

# **GENDER, GROCERY SHOPPING AND THE DISCOURSE OF LEISURE**

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BA (Hons)**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this work has not been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

I further declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated (a bibliography is appended).

Finally I give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be made available for photocopying and for interlibrary loan and for the title and abstract to be made available to outside organisations.

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## ABSTRACT

This feminist study adopts fractured foundationalism to explore the micro-politics of gendered relationships examining the day-to-day lives of ordinary men and women undertaking grocery shopping. The literature review focuses on the key theories underpinning leisure and shopping, their similarities and interrelationships. Beginning with the leisure literature and its attempts to define the leisure experiences of individuals and the role of leisure in society, it proceeds to discuss the work of key 'malestream' writers who challenge conservative notions of leisure. The importance of the contribution of feminism as an alternative critique of leisure is acknowledged. After exploring supermarket imagery and outlining contemporary trends in UK grocery retailing, the study considers the domestic realm and tensions between the rationality and hedonism of shopping emphasising the gendered frameworks which structure grocery shopping activities.

The methodology moves from a functional approach through content analysis and focus groups to the use of diaries, calendars and interviews located within a feminist framework. Content analysis of advertisements of UK grocery retailers and consumer interpretations of promotional messages provide insight into retailers' images of customers and consumer reactions to these. Discussions of grocery shopping through focus groups demonstrated a leisure dimension to grocery shopping.

The diaries, calendars and interviews illuminate attitudes and behaviour to grocery shopping, describing who does the shopping, visit frequency, preferred shopping days and the influence of store location. Participants perceive grocery shopping as both work and leisure but located grocery shopping within the wider discourse of leisure. It emerges that the cultural frameworks, which give context to grocery shopping, are significantly shaped in childhood experiences, which reinforce gender issues. The women in this study defined themselves through idealised role images – a perception not echoed by the male participants.

The thesis supports the inclusion of grocery shopping in the discourse on gender, power and leisure, illustrating the contribution of feminist methodology to understanding cultural meanings of grocery shopping in the fabric of the everyday lives of ordinary men and women.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family - the 'Cockburns', especially my grandparents and parents for their support, encouragement and their total conviction that both their girls 'could reach for the stars'. To my husband, David, for his support and excellent listening skills. To Georgina and Laurence, I hope that I can give you the encouragement, inspiration and excellent advice that I have had during your journey through life.

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# CHAPTER 1

## GENDERED RELATIONSHIPS

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# CHAPTER 1: GENDERED RELATIONSHIPS

## 1.1 Introduction

*All of our experiences need to be shared, discussed and analysed in order for us to make sense of our lives.*

(Stanley & Wise 1993: 73)

As Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993) have indicated above, there has been a strong emphasis in feminist research on the subjective and the everyday experiences of women. These personal experiences are regarded as either the focus of feminist research or a starting point for the application of theory (Harding 1991; Maynard & Purvis 1994). Originating in the mid-seventies, debates regarding the relevance of focusing exclusively on the personal at the expense of theoretical analysis are ongoing (Stanley & Wise 1993). Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, however, advocate that we should share and “*learn from other people's experiences beyond 'transcending' them through adding them into many others, and so producing 'theory'*” (Stanley & Wise 1993: 91). Liz Stanley and Sue Wise offer the concept of an “*intellectual autobiography*” as a way of sharing experiences and making explicit the “*strong objectivity*” of a feminist study (Stanley and Wise 1993: 8). Recognising the appropriateness of this in the context of this study, I present my intellectual autobiography as a theme running throughout the thesis.

This study derived from a fundamental question about why people use particular grocery stores and how they build grocery shopping into the fabric of their everyday lives. This thesis therefore examines the day-to-day lives of ordinary men and women and discusses how they intellectualise mundane everyday activities, specifically in this case grocery shopping, transcending them into tolerable, enjoyable, leisure experiences. It also is about the micro-politics of gendered relationships and how these are played out within the domestic sphere. In particular, observation of television advertisements ‘selling’ grocery shopping as a leisure activity made me ponder my own interpretation of leisure and led me back to school-day

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recollections of physical education (PE). It is with my reflections of this and in the spirit of sharing my intellectual autobiography that I will begin my story:

My introduction to the world of sport and leisure activities had been a mixed one. The PE teachers at middle school who insisted we do cross-country in the snow did not exactly make that activity a joyful one. In high school we were allowed to venture out and given the opportunity to try as many different activities as the school could offer. An eclectic menu was offered to us that ranged from ice-skating to American baseball. However, when I was fifteen my parents moved to South Wales. They succeeded in gaining a place for me at a local comprehensive that had an excellent academic reputation.

Apart from the usual culture shock, one incident regarding PE remains in my memory. It was summer and the PE teachers informed me that the regular activities on offer were: dance; tennis; netball; track activities. I hated all these! However I soon noticed that the boys were not involved in our PE classes. After some questioning I found out that they had separate PE activities that included two of my favourite sports: basketball and American baseball. I duly went to the PE teacher to request those activities and informed him that in my previous school I was the captain of the baseball team and regularly played basketball. I was refused admission to these sports on the grounds of my gender and was thus resigned to playing activities that I detested.

What emerges from this reflection is a recognition of the importance of gendered identity and how it underpins all aspects of everyday life. I now realise that my own interpretations of leisure are challenged and constrained by a variety of role expectations. The powerful pressures placed upon me to accept particular ways of thinking and acting towards others in my diverse roles as daughter, sister, wife, mother, friend and colleague in the various spheres of home, work and leisure all reinforce my gendered identity. Thus, I became interested in how relationships and practices that are deemed ‘normal’, ‘natural’ and ‘everyday’ are extremely powerful in their abilities to coerce individuals into accepting an ‘unwritten code’, often without question.

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Everyday conceptions of leisure frequently define it as freedom, space, non-work time and satisfaction or happiness (Wearing 1998). These common understandings of leisure neglect how it is historically produced and constructed within a patriarchal society (Green, Hebron &

Woodward 1990; Deem 1995; Wearing 1998). In addition, these conceptualisations of leisure also neglect the experiences and reality of certain groups in society (Deem 1988a). As my story above illustrates, these common definitions of leisure fail to appreciate the role it plays in reproducing particular gendered identities for the individual. Gender pervades every aspect of the leisure activity and it reproduces specific gendered practices as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’. They also fail to recognise the colonisation of the everyday routines of life by the discourses of leisure. Enjoyment, satisfaction and relaxation are themes that are interwoven with the functionality of the activity, for example the aesthetic elements that are designed into the functional aspects of material goods and everyday processes and activities, such as fitness equipment, the shopping environment, gardening and food.

This thesis initially sought to explore my anecdotal observations that consumers choose particular supermarkets, often bypassing one store to shop at a second. However, in exploring this and through an engagement with the feminist literature, particularly the works of Dorothy E. Smith, Sandra Harding, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, I became interested in examining how gendered social relationships structure leisure and grocery shopping (Smith 1987; Harding 1991; Stanley & Wise 1993; Stanley 1997b). This chapter, which introduces the study, is laid out as follows: reasons for this study (see section 1.2); aims and objectives (see section 1.3); overview of the thesis (see section 1.4); reflexive postscript (see section 1.5).

## 1.2 Reasons for this study

In this section I attempt to summarize the reasons for the study, beginning by exposing the “*intellectual location of the feminist researcher, as the person who makes sense of ‘the world’ and produces generalized knowledge-claims on the basis of this*” (Stanley & Wise 1993: 8). This study stems from my own involvement and interest in grocery shopping, both as a customer and employee.

While studying at college and later university (between 1986 and 1991) I was employed by Tesco, initially as a part-time checkout operator and later rising to the rank of supervisor. In 1988, in line with Tesco's focus on the large out-of-town sites, the small inner city store where I had worked was closed. Along with most of the other staff made redundant by Tesco, I found employment with Marks and Spencer and received a 're-education' in approaches to customer service. Marks and Spencer's management techniques, corporate culture, customer service and employee attitudes starkly differed from those of Tesco, and both contrasted with the academic debates, which I encountered while studying for a degree in Communication Studies at the University of Glamorgan. The 'feminist' and other theoretical debates, in particular cultural studies, which I encountered while studying, were sometimes in direct contrast to the 'real world' or the 'university of life' ethos, which prevailed in the male-dominated world of retailing. I became interested in defining a research proposal around some of the power issues inherent in grocery shopping and, later became particularly interested in exploring this from a feminist perspective, which explored issues of gender, power, epistemology and the individual.

