Consumption, exclusion and emotion: the social geographies of shopping

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In recent years, a productive dialogue has developed between retail geographers and those social geographers concerned with the spatiality of consumption. This has resulted in a series of accounts of shopping that emphasize notions of consumer creativity. Nonetheless, this paper argues that many of these have struggled to reconcile the meaning of shopping with an understanding of the material parameters within which consumers operate. Recognizing that this tendency has distracted from the socio-spatial inequalities evident in retailing, the paper examines how shopping rituals are embedded in social relations that discourage particular shoppers from visiting certain retail locations. Drawing on extensive and intensive data derived in Coventry (UK), the paper questions the extent to which this geography of exclusion is the product of constraint, arguing that shopping is shaped by a more complex spatiality of inclusion and (self-) exclusion. Accordingly, the paper makes the case for a social geography of shopping that pays careful attention to the emotionally laden transactions played out in particular settings.

Key words: consumer society, retailing, identity, exclusion, emotion.

Introduction

Though often overshadowed by studies of economic production, geographers' interest in retailing has a lengthy precedent. Initially, much of this work focused on store location and the modelling of retail catchments, with the mantra 'location, location, location' encapsulating the presiding spirit of a retail geography rooted in spatial science. More recently, however, it has been possible to discern a transformation in the agenda of retail geography, with the emphasis shifting from retailing to shopping. In this 'new' retail geography, traditional concerns with theorizing retail provision have been broadened to encompass consideration of shopping as a cultural activity. Here, an important influence has been the work of those social geographers who have drawn on theories of consumption in their attempt to elucidate the way that people purchase and transform commodities in different contexts

(Crang and Malbon 1996). Rejecting neo-classical models of consumer behaviour, such theories stress the negotiated nature of consumption, emphasizing its importance in the construction of identity. This has alerted researchers to the fact that shopping is an elaborate sociological 'game' played out in sites loaded with meaning (Crewe, 2000).

While not disputing the relevance of such insights to an understanding of shopping, this paper follows Jackson (1999) in arguing that the current preoccupation with consumer creativity underestimates the importance of the material constraints in which consumers operate. More specifically, it suggests this tendency serves to divorce understandings of shopping from the social (and spatial) context in which it occurs. For instance, the idea that access remains significant in shaping shopping is often overlooked in current research, despite a number of earlier papers having identified its importance in determining who shops where (Guy 1985). This paper will accordingly argue that access remains pivotal in understanding shopping, particularly if 'access' is not solely concerned with whether shopping opportunities can be reached, but also whether consumers feel they 'belong' in a location. As such, the paper concurs with Westlake (1993), who insists that shopping choices remain strongly influenced by factors including income, age, class and gender. Simultaneously, the paper follows Sibley (1995) in acknowledging the exclusionary processes that make certain (and typically newer) retail spaces inaccessible to certain groups. Yet at the same time, it takes seriously the idea that shopping remains an individual and often idiosyncratic activity. The paper seeks to do this by drawing on empirical data derived from a wider research project on shopping in Coventry (UK). In effect, these data suggest that shopping can only be understood as a creative pursuit, albeit one that is rooted in socio-spatial relations of consumption. On the basis of this, the paper begins to develop a theoretically informed account of shopping where the use of retail spaces is seen to involve a complex social interaction between people, places and commodities. Here, particular attention is devoted to the *emotions* that consumers experience, with the desire or disgust with which they imbue particular types of people, product, shop assistants, shop layouts (and so on) hypothesized as significant in creating geographies of retail inclusion and exclusion. It is concluded that it is through an exploration of the emotional experiences of shopping that a more nuanced understanding of retailing can be developed.

Consumption, disadvantage and retail change

Unquestionably, the 1990s witnessed a veritable explosion of interest in geographies of consumption. While this might be explained with reference to geographers' increased awareness of the centrality of consumption in social life, more cynically it might be added that many geographers did not consider the worlds of leisure, shopping and eating as worthy of investigation until key writings by Bourdieu (1984), Featherstone (1991) and Maffesoli (1996) pushed consumption issues to the top of the social science agenda. Nonetheless, today geographers are acknowledged as having produced a variety of often innovative research on consumption (Beaverstock and Crewe 1998). In effect, this has bequeathed geography with an enviable reputation as a discipline that bases its understandings of the 'consumer society' on empirical research which pays close attention to the materialities of everyday life. Moreover, it stresses the absurdity of analysing consumption practices in isolation from consideration of

the spaces in which those practices have unfolded, from the department stores and arcades characteristic of the nineteenth-century metropolis to the virtual spaces creating new retail opportunities for the computer literate (Markham 1998).

Within this literature, much attention has been devoted to shopping as a form of consumption (Crewe 2000). This has coincided with a dramatic reorganization of the provision of retailing in the West over the last two decades—the so-called 'retail revolution' (Guy 1998). The major trend here has been for town centre and suburban shopping to be augmented—and often supplanted—by new retail development. Associated with the rise of freestanding 'out-of-town' facilities, this has been particularly manifest in the development of Regional Shopping Centres, spectacular malls of over one million square feet. Elsewhere, the proliferation of retail parks, themed restaurants, leisure centres and heritage attractions has been read as evidence of a new consumer culture, where shopping blurs with leisure and work with play in 'quasified' consumer spaces (Hannigan 1998). While many studies have highlighted the rituals associated with these 'hyperreal' spaces (Baudrillard 1998), the form and function of more mundane (and perhaps more traditional) retail environments is also changing. Specifically, it has been suggested that the sinking of retail capital in new locations has resulted in declining numbers of retail multiples and (particularly) grocery superstores in suburban and city centre locations (Guy 1998). Additionally, the stores that remain have taken on rather different formats, only able to compete with the leisured ambience of retail parks by offering discounted goods, providing 'top-up' shopping or (conversely) by supplying specialist goods not available elsewhere.

