Forum for Scholarly Communications](#).

This post was developed from a virtual panel conversation that took place at the Modern Language Association 2022 meeting in January, organized by the [MLA Publications Committee](#). Throughout the week, the Elephant will publish one post per day from each of the six interlocutors on the themes of Change, Generations, Experiments, Open, Fit, and Labor. As always, readers are invited to continue the conversation in the comments. -Eds.

Generations

Parneshia Jones, director, Northwestern University Press

The great “Generational Publishing Dialogue” is something that will remain a cornerstone to the shifts in publishing. We have never had this many generations of authors, readers, and publishers who all make specific impacts on readership, scholarship, and how we disseminate books to meet the vast needs for our information. These needed dialogues are becoming more important to have in the earliest of stages in the relationships between authors and publishers. Why? No two authors, scholars, or books are alike. This is prevalent from a generational standpoint in which some authors still speak in traditional publishing language and see the values of their experiences and expectations, while others (and not always the younger generations) want to embrace more innovative models that constantly evolve.

The question is not necessarily a hierarchy question, or which is valued more; it comes down to how publishers can build sustainable models that can accommodate the different experiences and needs of authors and readers. Publishing needs to embrace the two-sided brain of “reinventing the wheel” and “if it ain’t broke, no need to fix it.” For example, at Northwestern University Press we have revised ideas about trade versus scholarly categories so that they are not thought of in such rigid, distinct terms, (i.e., never the twain shall meet), but instead talk to one another and even overlap—in some cases to broaden the readership for both. With this idea, what still remains at the helm is the mission of excellence in the publisher’s standards in scholarship.

Another area where we blur the boundaries is in our definitions, like what constitutes a “junior scholar” and whether the definition still applies in light of how scholars and scholarship have changed. Then there are hybrid authors and books (which in the past were seen as outliers) that include multi-genre titles, scholarly books that make an impact in the mainstream, and authors with or without a social media presence that have major influence in their fields. The “hybrid effect” has become an important and new cornerstone for publishers and will continue to respond to a global readership, contributing to their specific fields of study as well as to wider social impacts.

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Finally, what are we as publishers doing to sustain? As exciting as it is to see the cultural, social, and innovative shifts in publishing, the ideas for how we support these changes should come before the changes themselves. Publishers must understand the responsibility of change in relation to responding to a particular moment. How we sustain any shifts in our publishing models, responses to climates and conversations, should start with a blueprint, instructions, and resources that will outlast the initial response or call for change. Our responses should be lasting. They should embrace both the new and what is still here that we value and has helped us maintain our excellence in scholarly publishing.

Parneshia Jones is the Director of Northwestern University Press. Her acquisitions have garnered some of the highest literary honors, including the National Book Award, Kingsley Tufts, Pulitzer Prize finalists, Hurston Wright Legacy Awards, NAACP Image Awards, L.A. Times Book Award, and others. Jones is the author of *Vessel:Poems*, winner of the Midwest Book Award, and chosen as “One of 12 Books to Savor” by Oprah Magazine.

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