The recognition of shopping as a leisure activity is a relatively recent phenomenon. There has been some research on department stores, fashion retailers and do-it-yourself stores, but to date there has been little empirical work to include grocery shopping as a leisure activity (Laermans 1993, Newby 1993, Miller 1991, Du Gay 1996, Bowlby 1997, Miller *et al.* 1999). There has traditionally been a gender bias associated with grocery shopping. Although recent shifts in household and working patterns suggest that this should no longer be the case and that historical definitions of leisure should be challenged, a gender bias is still evident (Tomlinson 1990, Featherstone 1991, Gabriel and Lang 1995). This thesis offers evidence to support the hypothesis that grocery shopping has been redefined as a leisure activity within the context of modern lifestyles and evaluates the gendered relations that have constructed the activity.

Although this is a feminist study, my first encounters with the literature were with the traditional, mainstream texts and the functionalist perspectives of the marketing and retailing disciplines. Feminist research and theory offers an alternative perspective with which I feel

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more comfortable. Feminism is difficult to define, as there are many differences between and within different categories, although this is perhaps justified as it eliminates rigidity or stagnation (Delmar 1986; Mitchell & Oakley 1986; DeVault 1999). Feminism gives women's concerns a 'voice' and resonated with my ongoing, but previously unvoiced, frustration with stereotyping and patriarchal power. Marjorie L. DeVault offers a definition of feminism as:

*a movement, and a set of beliefs, that problematize gender inequality. Feminists believe that women have been subordinated through men's greater power, variously expressed in different arenas. They value women's lives and concerns, and work to improve women's status.*

(DeVault 1999: 27)

Feminism moves the focus away from the male-centred view to a woman's perspective (see Chapter 4). Much traditional research has either ignored women's concerns or simply added them to the existing body of theory. However, concepts such as emancipation, ethics and collaboration are also important for the feminist research project, whilst feminist empirical research is also guided by theory "*to demonstrate the reach of the political into areas typically assumed to be personal*" (Reinharz 1992: 249).

As I rushed to the university and back home, caring for the family, cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc., whilst trying to progress my research degree, a study of leisure shopping from a feminist perspective and an attempt to explore issues of patriarchy, power and control around the supply and procurement of food seemed particularly apposite. It soon became obvious that there was a research gap in the literature:

*Fantastic shopping malls are often visited in academic texts, but corner shops usually get overlooked. However the routine acts of the weekly grocery shop or nipping out for a pint of milk deserve close attention.*

(Bell and Valentine 1997: 136)

Over a period of eight years of increasing awareness of the grocery shopping sector, through my participation as employee, consumer and now researcher, I have noticed a change starting to occur, embracing the store environment, the retailer advertising and the gradual acceptance by consumers of the one-stop shopping concept. In an increasingly competitive environment, the

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intangible, experiential aspects of grocery shopping have been favoured and this is also evident in the responses from this study's participants (Chapters 6, 7, 8). For them, the grocery shopping trip could turn from a functional chore into an opportunity for 'family leisure' or for individual self indulgence through browsing many of the in-store items. However, rather than defining what leisure is in the context of grocery shopping, this thesis investigates the gendered social relationships which determine the experiences and opportunities for leisure for women. To date, definitions of leisure and consumption have focused on the functional aspects of both and much work continues to neglect the experiences of other groups in society, especially women. Yet gender infuses every aspect of leisure and consumption, determining the boundaries, opportunities and experiences for the participants. However, the construction of the activity hides these gendered practices and assumes that these roles and divisions should naturally be associated with the process.

### **1.3 Study aims**

This thesis adopts a feminist approach and aims to fill a gap in the literature in relation to the academic analysis of grocery shopping. The objectives of the earlier stages of the work were to explore the historical context of grocery shopping, examining the projected identities of the top four grocery retailers in the United Kingdom (UK) and juxtaposing consumer interpretations of the projected retailer imagery against everyday experiences of grocery shopping. This early work led to the hypothesis that grocery shopping has been redefined as a leisure activity within the context of modern lifestyles. Rather than defining what leisure is in the context of grocery shopping however, this thesis seeks to locate current grocery shopping practices in the wider discourse of leisure through an investigation of the gendered social relationships that determine the experiences and opportunities for women's leisure.

## 1.4 Overview of the thesis

Throughout the thesis the influence of the feminist literature on me will be acknowledged and the first person terms ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘my’ will be used rather than third person, ‘neutral’ terms that would distance me from my study. Following this principle the names of the authors cited will be given in full rather than merely mentioning their surnames. Again, here I am endeavouring to distance myself from the positivist objective methods of writing a thesis. I feel these points are in line with feminist written styles and also emphasise that research is not ‘hygienic’ and value-free, confirming that “*feminism itself, is deeply and irrevocably connected to a re-evaluation of ‘the personal’, and a consequent refusal to see it as inferior to, or even very different from, ‘science’*” (Stanley & Wise 1993: 21).

Chapter two focuses on the key theories underpinning leisure and shopping and their similarities and interrelationships. Beginning with the leisure literature and its attempts to define the leisure experiences of individuals and the role of leisure in society, the chapter proceeds to discuss the work of key ‘malestream’ writers who have challenged conservative notions of leisure. The importance of the contribution of feminism as an alternative critique of leisure is acknowledged. The chapter concludes with an overview of the historical development of key retailing sites, principally street markets and department stores.

Chapter three reviews the macro, meso and micro changes in the post-war period to UK grocery retailing that have supported the rise of the grocery multiples and culminated in an increasingly competitive marketplace. A discussion of the imagery and controlled atmosphere of the supermarket is followed by an outline of the contemporary trends in UK grocery shopping. The chapter proceeds to outline the background of the major UK grocery retailers, their market share and company details. It then considers the private domestic realm, which makes apparent the construction and control involved in the modern supermarket environment and the inherent

tension between the rationality of shopping and its hedonistic dimensions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the gendered framework structuring the activity of grocery shopping.

Chapter four discusses the complex concepts of paradigms, epistemology and theory and presents the theoretical framework for the study. Whilst phenomenology provides a foundational paradigm for this research, its lack of a critical perspective leads to the incorporation of feminist theory to facilitate a critical examination which influences both the method of data collection as well as its analysis. This chapter discusses the importance of theory for social researchers, focusing on the contributions of positivism, hermeneutics, Marxism, and feminism and how these approaches impact on leisure studies. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the approach adopted in this research, focusing primarily on the significance of qualitative research techniques.

Chapter five documents the methods used in my research study. My overall methodology built on each phase of the work, endeavouring to combine the outcomes and issues that emerged at each stage into the next phase of the investigation. I started this research with a functionalist approach through the application of content analysis and focus group techniques. This was followed with the profile questionnaires, diaries, calendars and interviews, which are all firmly located within a feminist approach.

Chapter six investigates the projected images of the four largest UK grocery retailers and the consumers' interpretations of these promotional messages. The chapter first describes the results of the content analysis, i.e. the key features of the retailer images of themselves followed by the retailers' perspectives of their ideal consumers as depicted in their commercials. The focus groups provided some insight into consumer attitudes to, and interpretations of, these promotional messages. The focus group discussions fall into three areas - consumer perceptions

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of: retailers; consumers; commercials. The chapter concludes with a focus on the leisure dimension of grocery shopping, specifically focusing on family shopping. However, I was suspicious that this issue may have emerged as a result of the focus group method and the concurrent participation of both male and female partners.

Chapter seven focuses on behaviour and attitudes to grocery shopping derived from the diaries, calendars and interviews. The chapter begins with a discussion of who does the shopping, the frequency of their visits, their preferred shopping day and the influence of store location on their choices. It then moves on to examine women's responsibilities for household chores and caring for others, before discussing the participants' in-store experiences and their attitudes and behaviour while actually doing their shopping. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the participants' perceptions of grocery shopping as both work and leisure and of their relationship with the retailers. In exploring the domestic realm and the relationships between the individual, their household and the public arena of the store, it extends the empirical work to explore the location of grocery shopping and associated activities within the wider discourse of leisure.