Given that out-of-town superstores, retail parks and malls have transformed the retail hierarchy, many researchers have considered it important to explore which sites of consumption are used (or not used) by people from different socio-economic backgrounds. Identifying which groups exhibit spatially constrained shopping patterns, tending to frequent older sites of retail, has been an important foci (e.g. Bromley and Thomas 1993; Lehtonen 1999). The overwhelming conclusion is that there is a dichotomy between old and new shopping facilities that results in marked inequalities in consumer opportunity. In effect, it is the more mobile and affluent who are seen to be most able to take advantage of the newer facilities, leaving the less affluent reliant on older shops. Commenting on this polarization, Eversley (1990: 13) describes the emergence of the 'disadvantaged consumer'. For the disadvantaged shopper, consumer choice is often no choice at all; there is reliance on a dwindling range of stores or use of informal sites where counterfeit, stolen or second-hand goods may be purchased (Williams and Windebank 2000).

The notion of the disadvantaged consumer that stresses the ability of people to frequent particular stores is, to some extent, influenced by their *material* circumstances. Accordingly, some have identified a dark side to the consumer society in the exclusion of a significant minority from certain retail spaces. Described as those existing outside 'the expanding enclaves of post-modern existence where people are consumers first and workers a very distant second' (Bauman 1997: 24), these consumers are marginalized within contemporary consumer landscapes. In some cases, this exclusion may even be forcible, as when teenagers, drunks or other 'undesirables' are removed from malls because they disturb what Sibley (1995: xi) terms as 'the white middle-class family ambience associated with international consumption style'. This stresses that shopping is a practice subject to (external) constraints, with a

variety of social forces, mechanisms and institutional arrangements restricting the options open to individuals. In the opinion of Warde and Martens (1998: 130), this creates a situation where 'material constraints, moral codes, social pressures, aesthetic sensibilities and situational logics all steer consumer behaviour along predictable paths'. Here, consumer choice is seen to be determined by material circumstances; different ethnic, gender, class and age groups are interpreted as frequenting particular stores and locations because of their differential resources, mobility and social competence.

Like the market analysts who classify people into consumer groups according to their social characteristics (e.g. *CACI* 2000), many retail geographers are thus implicated in a 'vertical' reading that interprets shopping as part of a commodity chain that starts with exploitative manufacture and finishes with 'duped' consumers. Against this, many contemporary theories of consumption offer a 'horizontal' interpretation that acknowledges consumer sovereignty (Slater 1997). Here, the idea that consumer behaviour can be predicted by socio-economic characteristics has been largely abandoned in favour of research that places emphasis on the 'performing self' (Featherstone 1991) and the way identities are constructed through consumption rituals. In geography, such ideas have inspired empirically grounded (and ethnographic) accounts of how eating (Valentine 1999), clubbing (Malbon 1999), tourism (Cloke and Perkins 1998) and shopping (Gregson and Crewe 1996) are used reflexively to create belongingness and distinction. Recognizing that people do not fit into stable consumer categories, such accounts highlight how consumers move between very different sites buying and appropriating a multiplicity of goods in their search for meaningful belongingness.

Significantly, several studies have identified a homology between postmodernism and consumerism. For example, Shields's (1992) notion of 'lifestyle shopping' draws on postmodern ideas of reflexivity to outline how 'active' consumers constitute their subjectivity by re-ordering the signs and symbols of everyday life. In so doing, Shields describes how people forge identities through the purchase (and subsequent utilization) of goods. Identifying consumption as a means of self-actualization, he argues that 'shopping for goods is a social activity built around social exchange as well as simple commodity exchange' (Shields 1992: 16). This implies that in a society where people are defined less by what they produce than what they consume, shopping is a means by which 'freedom' can be purchased. Highlighting notions of consumer autonomy, Shields and others suggest that contemporary consumption offers the possibility of 'mix and match' lifestyles where we define ourselves through our purchases (see Mort 1996). In this light, geographical analyses of the re-working of identity in both formal and informal retail spaces emphasize the highly individual and idiosyncratic nature of shopping (Clarke 1997; Goss 1993). Herein, the meanings ascribed to specific objects (and shops) are seen to be created through performances played out in particular spaces; it is suggested that consumers may improvise behaviours and competences that are quite distinctive to themselves.

Towards a social geography of shopping

Veering between accounts that describe shoppers as either consumer dupes or creative individuals, retail geography has arguably failed to reconcile different theories of consumption. As demonstrated above, conflicting interpretations of the consumer society are widespread—the retail revolution is deemed to have polarized

society, or, alternatively, to have provided all consumers with a rich variety of sites for lifestyle shopping. The existence of such dichotomous interpretations supports Jackson's (1999) wider claim that geographers have failed to transcend the distinction between the 'economic' and 'cultural' in accounts of consumption. In his view, it is vital that geographers engage with issues of commodification and consumption by carefully weighing up empirical evidence and locating the shifting meanings of things in the context of consumers' everyday lives (Jackson 1999: 104). This argument takes inspiration from the revival of interest in consumer culture in anthropology, which, according to one of its chief proponents, takes a thoroughly social perspective:

The study of consumer culture is not simply the study of texts and textuality, of individual choice and consciousness, of wants and desires, but rather the study of such things in the context of social relations, structures, institutions, systems. It is the study of the social conditions under which personal and social wants and the organisation of social resources mutually define each other. (Slater 1997: 3)

In the work of Jackson (e.g. Jackson 1998; Miller et al. 1998), this has resulted in explorations of shopping in North London using survey, focus group and ethnographic research to explore the articulation between identity and place. Here, the material culture of shopping sites is interpreted as a form through which social identities are discovered and refined. For instance, rather than implying that department stores are associated with a fixed 'upper-class' identity, it is suggested that specific department stores may be imbued with a material *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984) that individuals use to construct a notion of class identity. The meanings which people attach to particular stores are therefore deemed to be culturally mediated

through use, varying according to differences of ethnicity and class, gender and generation (Jackson 1998: 188).

In a somewhat similar manner, Taylor, Evans and Fraser (1996) offer an ethnographically grounded account of shopping in Manchester and Sheffield that explores the importance of shopping in structuring the 'cultural world'. This explores marked social patterns in the patronage of shopping spaces with reference to the economic sphere as well as 'personal worlds'. For Taylor, Evans and Fraser (1996: 160), shopping is 'a key element in the construction of a personal sense of identity in the city', with a different sense of identity being available for those with 'different levels of social and economic resource'. Invoking Williams' (1977) notion of a local 'structure of feeling', this suggests it is the actual routines of shopping undertaken by individuals that create the socially distinctive patterns observable in the city. Highlighting the pleasure and danger which different social groups experience in different spaces, the result is a taxonomy of the shopping spaces frequented by particular 'publics'; the sphere of cultural consumption and the realm of economic necessity are seen to cut across each other in locally specific ways, so that patterns of shopping cannot simply be predicted on the basis of social status.

By paying close attention to the way that individual routines are negotiated in the midst of social relationships, the work of both Taylor, Evans and Fraser (1996) and Jackson (1998) demonstrates the importance of developing a thoroughly *social* geography of shopping. Following their example, this paper seeks to develop a holistic account where the tendency for particular consumers to frequent particular stores or locations is seen to be the result of the social interactions and relations routinely played out between people, things and places (Bingham 1996). Hence, rather than accepting

that shopping is determined solely by a person's income, ethnicity or age, their distance from particular facilities or their assessment of the quality, price and style of goods on offer at different locations, this paper seeks to explore the specific social relationships that shape shopping. Moreover, by drawing on recent geographical work on social exclusion (Sibley 1995), the notion that some relationships serve to exclude individuals from certain spaces will be scrutinized. Developing this argument, the paper will particularly explore the emotional reactions that people experience in different shopping spaces, examining how sometimes antithetical responses of fear and pleasure can emerge in particular social situations (see Lupton 1998).

In order to elaborate these ideas, this paper draws on the results of a wider study of shopping in Coventry, a city of 271,000 people in the West Midlands (29 km to the south-east of the regional centre, Birmingham). Initial data on shopping routines in Coventry were collected via a questionnaire distributed to some 400 households (217 were returned). The questionnaire sought information on household characteristics and usual and occasional shopping locations for major categories of shopping (grocery shopping, household goods shopping and so on). These categories were derived from related studies of household spending and were deemed suitable for describing the shopping that people *routinely* perform (i.e. some 'exceptional' forms of shopping, like buying a car, were omitted). Given the interest in retail change, questionnaires were distributed in four neighbourhoods where facilities had declined in recent years (manifest in the closure of many independently run shops). In a second, intensive phase of research, forty representative households were recruited from this sample to participate in unstructured interviews (of up to two hours duration). Here, the focus was on the experiences that consumers encountered in both frequently and occasionally used facilities, exploring feelings about the types of people they encountered as much as the goods they had bought. Typically, interviews involved more than one participant, with the views of all adults in the household relevant in understanding shopping routines (Valentine 1999).

Given the broad remit of both extensive and intensive research, it is not intended to give a full breakdown of the results here. Instead, the intention is to highlight those interview results most relevant in elucidating the social geographies of shopping. Before doing this, however, it is useful to report the aggregate shopping patterns revealed. Most important, perhaps, is the location where different types of goods were purchased. This was established through the survey, which allowed respondents to list, in order of use, the main destinations where goods were bought. Here, the exact name of the shop was not required, with respondents indicating the general area where they shopped. For the purposes of this paper, the first named location has been used to compile a list of shopping destinations, including free-standing superstores/warehouses, more 'traditional' city centre shops, suburban district centres and 'cornershops'. Table 1 also includes categories for those shopping beyond the city and for those who gave responses too vague to be categorized effectively. This latter category ('other') also includes a few instances of 'catalogue' shopping. While this was significant for some, it will not discussed in the context of this paper, which focuses exclusively on 'real' rather than 'virtual' shopping locations.