Chapter eight argues that the cultural framework that provides a context for the grocery shopping trips has been forged around the intimate relations of the family. The participants' families, both in childhood and adulthood, operated along gendered lines with a division of labour that was further entrenched by the advent of children. The participants describe the specific pleasures that they gained from food and how these are incorporated in the more leisure-orientated secondary shopping trip. Participants described memories of childhood in which food figured strongly in their nostalgic reflections. Food experiences were both pleasurable and difficult, providing opportunities for both leisure and work. The central significance of food should not be particularly surprising in a study considering the grocery shopping experience, neither should the fact that childhood experiences are echoed in later attitudes and behaviours. This also demonstrated how the women in the study defined

themselves in terms of idealised images of particular roles, e.g. idealised images of good mothers, constraining their behaviour. The men in the study did not echo this.

Chapter nine concludes the thesis by reflecting on the struggle to recognise grocery shopping as a legitimate part of the discourse on gender, power and leisure which develops through the thesis. The chapter emphasises the importance of using phenomenology within a feminist framework to understand the cultural meanings of grocery shopping in the fabric of the everyday lives of ordinary men and women to provide a richer analysis than is offered by the functional approaches in the extant literature. The chapter concludes by offering potential avenues for future research.

### 1.5 Reflexive postscript

Despite the completion of the written thesis and its successful defence, my “*intellectual biography*” has not yet been accomplished, since the research processes that produced this final product still needs to be teased out before considering publications and further projects (Stanley & Wise 1993: 21). Reflecting on these processes of doing, thinking and becoming calls for brief postscripts reflecting on the whole experience and the development of the thesis. Reflexivity within the feminist research project is essential, as it produces the strong objectivity of the actual processes involved in the study (Smith 1987; Harding 1991). As the research is a social process that is constructed and interpreted through these social relations, then making the researcher’s influence accountable and transparent provides ‘objectivity’ for a feminist study. Thus, at the end of chapters four, five and nine I will reflect not only upon the thesis but also my development, and endeavour to make transparent the production of this thesis.

# CHAPTER 2

## LEISURE AND CONSUMPTION

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## CHAPTER 2: LEISURE AND CONSUMPTION

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter of the thesis will focus on the key theories regarding leisure and shopping, drawing on a diverse range of work. It will discuss the parallels between different theories and establish their significance to this study. The leisure literature provided a valuable starting point for the research, with its attempts to define the leisure experiences of individuals and the role of leisure in society (Deem 1988b; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990) and thus this chapter opens with a discussion of definitions (see Section 2.2). The chapter then proceeds to discuss four key writers from leisure studies, who have challenged conservative notions of leisure through the application of the functionalist, Marxist, and symbolic interactionist paradigms, namely: Stanley Parker; John Clarke and Chas Critcher; John R. Kelly (see section 2.3). Feminism will then be discussed, as it has been fundamental in advancing alternative critiques of leisure in response to the leisure definitions that had been proposed by ‘malestream’ academics (see sections 2.4 and 2.5). This chapter considers the similarities between leisure and shopping (section 2.6), before concluding with an overview of the historical investigation of the development of key retailing sites, principally street markets and department stores (see sections 2.7 and 2.8).

### 2.2 Defining leisure

Leisure presents many challenges, for the individual involved and the academic trying to conceptualise it. *What exactly is leisure? What purpose does it fulfil?* Leisure scholars struggle to define leisure, its meaning for the individual and its role in society. Various theoretical perspectives, from functionalism to postmodernism, have been applied in attempts to define and clarify the concept of leisure (Deem 1988b; Horna 1994). As Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard comment:

*The ‘meaning’ of leisure is historically and culturally specific, conveying different meanings to different peoples at different times. It can only be*

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*understood in the context of its relation to a specific historical and cultural situation.*

(Morgan & Pritchard 1999: 14)

The theories that are applied to clarify these leisure meanings are themselves situated within particular social and political climates (Clarke & Critcher 1985; Wearing 1998). Thus, leisure is influenced by our own experiences and by the dominant culture, which also encourages conformity to particular gender roles (Wearing & Fullager 1996).

Common elements are evident within the different academic definitions of leisure. These are pleasure, choice, time and paid work (Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990). Stanley Parker, for example, states:

*Leisure is time free from work and other obligations, and it also encompasses activities which are characterised by a feeling of (comparative) freedom.*

(Parker 1976: 12)

For John R. Kelly, leisure involves a combination of time, activities chosen voluntarily and experience (Kelly 1983), as he comments:

*Leisure is freely chosen because the activity or the companions or some combination of the two promise personal satisfaction. It is the personal and social orientation of the participant that makes an activity leisure – or something else. Leisure is defined by the use of time, not the time itself. It is distinguished by the meaning of the activity not its form.*

(Kelly 1982: 7)

These definitions are problematic and have been extensively criticised, particularly by feminist scholars. The central criticism is that such definitions do not provide a holistic account of leisure meanings for all individuals, based on the context of their lives and the role leisure plays within society. Thus, as Karla Henderson, Deborah Bialeschki, Susan M. Shaw and Valeria J. Freysinger note, there is still a gap between these definitions and peoples' experiences and common-sense notions of leisure (Henderson *et al.* 1996). Certain groups in society, women in particular, are neglected by these definitions and may conceptualise and experience leisure differently from these mainstream definitions. Some of the complexity of these definitions and

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meanings will be outlined in the following section, before a brief discussion of the work of four influential writers in leisure studies.

Leisure definitions reflect illusions of freedom to choose, and activities that individuals can participate in during their '*free time*'. These concepts mask the reality of the political and social environment that impinges on and constructs the leisure sphere (Clarke & Critcher 1985). Pleasure, for example, is a very subjective concept and can vary greatly depending on the individual, context, activity, social structure, and financial status (Deem 1988a). Pleasure can be gained from watching others enjoying their leisure time, such as a parent watching a child's school play. Free choice and time are also problematic issues as they assume a homogeneous society where individuals do not have to worry about finances, are in paid full-time employment and can find time away from other responsibilities and chores (Wearing & Wearing 1988). It seems that there can never be a universal definition of leisure without an examination of the historical and social processes that determine the concept of leisure (Morgan & Pritchard 1999). Rather, the emphasis should be placed on how leisure is constructed, challenged, maintained and what types of leisure are deemed worthy of academic study (Clarke & Critcher 1985; Wimbush & Talbot 1988; Rojek 1995; Wearing 1998).

### **The influence of culture**

Leisure, as mentioned previously, is both historically and politically-constructed. In order to understand the meanings of leisure at any point in time the cultural context needs to be analysed to provide a broader understanding. Thus, any choices and interpretation that an individual makes derive from the cultural contexts, which, in turn, are firmly located around issues of gender and power (Morgan & Pritchard 1999; Tomlinson 1999). Despite the statistics that illustrate the increasing numbers of women in the workforce, success in educational establishments and in the workplace, there still remains a discourse that constructs and presents experiences through traditional gender roles (Griffin 1981; Maynard 1985; Green, Hebron &

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Woodward 1990; Harding 1991; Deem 1995; Jackson & Moores 1995; Samuel 1996; Lury 1997). As Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard (1999) comment:

*Culture consists of socially conditioned patterns as well as mental processes, reflected in people's behaviour and interaction as well as their thoughts. Thus conflict can arise when different groups drawing on different cultural resources lay claim to the same leisure space. This is also complicated as the leisure patterns of a social group reflect not only its own perception of what is appropriate behaviour, but also the views of those who are external to the group but in a position to reinforce their expectations. This can be seen in the way in which female leisure patterns are often influenced by male perceptions of 'acceptability'.*

(Morgan & Pritchard 1999: 19)

Maureen Harrington's research examined the leisure provision available in Canada and found that the services provided were primarily for men's leisure activities and interests (Harrington 1998). Similarly, family leisure has often been examined as a homogeneous unit, yet this 'blanket' form of investigation ignores the different experiences of the individuals in the household and, in particular, women's leisure meanings and time (Woodward & Green 1988; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990; Bialeschki, Kelly & Pesavento 1996; Wearing 1998). Leisure interpretations and meanings are thus bound up in a set of cultural and historical associations that are structured around gender and power divisions (Critcher 1989; Henderson 1990a; Thompson 1990). These restrict opportunities for certain groups in society and encourage them to perceive this situation as 'normal' through the advocacy of common-sense notions (Woodward & Green 1988; Tomlinson 1999).

### **Leisure time**

Leisure time in the UK has become a valuable commodity as some individuals have the financial resources to buy leisure but are limited in their time available for the activities. At the same time, other people in society are less well-off in financial terms but have more time to spend on leisure (Martin and Martin 1998). Leisure has also been defined as the 'free' time that individuals have remaining after their day-to-day obligations have been completed (Wearing & Wearing 1988). Leisure as free time is an extremely limited concept, and one that is both

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historically and gender-specific. Perceptions of time for example, over different periods in history, have altered from the precise measured time of today, to a definition of time that slotted in with the seasons and was task-orientated (Deem 1988a; Wearing & Wearing 1988; Lynch & Veal 1996). Prior to the industrial era, time use was governed by the context, seasons, or the social need for a task to be completed. The major problem with this concept of leisure is that it directs attention away from the power struggles inherent within society, and suggests that leisure time needs to be earned.

Time-budget studies, however, are useful as they indicate the time spent on household chores and the amount of 'free' time available to the different genders. However, such studies do not provide a holistic picture of the meanings associated with the leisure activities, or account for the gender differences in participation (Deem 1988a). In fact it has been suggested that women and men may have different conceptions of time, with males preferring to measure time by the clock, whilst women tend to be task-orientated (Deem 1988a; Lenskyj 1988). These preferences are in part associated with employment patterns, the double-shift of work and housework, and the doubling up of activities. Rosemary Deem writes:

*Everyone, including the woman herself, may feel that this doubling up is acceptable, whereas just sitting, relaxing and watching television might make her feel guilty and invoke comments about laziness from her husband. Enjoyment and relaxation often has to be snatched by women houseworkers from other activities like taking children to their leisure activities.*

(Deem 1988a: 11)

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A further complication, particularly within the time-budget studies, is that the researcher usually selects and categorises the different activities (Hilfinger-Messias *et al.* 1997). Thus, the leisure and work activities are pre-defined by the researcher. Shopping has been described in various studies as both pleasurable and more akin to leisure, while in other studies it is described as work. But for the time budget studies shopping is not conceived as a leisure activity (Deem 1988b; Wimbush 1988; Lehtonen & Maenpaa 1997). Context is also important in the leisure

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enjoyment of the individual - activities such as gardening or hosting a dinner party can have different meanings for people depending on its context (Bhattir & Church 2000).

### Marginalizing leisure

Traditionally in the UK, leisure studies has been on the periphery of academic study and was not seen as an area of study in its own right until the 1970s (Wearing 1998). Leisure theory was initially seen as part of the much larger field of industrial relations and therefore leisure was actually studied indirectly (Horna 1994). Leisure was seen as a sub-discipline of sociology and borrowed from many other theoretical perspectives and disciplines (Wearing 1998; Tomlinson 1999). However, the onset of high unemployment during the 1980s sparked an increasing interest and concern, within academia and the public sector, in the perceived problem of the onset of a leisure society (Coalter 1990). While leisure studies started to be treated more seriously, it is still marginalized today and it has only been relatively recently that many universities have started to offer leisure studies as a degree in its own right (Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990).

### 2.3 Changing academic perspectives of leisure

The following section will briefly detail three key paradigms – functionalist, Marxist and symbolic interactionist - that are applied by certain leisure scholars to illustrate how these ‘ways of thinking’ have been influential in conceptualising leisure. Stanley Parker’s work exemplifies a functionalist perspective. In contrast, John Clarke and Chas Critcher’s work illustrates the Marxist perspective. Finally, the work of the American John R. Kelly, which uses a pluralist approach focusing on the experience and socialization process involved in leisure, is discussed (Parker 1976; Kelly 1983; Clarke & Critcher 1985; Rojek 1995). Whilst these three key paradigms are some of a number of theoretical perspectives that have been applied to

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leisure and its role within society, it is important to note that, as Betsy Wearing warns: “*theories arise in particular socio-political and cultural climates*” (Wearing 1998: ix).

### The functionalist perspective

Stanley Parker’s early work applied functionalism to examine the different social functions of leisure and the relationship between leisure and work (Parker 1976; Horna 1994; Wearing 1998). He originally came from a sociology background and was investigating the nature of work. The meaning of leisure within Stanley Parker’s initial studies was firmly anchored to paid work and thus, leisure becomes time left over from paid employment. The experiences at work were examined and understood as a function of society with leisure viewed as compensation and ‘freedom’ from this work environment (Clarke & Critcher 1985). His studies focused on the white male’s occupation, class and the leisure activities that he pursued:

*Thus, for the individual and the society, leisure is shaped by the reaction to work and this influence predominates over other factors, such as class and gender.*

(Clarke & Critcher 1985: 18)

Women and other groups that did not fit the white, male paid work stereotype were largely ignored or seen as variables where no one factor takes importance (Deem 1988a; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990).

Stanley Parker’s work has been extensively criticised by many other leisure scholars and in particular by feminists. The main criticisms centre on his insistence that work is firmly attached to leisure; his neglect of power issues; and his lack of investigation into the meanings of leisure for the participants (Tomlinson 1999). He sees leisure as freedom and voluntary time for the individual, and conceives it to be bound ultimately to relations of work (Clarke & Critcher 1985). He has been criticised for over-emphasising the voluntary nature of leisure and for not considering gender or power issues (Deem 1988a; Green & Hebron 1988; Green, Hebron &

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Woodward 1990). He also neglects to examine the meaning and context of leisure, even for the individuals that he studies (Tomlinson 1999).

### The Marxist perspective

This section will review briefly John Clarke and Chas Critcher's work, which applied a Marxist critique to the study of leisure. While the functionalist perspective perceived leisure as a voluntary activity framed by choice, researchers who use conflict theory criticise these naive perceptions of leisure (Clarke & Critcher 1985; Deem 1988b; Morgan & Pritchard 1999; Wearing 1998). Society is seen as stratified into different classes that are differentiated through their interests and access to resources. Leisure becomes linked to paid work/labour and is seen as something that needs to be earned or given in compensation for the productive work of the individual (Kelly 1991; Wearing 1998). As John R. Kelly notes:

*Leisure is both time that is given by the system, and a commodity that is distributed through the market. Leisure can be bought, since even time has a price.*

(Kelly 1991: 8)

Leisure in this perspective is seen in terms of both individual and social agency with processes, such as class and gender, impinging on the leisure context. These processes structure the meaning of leisure and are constructed and reproduced through the individual. From a Marxist analysis, leisure is not only constructed and constrained by the structures in society but the individual can also be coerced to reproduce these processes or, if dissatisfied, challenge them. Thus, the key difference between the functionalist and Marxist perspectives is that the former envisages leisure as freedom while the latter sees it in terms of conflict between different groups in society for control of the "*leisure capital*" (Clarke & Critcher 1985: 106). Another key difference is that a historical analysis is important, as the ideologies that developed around the notion of leisure are clearly identified as human developments that serve the interest of certain groups in society (Clarke & Critcher 1985; Rojek 1995; Morgan & Pritchard 1999; Wearing 1998). As John Clarke and Chas Critcher comment:

*The twin consideration of society as both a system of structures and processes and a constantly recreated set of meanings and social practices brings us back – as it must – to the question of history.*

(Clarke & Critcher 1985: 46)

Leisure forms in this perspective serve the interests of the dominant groups in society and “reflect the profit motive and limit consumer choice to those activities and commodities which are saleable in the market-place” (Wearing 1998: 25). The UK brewing industry, for example, has become concentrated into a handful of companies and, despite providing a wide array of alcoholic brands, the “diversity provides the appearance of consumer choice behind which stands a massive concentration of economic power” (Clarke & Critcher 1985: 106). Thus, a Marxist analysis has indicated the importance of evaluating leisure in a more critical way, investigating the role of power and ideology, and emphasising the public sphere over the private/domestic realm (Clarke & Critcher 1985; Beasley 1999). However, for many feminists, Marx did not adequately address the issue of gender in his analysis, although feminist socialist writers did later try to address this gap, placing women at the forefront of their analysis (Deem 1986; Green & Hebron 1988; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990).