While Table 1 does not indicate the type of store frequented (for instance, Coventry city centre contains a mixture of retail multiples, independents and charity shops), it does suggest that few households actually shop for all goods solely in one location (e.g. performing

Table 1 Usual shopping location, by purchase category (percentage)

Location	Casual purchase	Main grocery	Small household	DIY goods	Major household	Furniture	Clothing and footwear
Free-standing superstore	9.5	36.9	11.7	63.2	34.3	17.7	0.9
Coventry city centre	3.3	6.5	44.4	10.9	29.9	27.6	72.4
District centre	27.1	37.3	27.3	13	6.5	13.5	6.5
Local shop/cornershop	47.4	4.1	2.0	0.5	0.5	1.2	0.5
Beyond Coventry	0.5	1.4	2.9	2.1	3.0	6.5	4.7
Other	12.2	13.8	11.7	10.3	25.8	33.5	15
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. of respondents	211	217	205	193	201	170	214

their grocery shopping at the same place they purchase clothes). As such, it implies a *fragmented* geography of shopping whereby most travel to different locations for particular types of goods. Here, there was a significant association (at the 95 per cent confidence level) between shopping location and 'journey to shop'. For example, the proximity of 'corner shops' to most residents resulted in the majority (55 per cent) walking to their usual location for *casual shopping*. Conversely, nearly 90 per cent performed their *main grocery shop* by car. Overall, the survey points to the existence of a mobile population which walks to nearby corner shops for casual purchases, drives to different freestanding superstores for furniture, DIY, major household or main grocery purchases, visits the city centre by car or bus when purchasing clothing and footwear, and drives or walks to local centres when making small household purchases.

Given that many accounts of consumer disadvantage have suggested that socio-economic factors limit people's ability to use a wide range of facilities, the characteristics of households frequenting particular locations was also analysed. For example, Table 2 shows that households who use either district centres or the city centre for their main grocery shopping were more likely to be car-less or have no earner when compared to superstore shoppers. Conversely, higher proportions of those using city centre locations are from large family or single-person households. Analysis of the relationships between grocery shopping location and characteristics of disadvantage demonstrated a statistically significant association (at the 95 per cent confidence level) between car ownership, employment status, age, family structure and size of household (on the one hand) and grocery shopping patterns (on the other). Of the factors previously associated with consumer disadvantage, only ethnicity was not found to be a good predictor of shopping routines.

These statistical tests were repeated in relation to other forms of shopping (i.e. clothes or DIY shopping), with similar results. In most cases, there was a tendency for car-less, older, unemployed, large and lone-parent households to be found shopping in traditional locations (independent stores, district centres and the city

Table 2 Usual location of main grocery shopping, by household type (percentage)

	Free-standing superstore	Coventry city centre	District centre	Local shop/cornershop	Beyond Coventry
Carless households	17.5	35.7	27.2	22.2	0.0
Households with no one in employment	10.0	14.3	13.5	11.1	33
Retired head of household	26.3	28.6	29.5	33.3	0.0
One-person household	26.3	37	19.7	22.2	33
Households with 3+ children	8.8	14.3	4.9	11.1	0.0
Single-parent households	21.1	28.6	6.2	11.1	0.0
Ethnic minority head of household	12.8	14.3	12.3	11.1	0.0
No. of respondents shopping at named location	80	14	81	9	3

centre) rather than freestanding superstores and warehouse parks. Additionally, few of these households reported ever shopping outside Coventry. This supports Eversley's (1990) claim that particular household types—typically those exhibiting material disadvantage—tend to shop in a restricted, localized range of stores. Further examination suggested that these factors compounded one another, so that reliance on a limited range of stores was particular evident among elderly households who lacked access to a car (with the retired car-less more likely to use district centres than the younger car-less).

Shopping around: consumer experiences and exclusion

While survey responses indicated a tendency for different household types to shop in certain locations, they offered a limited understanding of the dynamics of social inclusion/exclusion that encouraged consumers to favour certain locations. Given the idea that consumption fragments along 'lifestyle' as well as social-economic lines, it was deemed important to relate individual and household shopping routines to the broader social geographies of the city. To these ends, the use that different people made of retail spaces was explored by prompting individuals to recount their experiences of shopping in the locations they identified in their survey. This allowed exploration of both the locations and outlets visited, each of which might take on different meanings for the consumer. Respondents were thus prompted to speak about their experiences of shopping in particular spaces, outlining those interactions that elicited negative emotions (e.g. fear, disgust, anger, frustration) and those that excited more positive emotions (e.g. love, happiness and desire). This focus on emotions was very deliberate, as the way individuals respond in given social contexts was hypothesized as crucial in determining which stores they tend to avoid or frequent. While emotions are embodied, in the sense that they are felt and experi-

enced (Parr and Butler 1999), this type of analysis rejects the notion that emotions cannot be articulated because they dwell within the psyche (cf. Pile 1996). However, this does not imply there is any straightforward correspondence between individual emotional experiences and its articulation. Instead, it interprets emotions as primarily interpersonal phenomena (i.e. arising in response to social circumstances), stressing that the public representation of emotional experience is not secondary to its private experience. Following Parkinson (1998), a focus on emotional talk (i.e. how people convey their feelings) was deemed an appropriate way of exploring how individuals respond to specific social situations, recognizing they manage and express feelings according to their position in interpersonal social networks. For example, it has often been noted that men and women manage their emotional selves very differently, with men encouraged to repress particular emotions that are associated with vulnerability rather than strength (Williams 2000). Yet emotion is not only gendered. For instance, it is possible that two people may have similar experiences of a particular shop (e.g. bad service) but have very different emotional reactions to this (e.g. amusement versus anger) depending on their age, sexuality or class. In spite of these variations, three issues emerged as particularly significant in prompting emotional responses— convenience, value for money and ambience. The importance of each will be discussed, outlining how these affected different individuals (and households).