### **The symbolic interactionist perspective**

North American leisure studies have been primarily dominated by more of a practitioner-focused approach, and the meanings of leisure have been overlooked in favour of these more business-like approaches (Hemingway 1990; Hemingway 1995; Duplis 1999). However, John R. Kelly and Karla Henderson have differed from this perspective and conceptualized leisure through an interpretative approach investigating the freedoms, constraints and meanings that an individual may have regarding leisure (Kelly 1983; Henderson & Allen 1991; Henderson 1991; Kelly, Burton & Regan 1994; Wearing 1998). John R. Kelly’s work draws on many different theories from interactionism to existentialism, but essentially his work focuses on social identities and the social interaction of the leisure experience (Ingham 1987). Symbolic interactionism as applied by John R. Kelly has been defined as:

*...the subjective meaning given by individuals to leisure experience, ... the vital dynamics of freedom and constraint, and the individual and social interactions implicit in this experience. Leisure becomes a process, rather than a social structure or an institution of social control, social health or social liberty.*

(Wearing 1998: 41)

John R. Kelly's research, like Karla Henderson's, is concerned with the individual's freedom and constraints, and also includes the identities and social roles that influence these perceptions (Henderson 1990a). His work attempts to bring together the individual's meaning of the leisure experience and the social process that will constrain or facilitate the leisure experience. He defines leisure in these terms:

*Leisure is not a universal "Idea" in the Platonic sense, not an unchanging essence of human existence. Rather, it is a social construction that is composed of elements of a particular culture and historical epoch. While some kind of activity that is playful or focused primarily on the experience may be near universal among human societies, the particular forms and formulations are specific to a culture and subject to change. Further, leisure in contemporary culture is a complex construct consisting, for example, of both engagement and disengagement, both individual experience and social action.*

(Kelly 1997: 403)

John R. Kelly describes leisure as social experience and an ongoing process, constructed through a combination of individuals, their social relationships, and the leisure context (Kelly 1997). It is an evolving, flexible process that develops and interchanges with the social environment and can also be adapted by individuals as they develop. He notes that we are all influential in this process, as it is a dynamic model and therefore the researcher and the participant contribute to the interpretation and experience.

Existentialism suggests that individuals (including the researcher) are "*in a mode of becoming*" (Kelly 1983: 94). The practices that the individual are engaged in are meaningful and focus both on the present and future. Within this framework, socialisation is important, as the individual has been socialised into certain expectations, norms and roles throughout their life experiences, which they perceive as 'natural'. Biological sex, for example, distinguishes and outlines specific roles determined by society, with the person resisting or accepting these concepts, which may change according to the situation. So, for example, what we envisage or conceive as

leisure, or consumption for that matter, is socially constructed. The researcher will be part of the process, both constructing and analysing this reality, which is always changing (Kelly 1997; Wearing 1998). In order to understand this process John R. Kelly suggests a broader interpretative framework is required that is flexible and allows for both agency and structure. Despite the flexibility offered in his model and his attempt to bridge the divide between agency and structure his work does have certain fundamental flaws. As he himself acknowledges, his work focuses on the individual and the micro processes, neglecting issues of power within these situations (Kelly 1994; Wearing 1998).

## 2.4 Leisure: whose voice is being heard?

The brief overview of the key academic debates within the field of leisure has demonstrated the development in our understandings of the sphere. Scholars have realised that leisure has many different meanings and experiences depending on the individual and context. Each attempt to define and understand the role of leisure has been evaluated from a different theory and perspective. Each perspective illustrates what it considers to be the important focus of the study; from the white males of the functionalist study, to a class analysis, to the microanalysis offered by John R. Kelly (Deem 1988a). Trying to define leisure has been challenging, and it is unlikely that there will ever be a complete or satisfactory definition of leisure (Horna 1994). What is crucial is that the process and role of leisure is investigated using an approach that is critical and incorporates an historical analysis. As Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard write:

*...the emergence of mass consumer capitalism reconstructed the leisure experience in Britain: clearly defining leisure time and space and establishing leisure as an item of consumption. As a commodity which has to be purchased in the market place, leisure throughout the twentieth century has been available only to those with access to key resources: time and money.*

(Morgan & Pritchard 1999: 18)

All of the studies discussed above have either placed men or class at the forefront of their investigation. Women have either been seen as a variable, as in the functional studies, or

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subsumed under the class analysis. This study will now briefly review the feminist contribution to leisure studies and the importance of placing women at the forefront of the research.

## 2.5 Feminist views of leisure

Two key feminist perspectives will be briefly discussed in this section; firstly that of feminists who align themselves with Marxist or Socialist theory, followed by the liberal feminist perspective. Feminist theory is not a homogenous perspective and many different theories and applications exist under this broad umbrella category. As Chris Beasley warns:

*...it is a categorising approach which has its share of problems, not least of which is the tendency to underestimate the extent to which individual writers may not fit neatly under one 'label' and/or may change their views over time.*

(Beasley 1999: 43)

In addition some viewpoints may not be so easy to pinpoint, as the feminist may not have explicitly stated her or his theoretical orientations. Despite the lack of acknowledgement from 'malestream' scholars, feminist leisure researchers have made a substantial contribution to the study of leisure experiences and meanings, which has also influenced public policy and the provision of resources (Deem 1999). Chapter 4 provides a more detailed account of these issues and the theoretical perspective applied in this study, this section, however, will focus on the contribution of feminists to leisure research.

Feminist leisure researchers have extensively criticised the focus on men's leisure, and the 'malestream' theories that do not adequately address women's experiences, meanings, and contexts of leisure and work (McCormack 1998). An analysis of women's leisure calls for an investigation into the processes of ideologies and hegemonies, which serve to restrict and contain the inequalities, presenting them as natural and legitimate (Griffin 1981; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990). Women's lives have either been neglected or compartmentalised within this mainstream work (Deem 1988b). In effect, their leisure and work are envisaged as similar to their male counterparts' and the phenomena of leisure and work are isolated in different

contexts (Wearing 1998). Much of many women's leisure involves work and a certain amount of guilt may be included as they service and facilitate other people's leisure (Thompson 1990). When seeking their own leisure time and space, many women experience guilt and may also be reprimanded through other people's reactions to their leisure time (Thompson 1990; Deem 1995; McCormack 1998). Some male partners will also constrain women's leisure and sanction any leisure outing that they do not feel is appropriate or interferes with their own leisure activities (Wearing & Wearing 1988; Woodward & Green 1988; Thompson 1990).

Feminist researchers investigating women's leisure have indicated the types of leisure that women seek and enjoy, which at times, may be both leisure and work (Wearing & Wearing 1988; Wimbush 1988; Kay 1996; Wearing 1998). These studies also illustrate that women see relaxation and socialising as fundamental components of their leisure time or activities (Deem 1986; Henderson 1990a; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990). Meeting in the street, gathering together to play sport or at bingo, all appeal to women as sociable activities that can also increase their confidence (Dixey 1988; Wearing 1998). Karla Henderson has indicated that the '*ethic of care*' (Henderson *et al.* 1996: 23), which confines women (and men) to gender-appropriate roles and leisure outlets, can also be a source of pleasure and power for them (Henderson & Allen 1991). On the other hand, studies have also found that women are challenging this ethic of care in trying to create a space for their leisure (Freysinger & Flannery 1992). Many complex factors are woven into the lives of women. The structural constraints and the ideologies of motherhood should not be neglected, as the broader social and political framework is still an important determinant in an individual's life (Wearing & Wearing 1992).