Convenience and access

In several accounts, attention has focused explicitly on the way *car-less shoppers* are excluded from newer shops. Bromley and Thomas (1993), for example, argue that it is car-less inner-city dwellers who have been most affected by the tendency of retail multiples to seek 'out-of-town' locations. The consequences of this are apparent in so-called 'food deserts' where isolated 'corner shops' or garage forecourt shops now provide the only local source of fresh food (Wrigley 1998). Ostensibly, this description appears appropriate for the neighbourhoods surveyed in Coventry, where few shops sell fresh produce. Accordingly, the survey results suggested that many consumers were highly mobile, visiting a variety of locations within (and beyond) the city to fulfil their shopping needs; however, others were more localized and, apparently, restricted. Addressing this issue in the interviews, most claim to shop in locations that were *convenient* for them. For most, this was not the nearest location, but one that could be reached without experiencing undue anxiety. For example, one respondent, who lived 6 miles from the city centre, reported:

I usually go to the town—I find it easier. I've got asthma so I'm a bit limited how far I can walk but if I go into the town I've only got to walk to the bottom of the street, get on the bus, I can go into Sainsbury's, out again and on the bus and back home again. (male, 70s, car-less)

Thus 'convenience' had different meanings for different respondents, with some making lengthy or a complex journeys if they felt this was the easiest way of doing their shopping.

Nonetheless, the fact most had established shopping itineraries highlights the habitual nature of shopping, something that is slow to change (Taylor, Evans and Fraser 1996). In most cases, this adherence to particular journeys to shop was tied into other social activities, with a frequent concern being juggling family commitments with shopping. This was

especially evident in respect of childcare, as one parent recounted:

I'll tell you, he [son] is a nightmare when you take him shopping and a crèche would be quite helpful because he loves playing with other kids and stuff but he will not sit in a trolley … he grabs things … 'I want these, I want those'. (female, 20s, lone-parent)

Those shopping with children would report visiting stores where they knew they could minimize time shopping (e.g. get help packing bags) and, in some cases, avoiding locations where children might demand to buy toys, sweets or junk food. Here, there was a trade-off to be made between travelling time and the convenience offered by particular outlets (such as superstores), and some car-less parents stated they were happy using the bus, walking or getting a taxi to such stores. On the other hand, some elderly and single respondents reported avoiding superstores because of the presence of 'noisy' children, instead developing shopping routines that took in cafés where they met friends and neighbours. Here, pleasurable shopping experiences were equated with locations that offered a relaxed and unhurried experience—though some seemed much happier negotiating the hustle and bustle of markets and busy stores than others. For instance, one food superstore was described by several as 'horrendous' because of the length of queues at checkouts; others shopping at similar times described the shop as offering a fast and efficient service.

Issues of convenience also arose in relation to car use, and many with cars reported avoiding certain locations because of the frustration (and cost) of parking. The idea that an 'organized' shopping trip could be disrupted by problems such as failing to find a parking space was obviously upsetting to some. Such reactions were particularly evident among those

disabled respondents reliant on reserved parking:

I went to that new superstore … and I came out crying my eyes out from there … We couldn't park in the wheelchair car-park because there wasn't any. There was some but they were being used by people who hadn't got orange badges in the window … I was soaking wet when I got inside. Oh, it was a horrible experience altogether, I'd never go again. (female, 50s, long-term illness)

Against that, car ownership did allow some consumers to develop a more diffuse (but routinized) shopping pattern, such as visiting two different food superstores on alternate weeks. But such consumers seemed unwilling to avail themselves of the varied range of shops (and competitive prices) in the city centre because of the effort taken to carry products to their car. The appeal of the one-stop shop appeared obvious to many who used freestanding superstores for grocery shopping:

Everything I want is there. I only do it once a week and that's it, finished. Everything I want on a specific day is there and that's it. It's great. (male, 40s, no characteristics of disadvantage)

Accordingly, developing itineraries of shopping based around locations with convenient parking had become a major concern for car users, even when bulky goods were not being purchased. Walking was regarded by most as a chore that diminished the enjoyment of the shopping experience. This was evident when one shopper was asked whether she might visit a new retail park located two minutes walk from where she normally shopped:

I would still drive there … I'm not entirely sure how you'd walk there actually, apart from the subways and then you have got that main road to cross, so

no, it's not easy from a pedestrian point of view. I don't think it's particularly accessible ... who likes walking through a subway these days? (female, 20s, lone-parent)

In this case, the convenience of driving to a specific location was clearly influenced by a concern with minimizing risk, suggesting that convenience incorporates judgements about where shopping can be performed without physical inconvenience, without impinging on other domestic and work routines and without creating undue anxiety (something examined in the following sections).

Value for money, quality and price

Whether a store or location offered value for money was important to respondents, but this was based on sometimes contradictory judgements. In general, it appeared that value for money, rather than cheapness *per se*, concerned consumers (Miller 1998). This was evident in comments about 'Pound shops' (general discount stores found in abundance in Coventry) which, for most, promised bargains but offered goods considered of dubious quality:

The Pound Shop is alright if the children have a bit of pocket money [but] for actually buying toys they break too easy ... You go in there and you buy five items—that's five pounds, which is not cheap. (female, 20s, large family)

This concern that goods should offer value for money, and the tendency for consumers to be prepared to pay more to acquire better goods, was evident among both affluent and less prosperous consumers. Here, most consumers seemed acutely aware of price differentials between stores, but felt these differences were a true reflection of the *desirability* of goods. In

relation to groceries, many consumers recognized that the best way to obtain value for money would be to shop for different items (i.e. frozen food, fresh produce, fruit and vegetables) at different locations, but generally performed their main shop at the store that represented (for them) the best overall value. A comment from one consumer underlined this:

You went to ... [a discount store] and you found that ... individual items there might be loss-leaders and you think, wow, that's cheap, so you put it in. But then there'll be something else, you think, well this isn't particularly much cheaper than Sainsbury's [superstore]. You'd buy it, your total bill would be roughly the same and yet the range of stuff wasn't as good. So you thought, I've lost out here. (female, 30s, ethnic minority)

While this type of assertion was made frequently, others disagreed, claiming that discount stores offered good value. This problematizes the distinction made between use value and exchange value which is still fundamental to many analyses of consumption (Baudrillard 1998). Indeed, judgements about what constituted quality and value varied enormously, often based on consumer's ideas of what goods their family or peer group would consider tasty, attractive or desirable. Commodities like own-brand tins of beans were thus described variously as 'disgusting' or 'lovely', the satisfaction that one person had with a brand contrasting with the disappointment experienced by another when encountering the same 'watery, anaemic-looking beans'.

What was common to all shoppers, however, was the pleasure generated in obtaining a bargain. Here, a bargain was defined as any purchase which generated a level of happiness for the consumer that they associated with goods of a higher price. Bargains generated a rush of excitement that turned shopping from a chore

into an adventure; as one shopper recounted 'I like food shopping and getting a good bargain like a reduced joint of beef will put me on a high for days' (male, 40s, no characteristics of disadvantage). Many others frequented charity shops in the search for a bargain, reporting their happiness on discovering an item of designer-label clothing or a cheap decorative item. Yet this happiness was not only justified in selfish terms (i.e. the fact that the individuals had been able to buy something they desired for less than they considered it worth); a bargain was something that shoppers considered that friends or family would also take excessive pleasure in, meaning that notions of 'value' need to be interpreted as interpersonal and relative rather than absolute. As in Miller's (1998) ethnography of shopping, an oft-noted tendency was for consumers buying with others' pleasure in mind to reward themselves when they found 'bargains' by then spending some of the 'saved' money on a small 'treat' for themselves—a cup of coffee and cake in the supermarket café or a glossy magazine. In this sense, a treat is the antithesis of a bargain; something which people gained pleasure from but could not rationalize as good value.

Here, it was possible to discern relationships between consumers' socio-economic status and where they thought bargains could be found. More affluent shoppers claimed to have found bargains in a wide variety of outlets, from department stores to charity shops, whereas those on tighter budgets stated that some shops were always too expensive (several department stores and jewellery shops being identified as bereft of bargains). Yet some of the least affluent respondents claimed to feel uncomfortable shopping in charity shops, feeling happier with the quality and value of goods in 'high street' stores (especially chains like Wilkinsons and Littlewoods). Here, judgements about the

value and quality of goods were often underpinned by perceptions of 'corporate ethos' (e.g. the inferiority of the products and service at independents versus the dependability of the 'high street', where refunds could be obtained for unsatisfactory goods). For instance, some respondents who had visited grocery discounters suggested that the cluttered and sometimes shabby interiors of these shops (which often require consumers to tear open cardboard boxes to obtain goods) was actually designed to give the (false) impression that they were packed with bargains. Moreover, some treated the unbranded and 'foreign' products on offer with suspicion:

I don't like shopping at … [a discount store]. I went in there once but I hadn't heard of any of the brands. Well, you don't know what's in them, do you? And you have to pay by cash and I never have that much money on me when I go shopping. (female, 50s, no characteristics of disadvantage)

But it would be quite wrong to suggest that all consumers who used discounters were unhappy with the quality of goods, or objected to the ethos of such stores. In fact, most consumers who incorporated these into their shopping itineraries claimed to be happy to perform much of their shopping in discount stores, acknowledging the range of goods might be better elsewhere but feeling that the quality of goods was excellent for the price. In effect, being able to frequent a series of shops that consistently offered good value for money seemed more important to most shoppers than whether stores had many bargains— in very many cases, the tendency of shops to effect sudden and unexpected rises in the price of goods caused consternation and aggravation.

Ambience, sociality and dealing with difference

The idea that different locations and stores offer different ambiences appeared to be widely understood by respondents, prompting often extreme reactions. This was manifest in detailed observations about the type of facilities (particularly toilets), service and general friendliness offered by stores. For example, shops respondents tended to avoid were described as 'grotty', 'old-fashioned' or (conversely) 'too flashy', while staff were described as 'lazy', 'annoying' or, occasionally, 'over-attentive'. In relation to Sibley's (1995) arguments about the stereotyping of abject spaces as defiled, dirty and polluted, it was interesting that some people even reported feeling disgust in certain shopping spaces:

I mean, the [superstore] in Bell Green ... I find that a dirty place. I find the staff—how can I put it? Er ... cleanliness is not at the top of the agenda when it comes to dress and stuff like that. My wife's been in a few times and complained to the manager about things like refrigerators being unclean, especially where they keep dairy produce ... I just wouldn't use it. (male, 50s, no characteristics of disadvantage)

This suggests that many feel 'out of place' in certain locations, reporting instances where they felt repulsed by standards of cleanliness and service received. In other cases, people found it more difficult to identify quite why they felt out of place in a given store or retail location. Unfamiliarity with the rituals played out in some spaces was obviously alienating to some; respondents reported their embarrassment trying to pay for goods by credit cards in shops that dealt only in cash, while others stated their helplessness as market traders selected sub-standard fruit and vegetables 'especially' for them. Others (and especially the elderly) felt awkward in a new discount warehouse, with the procedure of applying for a membership card putting several off from revisiting that store. Likewise, one or two respondents felt demeaned by having to rummage through piles of clothing in the same store, or tearing open boxes of produce.