Feminist leisure researchers have also received strong criticism themselves regarding their theoretical perspectives and research. Researchers within leisure studies have criticised this body of feminist work for: neglecting current debates and developments; being outdated; portraying women as an homogeneous group; not recognising that people can enjoy

stereotypical activities; using men's leisure as the benchmark for women's non-participation (Coalter 1997; Rojek 1995; Coalter 2000; Rojek 2000). Feminists have always argued that women are different but share a 'common world of women' due to the gender inequalities in society (Smith 1987). They have also argued that leisure can be both a source of enjoyment and resistance for women (Wearing & Wearing 1988; Wimbush 1988; Wearing 1998). Karla Henderson's work has investigated the ethic of care and found that these traditional stereotyped caring activities can also be a source of power for women that they may be unaware of and thus demonstrates that women's leisure should not always be compared with men's leisure (Henderson & Allen 1991). As Rosemary Deem comments:

*Just because leisure may have been seen as a site where inequalities were reproduced, it does not mean that researchers were unaware that leisure also brought enjoyment to many women.*

(Deem 1999: 166)

For socialist feminists in particular, increased opportunities and access to leisure resources for women can be met through an involvement with paid work (Pahl 1989; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990; Pahl 1995). Women can access some funds for themselves and find it easier to place boundaries between the different spheres in their lives (Kay 1996). The negative side effect however, is the 'double shift' of paid and domestic work.

### Socialist/Marxist feminist perspectives

The key difference between the Marxist researchers as described earlier and a study that applies a socialist feminist perspective is that, as Eileen Green, Sandra Hebron and Diana Woodward (1990) note:

*...the concept of patriarchy is central to our theoretical analysis, but we are equally concerned to articulate theories of patriarchy within a broad socialist analysis which cites social class, race and ethnicity as equally pertinent factors in analysing leisure in capitalist societies*

(Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990: 19)

Socialist feminist researchers question whether social class is the only major division and instead argue that gender inequalities should also play a central part in the analysis (Deem

1982). Leisure practices and discourses are thus identified as an area where inequalities occur due to gender, class and ethnicity (Wearing 1998). Women are placed at the centre of a feminist analysis, as all societies are stratified according to gender, with women subjugated, although the type and nature of the ‘oppression’ may differ depending on the culture and context (Stanley 1988; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990). Socialist feminist writers critically investigate the relationship between gender (patriarchy) and class (capitalism). Socialist feminists analyse women’s everyday, domestic lives within the context of broader social and political structures. Leisure does not exist independently, nor is it a realm characterised by freedom and ‘choice’, rather it “*is an integral part of the social relations, informed by and contributing to the social order*” (Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990: 18). Thus, women’s leisure ‘choices’, ‘freedoms’ and access to different leisure opportunities are controlled and restrained both through the structural constraints and by men.

### **Liberal feminists**

This type of feminism is seen as the moderate perspective and focuses on unequal rights primarily within the public realm of life. Karla Henderson’s work typifies this approach. Writing with Deborah Bialeschki, Susan. M. Shaw and Valeria J. Freysinger, she states:

*As women seek to have choices in all aspects of their lives, they desire choices within leisure as well. We believe that through leisure women can learn to value themselves as individuals and challenge some of the societal restrictions and stereotypes that constrain behaviour.*

(Henderson *et al.* 1996: 20)

As the above quote illustrates, they are concerned with freedom for women (and men) from societies’ stereotypical constraints (Henderson *et al.* 1996). Instead, women are encouraged to break away from identities so that they can be equal with men (Beasley 1999). This work, like John R. Kelly’s, draws on symbolic interactionist theory and investigates the subjective sphere, emphasising the importance of identities, roles, and socialisation in constraining the individual (Henderson & Allen 1991; Wearing 1998).

As mentioned earlier, Karla Henderson draws on the concept of the ethic of care, which is entrenched in the concept of socialisation and does not adequately look at the role of the broader structures in producing these stereotypical roles. Leisure, in this analysis, is viewed as a tool to achieve equality and recognition, especially for women and other powerless groups in society (Wearing 1998). As with John R. Kelly's work, the limitations of this liberal approach to a feminist analysis are similar. Karla Henderson neglects the broader power structures through her focus on socialisation and positions leisure as a neutral tool for self-expansion, which if used correctly can be applied to help the powerless groups in society. This work does not critically investigate issues of power or examine how these power structures, by using ideology and economic resources, restrict and constrain an individual's leisure 'freedoms' (Wearing 1998). Karla Henderson has also been criticised heavily for her sample selection of white middle class participants, who generally have better access to resources than other groups (Wearing 1998).

## 2.6 Bridging the leisure-consumption gap

A number of leisure studies scholars have commented on the crisis within leisure studies. Various reasons are given for this state but more importantly some suggestions have been made on how to get out of the '*ghetto*' (Deem 1999). Fred Coalter, Chris Rojek and Alan Tomlinson, for example, have stated that leisure studies suffers from specialisation with a tendency to neglect mainstream developments and theories that are occurring outside of the field (Coalter 1997; Tomlinson 1990; Rojek 2000). Rosemary Deem has commented on the lack of empirical work and the gap between theory and the everyday lives of UK women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as many substantial studies of women's leisure are more than 10 years old (Deem 1999; Aitchison 2001). She suggests that despite the initial difficulties, one way out of this ghetto could be by bridging the divide between leisure and consumption (Deem 1988a).

Some leisure scholars have made attempts to bridge this gap, as illustrated by Derek Wynne's work investigating middle class leisure and the application of Pierre Bourdieu's theories to this context (Wynne 1990). Similarly, Stephen and Betsy Wearing have investigated the commodification of leisure, looking at fashion and smoking in young girls (Wearing & Wearing 1992; Wearing & Wearing 2000). An earlier attempt at bridging the leisure/consumption gap can be seen in Thorstein Veblen's work on '*conspicuous consumption*', which investigated upper class leisure experiences and activities in the United States at the turn of the last century (Veblen 1912). His work is significant because he comments on the consuming aspect of leisure, which needed to be earned to validate it as a worthwhile activity (even then some activities were deemed more worthy than others). Essentially a structuralist exploring the inequalities evident in society, Thorstein Veblen considered that the dominant class was the prevailing role model for other classes to emulate (Veblen 1912: 84). Thus, as Rosemary Deem concludes, we should be:

*...building more bridges between leisure studies and consumption studies...A greater focus on commercial leisure, and situating gender analysis in wider research questions and problems, might also help relocate gender and leisure scholars outside their current ghetto.*

(Deem 1999: 174)

## 2.7 Leisure, consumption and shopping

This section will respond to the question of leisure, consumption and shopping through a discussion of the definitions of leisure shopping and the inherent tension between the functional and pleasurable qualities of the activity. The parallels between leisure and consumption will be explored before an historical investigation of retailing sites is presented. Definitions of leisure shopping have been firmly focused on fashion and other types of shopping, with grocery shopping dismissed as a mundane, household necessity conducted by women (Campbell 1997). Thus, the identification of leisure and work in retailing, has until recently been clearly conceived with shopping for yourself, as leisure, and grocery shopping for the household as work. This seemingly simple distinction is very problematic as it neglects the researcher's bias,

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the expectation of gender stereotypes, gift giving and importantly, the historical development of shopping.

Colin Campbell's work (1997) is a useful starting point and helps set the scene in identifying leisure shopping. He regards grocery shopping as work and mundane, particularly for women, compared to the more exciting realm of fashion shopping. He differentiates between them and defines the two as: "*regular grocery shopping, 'provisioning' and other forms (mainly, it would seem, for clothes)*" (Campbell 1997: 189). It is interesting that he rigorously defines the two types of shopping and yet does not differentiate between the different experiences or emotions that consumers may have when shopping. Rather, he seems to emphasise the importance of the shopping environment in dictating the experience or anticipation of pleasure for the consumer (Gabriel & Lang 1995). Despite similarities between his work and that of consumer behaviour theorists (e.g. East 1994), Colin Campbell does appreciate that the activity is more complex than those models advocated by marketers. Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen and Pasi Maenpaa (1997) explored both the pleasurable, leisurely aspect and the functional aspect of shopping in a mall environment in Finland and found that shopping can be:

*...both rational and hedonistic at the same time. However, this paradox is not solved but rather 'acted out' in the practice of shopping – it remains as a source of permanent tension stimulating the activity of shopping... What people seek are inner experiences and good feelings, and in so doing they try to optimise the possibilities of achieving them.*

(Lehtonen & Maenpaa 1997: 135)

Trips to the mall consisted of both the rationality of the need to replenish and the pleasurable fantasy aspects of the trip, indicating that there could be more diffusion between the two processes than indicated by Colin Campbell's (1997) 'common-sense' statements (Lehtonen & Maenpaa 1997).

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As Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen and Pasi Maenpaa (1997) discuss, pleasurable shopping is always framed by the possibility of purchasing, as it is the fantasy and anticipation of future purchases

or possibilities that provides the excitement and potential pleasure. The retailing environment is constructed to provide a positive atmosphere and the 'freedom' to choose from the array of endless brands encourages the consumer to become a flaneur, assuming the role of spectator in the retailing sphere (Gabriel & Lang 1995; Rappaport 2000). Individual 'choices' and 'freedoms' are encouraged in the retailing environment and are projected as a form of identity construction for the consumer (Elliott 2000). The material goods, from the mundane to the more elaborate luxury items, selected by the individual, are envisaged as an expression of identity for the consumer (Thompson, Locander & Pollio 1990; Miller 1998a; Miller 1998b; Elliott 2000).

As Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen and Pasi Maenpaa comment:

*It should be borne in mind, though that the necessities of buying are never absent from the social form of shopping, although shopping is not only a necessity, a must, that is seen positively. It is the intermingling of these two aspects – necessity and pleasure – that constitutes the shopper's activity.*  
 (Lehtonen & Maenpaa 1997:144)

This tension between pleasure and necessity is apparent throughout the grocery shopping trip, which can be unbalanced if certain obstructions are placed before the shopper, hence the customer service promises made by some retailers of '*three in front*' (only three customers are allowed to queue in front of you at the checkout before another checkout is opened), '*satisfaction or your money back*', etc. Goods must be acquired quickly and easily and supply novelty within a familiar environment. Individuals can, and are, encouraged (particularly evident during the grocery retailer price wars) to compare prices between the major retailers, balancing the bargains with quality, thus, making 'choices' within pre-set limitations.

### **Parallels between leisure studies and consumption studies**

Shopping and leisure have, as Rosemary Deem (1999) notes, shared many similarities. In fact study of the two activities has often covered similar ground but has never been formally introduced (Mullett 1988). Both leisure and shopping are difficult to define and many different theories have been applied in an attempt to understand the intrinsic nature of each activity (Mullett 1988). As Colin Campbell comments:

*...there is little doubt that many people do obtain great pleasure from shopping-or at least from some kinds of shopping- and that shopping is a leisure-time pursuit that has increased in importance in recent decades. However, it is not entirely clear what exactly constitutes the source of the pleasure.*

(Campbell 1997:189)

Leisure shopping and leisure have presented similar challenges to the practitioner and academic researcher as they are both difficult to define, subjective, marginalised and symbiotically tied to the wider cultural and social/political framework (McCracken 1990; Nava 1997; Humphery 1998). Clearly, in order to investigate this ‘modern’ phenomenon of leisure shopping (even grocery leisure shopping), the historical and political structures that frame and define the activity need to be investigated.

### Defining and conceptualising shopping

As noted above, it is difficult to establish a satisfactory definition of leisure shopping but, as this brief section will illustrate, attempts have been made. Leisure shopping has been viewed as the result of modern life, as the laws regarding shopping have been relaxed and many individuals have larger disposable incomes (Martin & Mason 1987). The actual definition of leisure shopping still remains ambiguous with Rachel Bowlby, for example, interchanging the phrase “*going shopping*” with “*doing the shopping*” (Bowlby 1997: 102). However, Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen and Pasi Maenpaa have tried to extract a more detailed definition from their empirical work and define the activity as a:

*Consumption-orientated movement in a space where one has the possibility of making purchases...shopping always has something to do with buying, but in a way which allows it to be also plain day-dreaming and the planning of future purchases...in a space that makes purchasing possible and where the openness and plurality of possibilities are fundamental.*

(Lehtonen & Maenpaa 1997: 143)

The Finnish mall that was the subject of their study provided interviewees with the rationality and rhythm of everyday life along with the unexpected anticipation of ‘what could be’. In their investigation they discuss the tension between the pleasurable and work aspects of shopping that the interviewees experienced in all types of shopping – from luxury items to grocery shopping.

However, in their work they have neglected to mention the wider discourses of power, identity and gender, which have been produced historically and penetrate the shopping sphere (Nava 1997; Stanley 1988; Rappaport 2000). They have produced a dichotomy of shopping for pleasure and task, (see the table below) but admit that shoppers can quickly switch from one to the other within the same trip and “*that the necessities of buying are never absent from the social form of shopping*” (Lehtonen & Maenpaa 1997:144).

**Table 2.1 Shopping: pleasure versus necessity**

Pleasure	Maintenance
Spending time	Scarcity of time
An end in itself	A means
Purchases not always necessary	Planned purchases
Impulsiveness	Planning
Pleasure	Necessity
Emphasis on experience	Emphasis on rationality

(Adapted from Lehtonen & Maenpaa 1997:144)

Retailers, especially since the rise of the department store, have endeavoured to influence consumers (especially in the grocery sector) through, for example, the environment, the marketing literature and customer service; encouraging ‘appropriate’ experiences and attitudes towards shopping (Bowlby 1996; Bowlby 1997; Bell & Valentine 1997; Runciman 1996). Thus, there is a constructed attempt by grocery retailers to: “*shift the association of food shopping from work to leisure*” to encourage consumers to spend more (Bowlby 1997: 103). Supermarket marketers are acutely aware of this tension between the pleasure and chore aspect of the trip and have experimented with different aspects of the store and shopping trip in order to enhance more positive feelings for the consumer to associate with the activity (Du Gay 1996). The ‘new’ supermarket store introduced during the 1950s heralded the ‘modern’ way to

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shop, with self-service and convenience promoting an efficient and effective method for the consumer to obtain all their household goods (Bowlby 1997). This discourse emphasised the supermarket-shopping trip as a functional, domestic chore for the consumer. In the late eighties and nineties, with increasing competition and costs, the supermarkets tried to encourage the consumer to spend more at the store with the addition of various amenities so that now:

*The introduction of cafes, inviting the slower time of the outing, puts an end to the identification of food shopping as a definite task to be completed as quickly as possible. Now you can be doing the shopping and going shopping, getting the basics and enjoying yourself, all in one place at one time.*

(Bowlby 1997:108)

Shopping, whether for food or at the department store, has always been strongly associated with women (Bowlby 1988; Bowlby 1997; Campbell 1997; Fiske 2000). Rosemary Deem (1986) noted in her study that despite shopping being omitted from the category of leisure in the government surveys, many of the women in her sample reported that they enjoyed shopping. When the department stores first arrived they went to great efforts to ‘woo’ the female shopper and shopping became a women’s pastime and, at times, an addiction (Abelson 2000; Cohen 2000). However, as John Fiske suggests, this conception of women as shoppers does offer them an opportunity to empower themselves within a system that marginalizes their knowledge and involvement (Fiske 2000). Richard Elliott (2000), in his study of women shoppers who are addicted to shopping, extends this argument and concludes that the material goods served to construct the consumer’s identity, but also provided a feeling of control for those (women) who lacked control over a large part of their lives. In contrast, the work of Colin Campbell (1997), and Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen & Pasi Maenpaa (1997), neglects this broader historical framework that has constructed these gendered social meanings of shopping and leisure, which have also confined women into particular social roles and values (Fiske 2000). The following sections will detail the complexity of leisure shopping, starting with a historical view of two key sites of shopping development - street markets and department stores.