Yet feeling excluded was not solely something that consumers associated with outlets located at the lower end of the 'retail hierarchy'. To the contrary, some shops alienated consumers through strategies designed to emphasize their exclusivity, such as a jewellers which had been visited by one respondent:

I took John's watch there, they quoted about £40 to have it cleaned ... Well it's a nice watch but it put me off having to ring the bell before they let me in. It said 'please ring' and you ring the bell and then they press the buzzer to let you in and then the door closes behind you. That really annoyed me ... There's no need for it, you know? (female, 30s, no characteristics of disadvantage)

A similar sense of indignation was evident in one interviewee's opinions of the West Orchards shopping mall (in Coventry city centre), an environment regarded as a warm, pleasurable and leisured environment by many:

The toilets are tucked out the way ... located in the eating area and there is an assumption, even though they are public toilets, that they are for patrons only. And I remember when it first went up there was a sign that said 'This is not a public right-of-way' ... giving you the impression that unless you were there shopping, you weren't welcome kind of thing. (male, 40s, unemployed)

The reasons why people might feel out of place thus vary considerably, but in many accounts there was evidence that people felt uneasy (and sometimes fearful) about visiting district cen-

tres and local shops that were not in 'their' locality. Here, it is interesting to note that the same respondent reported feeling out of place visiting Bell Green, a neighbourhood centre serving a 1950s council estate on the outskirts of the city:

The only time I use Bell Green is to visit the hardware store ... If you go up to Bell Green you might get your car damaged. You get this sort of bad feeling; same as everywhere I suppose but that's basically why I avoid it. (male, 40s, unemployed)

Here, the vilification of this shopping area in the local media was mirrored in a number of similar claims that the area was to be avoided, with some (more affluent) consumers claiming to be fearful of it. This contrasted with the views of those who used it regularly, who described a friendly, attractive shopping location:

It's all compact and you've got the square where you can walk and the kids can play in the square while you're in the shops like, you know? It's all open, the square's all open so you can look through the windows and the windows are all low-level, you can watch them. I think it's great down there. (female, 60s, retired)

In this case, it was the overall atmosphere of the centre, rather than the (obvious) presence of CCTV cameras that appeared to reassure users of the safety of the area.

Against a backdrop of rising concern that the streets are becoming less civil and more dangerous, security was a major issue (Thomas and Bromley 1996). Yet, alongside this, a more general concern with negotiating (and *avoiding*) difference appeared prevalent. Many elderly residents described their concerns about the city centre at the weekend, when they felt the streets were full of noisy and aggressive

youths. While the study did not examine the behaviours of teenage consumers, it is quite possible that many of these are equally uncomfortable sharing social spaces with older people. Concerns with difference emerged in other ways, and although there was less obvious ethnic stereotyping of shopping locations than reported by Miller et al. (1998), many suggested that one district centre was catering solely to the Indian or Pakistani community, and had little to offer white consumers. Several white consumers reported their unwillingness to use 'Indian' shops for anything but emergency purchases, stressing their suspicion of the 'unknown' and 'foreign' brands that they sell. Against this, the few ethnic minority consumers interviewed reported feeling excluded from some 'mainstream' stores because of the nature of their product lines and predominantly white clientele.

In summary, developing Maffesoli's (1996) ideas of *affective ambience*, it appears that most consumers wish to make their purchases in places where they can minimize encounters with people and things that are unknown to them (i.e. where they feel comfortable). As Maffesoli stresses, a general tendency is for people to seek forms of sociality that offer little risk. In short, one of the key social roles of shopping appears to be facilitating interaction with 'familiar strangers' in a jovial or friendly manner (without too much riding on the outcome). For some, this affective ambience may be found in the sanitized and controlled spaces of the mall or superstore, while for others it persists in 'local' spaces where they feel at home. Yet the way people respond to difference and diversity is informed by their positionality. As such, the wish to avoid difference is not universal, and Hannigan (1998) notes some (generally affluent) consumers seem to take pleasure in 'riskless risks'—such as visiting 'thrift' or 'ethnic' shops

where they are patently out of place. While this has been commodified (so that 'ethnic' theming may be common in stores), in Coventry this was manifest in the numbers of (generally more affluent) consumers prepared to shop 'out of place' when seeking a 'bargain'. The fact that some sites evoke simultaneous feelings of risk and excitement points to the contradictory impulses that shape consumption, as well as the need for more research on the emotions associated with shopping.

Conclusion

While this research was conceived as an exploration of the specifics of shopping in Coventry, this paper has sought to relate these to general debates concerning consumption, place and identity. Consequently, this paper has scrutinized shopping habits in an attempt to highlight some of the weaknesses evident in the literature on contemporary consumption. At the aggregate level, this analysis suggested there were significant differences evident between socio-economic groups (defined in terms of car ownership, employment status, age and family size, but not ethnicity) in terms of the type of locations that were frequented. In effect, this concurs with those who have argued for a polarization of society between those who are able to immerse themselves in a wide range of shopping experiences and those who are increasingly reliant on a limited number of stores (Westlake 1993). Yet the analysis of interview data provided a somewhat different take on this, with aggregate patterns interpreted as the outcome of a more complex geography of exclusion and inclusion. As has been shown, most consumers were discouraged from visiting certain retail spaces because of their feelings about the type and quality of shopping they had experienced there in the past. The interviews

conducted in this study suggest this is as influenced by shoppers' understanding of the types of people they may encounter there as much as by the type and quality of goods they might buy there. The net result can be described as a process of *self-exclusion* whereby many consumers tend to avoid the stores and centres they associate with negative experiences. This was manifest in some idiosyncratic and apparently contradictory behaviours. For example, some less affluent consumers avoided their nearest shops because they offered low-quality goods in an environment that provoked anxiety and distaste, while other more affluent and mobile groups frequented them because they felt they offered genuine convenience. Likewise, some affluent consumers used sites more associated with disadvantaged groups in their search for a 'bargain', while others felt 'out of place' in charity shops and discount stores, resulting in them avoiding these in favour of the stores and locations they associated with more pleasurable shopping experiences.

Rather than reaching the banal conclusion that shopping is complex and contradictory, this paper has suggested that a careful *grounded* analysis of consumer transactions in different contexts can begin to make sense of shopping. In this paper, we have argued that this necessitates striking a balance between creativity and constraint, with individual routines seen to be embedded in specific social and spatial relations (Jackson 1999). Here, we placed particular emphasis on the *emotions* that consumers experience in different locations, with the pleasure or pain which they experience when interacting with particular types of people, product, shop assistants, displays and shop layouts appearing as crucial in creating geographies of exclusion and inclusion. The results reported here suggest that consumers made decisions about where to shop on the basis of past shopping experiences that

created feelings of pleasure, pain, frustration, anger, excitement, guilt, desire and disgust. In this analysis, it was issues relating to store convenience/access, value of goods and ambience that seemed to provoke the strongest reactions, but these clearly elided with one another in certain situations. Moreover, individuals of differing social background responded differently in equivalent situations, suggesting that emotions arise interpersonally. Emotional talk thus begins to provide evidence of the intricate connection between individual identity and social context that is constantly reworked through consumption practice.

The idea that shopping is emotionally charged has not been widely considered (though see Bowlby 1985), but offers massive potential for understanding better the way that shopping is shaped by the transactions between people and things. Indeed, if one follows Parkinson (1998) in arguing that emotions are *effects* of transactions between people, places and things, it seems both possible and desirable that geographers investigate the emotional experiences of shopping. While this necessitates an appreciation that identical experiences can engender antithetical emotions in different consumers (e.g. shoddy service could provoke resignation or anger), this is not to argue for the revival of humanistic and/or subject-centred approaches to consumption, where knowing subjects are bequeathed with an endless capacity to shape their material world. Instead, it underlines the need to extend consideration of what is material in studies of 'material culture' to encompass the emotions that are a necessary accompaniment to the interactions between people and things. It is through an exploration of these emotional transactions that we suggest a more thoroughly *social* geography of shopping might be developed.

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Abstract translations

Consommation, exclusion et émotion: les géographies sociales du shopping

Un dialogue fécond s'est récemment développé entre les géographes de la vente au détail et les géographes sociaux s'intéressant à des questions d'espace et de consommation. Ceci s'est traduit par une série d'analyses du shopping soulignant la créativité du consommateur. Cet article soutient que plusieurs de ces études tentent de réconcilier le sens du shopping avec une compréhension des paramètres à l'intérieur desquels les consommateurs agissent. Partant de l'idée que cette tendance écarte l'attention des inégalités socio-spatiales inhérentes à la vente, ce travail examine comment les rituels du shopping sont ancrés dans des relations sociales qui découragent certains consommateurs de visiter certains endroits de consommation. À partir de données intensives et extensives dérivées de Coventry (R.U.), l'analyse questionne jusqu'à quel point cette géographie de l'exclusion est le produit de contraintes, soutenant que le shopping est influencé par une spatialité plus complexe d'inclusion et exclusion individuelle. Ainsi, l'article propose une géographie sociale du shopping mettant l'emphase sur le contenu émotif des transactions déployé dans des contextes particuliers.

Mots clefs: société de consommation, vente au détail, identité exclusion, émotion.

Consumo, exclusión y sentimiento: las geografías sociales de hacer la compra

En los últimos años se ha desarollado un diálogo productivo entre los geógrafos con interés por el comercio minorista y aquellos sociogeógrafos con interés por la espacialidad del consumo. De esto ha surgido una serie de descripciones de 'la compra' que hacen hincapíe en ideas acerca de la creatividad del consumidor. Sin embargo, este papel sugiere que muchas de estas con dificultad han conciliado el significado de comprar con un entendimiento de los parámetros materiales dentro de los cuales operan los consumidores. Teniendo en cuenta que esta tendencia ha distraído de las desigualdades socio-espaciales evidentes en el comercio minorista, el papel examina la manera en que los ritos de hacer la compra forman parte de las relaciones sociales que disuaden a particulares compradores de visitar particulares lugares de comercio minorista. Haciendo uso de extensiva e intensiva información que tiene su origen en Coventry (Reino Unido), el papel cuestiona hasta qué punto esta geografía de exclusión es producto de coacción, sugiriendo que el acto de comprar está formada por una espacialidad más compleja de inclusión y (auto)exclusión. Por consiguiente, el papel expone los argumentos a favor de una geografía social de la compra que atiende con minuciosidad a las transacciones cargadas de sentimiento que se ve interpretadas en específicos entornos.

Palabras claves: sociedad consumidor, comercio minorista, identidad, exclusión, sentimiento.