## 2.8 Consumption: whose voice is being heard?

Street markets and department stores were two of the key spheres in the development of the modern ideal of consumption, along with 'appropriate' shopping behaviours and expectations (Blomley 1996). Street markets and department stores illustrate the ways in which shopping has been articulated and contested, providing evidence of the complicated and diverse relationship between people and consumption. Shopping, in particular, reveals the connections between the private world of the home and the public arena of the store. The rise of the consumer culture of the store is important, as it was here that consumers were instructed on how and what to consume. This instruction also filtered into their identities, which were judged against this consumer knowledge (Glennie & Thrift 1992). Gender, identity and power are key factors in the construction and reproduction of consumption as it promoted women as both powerful and at the same time, powerless.

The shopping literature tends to regard retailing and particularly grocery retailing, as a late twentieth century product, neglecting the development of pre-supermarket days, in which shopping was documented as a leisure pastime (Riddy 2000; Davies 1992). Historical evidence, for example, illustrates the leisure aspects of street markets, fairs and the high streets, especially for working class families. As Nicholas Blomley notes:

*A great deal of shopping, especially by women, was done in pairs or in large groups, at least on the basis of diary entries, and shopmen's manuals. It is also clear that both urban and rural shops in the eighteenth century were more than mere buying-places...*

(Blomley 1996:229)

Andrew Davies' (1992) account of working-class life in Salford, Manchester in the late 1890s, paints street markets as an 'informal leisure' setting for working class couples and families:

*An evening spent around the markets and main streets could be an occasion for married couples to spend time together; it also afforded parents with young children the chance to go out as a family.*

(Davies 1992:132)

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The market offered working class couples and families opportunities for free entertainment, as many had fairgrounds or street entertainers to keep the shoppers amused. During the 1920s and 1930s financial hardship restricted many of the leisure practices of working class life, especially for women, and the street markets provided a social venue that enabled individuals, particularly working class women, to mingle and meet acquaintances, exchanging conversation and information (Cross 1993; Davies 1992; Blomley 1996). Thus, the traditional weekly outing to the Saturday night markets in the Manchester and Salford areas achieved two objectives: firstly the purchase of cheap food and secondly the enjoyment of the entertainment which was readily available (Davies 1992).

The boundaries between work and leisure were blurred by poverty, which restricted the working class shopper's participation in formal, paid leisure venues, and instead they engaged with these other informal leisure practices (Davies 1992). In Andrew Davies's case study, the street markets provided a free, informal leisure venue for groups of shoppers, women and 'lads' who were from the local neighbourhoods (Davies 1992). They could attend even when severe poverty restricted their participation at formal attractions, such as the cinema and the pub. As he comments, these informal, everyday leisure activities have received little attention from historians despite the fact that they played a significant role in the individual's life (Davies 1992). Importantly, his study indicates in respect of this present work, that the informal leisure and socialising that these markets provided, were an integral part of the weekly shopping trip, legitimised by the desire to gain a bargain (Blomley 1996). Andrew Davies's study also provides evidence of men, single and married, attending the markets with their friends and/or families (Davies 1992). In contrast the department store was more strictly structured and controlled in its work practices, store and promotional material through gender and class (Rappaport 2000).

### **Department stores: a distinct move towards modern day shopping**

Department stores developed during the mid-1880s and revolutionised the retailing scene, in terms of class, gender and the meaning of consumption (Rappaport 2000). The development of the department store coincided with the spread of the urban middle class and enabled middle class women to escape the boredom of the household and participate in the more public sphere of shopping (Reekie 1992; Corrigan 1997; Heinze 2000; Rappaport 2000). As Rudi Laermans comments:

*The transformation of buying into shopping (in the modern sense) and the subsequent 'leisureization' of shopping itself offered middle-class women new opportunities within the public sphere. A growing number of urban women found in shopping a legitimate reason to escape the domestic sphere.*

(Laermans 1993:97)

Department stores symbolised a change in the consumption practices of individuals, as they targeted the household, specifically the female consumer. Women were considered responsible for the household and were now expected to furnish it with these material goods (Bowlby 1988; Firat 1994; Riddy 2000). There was a growing awareness in this Edwardian society that material goods should be used to display and promote this new found status (Glennie & Thrift 1992; Nava 1997; Rappaport 2000) and the meaning of shopping and consumption had changed from the more frugal Victorian era (Blomley 1996; Rappaport 2000). Department stores, such as the Marshall Field's store in the United States and Selfridges in the UK (the latter guided by Harry Gordon Selfridge), not only encouraged women to participate in consumer culture but also:

*Like many of his contemporaries, Selfridge hoped that the luxurious décor, architecture, amenities, and entertainments, as well as extensive publicity, would encourage patrons to reimagine the way they viewed shopping. ...customers were asked to see buying not as an economic act but as a social and cultural event.*

(Rappaport 2000: 31).

The department store was built and equipped with various amenities that reflected the home and specifically targeted middle-class women (Rappaport 2000; Nava 1997). Shopping was constructed as more than just the rational need-buy equation; instead shoppers were encouraged, through the environment, which stimulated all the senses, to look and take in the sights (Blomley 1996).

Department stores in their physical design, location, ambience and clientele promoted and sustained particular cultural constructs based principally on gender and status (Bowlby 1988; Reekie 1992; Glennie & Thrift 1996; Bowlby 1997; Corrigan 1997; Nava 1997; Fiske 2000; Rappaport 2000). These stores offered individuals opportunities to fantasise about the array of goods that they could choose from, and to mask their identities in an environment populated with strangers (Laermans 1993; Abelson 2000). As Peter Corrigan comments:

*Earlier, women would confine their shopping to the neighbourhood and meet lots of people they already knew. While this has its positive sides, it can also be a little constraining. The department store offered the possibility to escape not only the domestic sphere but also the neighbourhood, and swap the pleasures and restrictions of the known community for the quite different pleasures and restrictions of the community of strangers who thronged the city streets.*

(Corrigan, 1997: 61)

Crucial to the department stores' success was the increasingly urbanised population, with an improved transport system and factory technology, which enabled items to be mass-produced cheaply (Glennie & Thrift 1992; Laermans 1993). Department stores symbolised the change in emphasis from a production-orientated process to a consumption-centred society (Glennie & Thrift 1992; Lury 1997). The consumer was the important part of the process; the actual production of the commodity was insignificant and manufacturing now supported the new found needs and desires of the consumer culture (Glennie & Thrift 1992; Lury 1997).

Prior to the advent of department stores, customers only entered a store if they wished to purchase an item, goods were rarely displayed in shop windows and the prices of the goods were not displayed (Nava 1997). In contrast, the department store was available to all shoppers and featured elaborate displays and special events, and displayed prices clearly (Laermans 1993; Corrigan 1997). The store also provided opportunities for women, specifically the middle classes, to visit, mingle and window-shop in the more public space of the store without fear of violence or reproach (Laermans 1993). Gail Reekie (1992) comments on the layout and changes in McWhirters, a Brisbane department store that opened in the 1930s. The goods were segregated in the store according to gender with men's items being assigned to the periphery of the store. She comments

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that the mundane shopping was regulated to the realm of women's work, while leisure shopping was characterised by the involvement of both genders and a playful mixing of commodities and identities. This occurred in the store through changes to the store, which became a festive market space and encouraged leisure shopping (Reekie 1992). Through the promotional material and, in particular, the experience of the store, consumers were educated and shown the appropriate manner in which to consume these material goods (Glennie & Thrift 1992).

Commodities were increasingly displayed together, obtaining meaning from the context and the goods that each item was associated with (Nava 1997). Thus, the emphasis was for a complete lifestyle, which was displayed in the store's promotional material, in-store design, and treatment of their customers:

*With their many free services for, and courteous treatment of, shoppers, the early department stores created an almost aristocratic ambience. The female customer was intended to feel like a real queen or at least a lady while she was shopping because she walked into a palace-like atmosphere that was thoroughly imbued with luxury.*

(Laermans 1993:93)

Individuals were simultaneously consuming a particular behaviour, a lifestyle and establishing their identity through the process, rather than just buying the item (Glennie & Thrift 1992; Blomley 1996; Glennie & Thrift 1996). Notions of luxury and quality were important, despite the fact that the mass-produced goods were actually made cheaply. The in-store design and architecture displayed the importance of the store, and in turn, the goods it displayed. The stores provided everything that the shopper needed in one convenient location, not unlike the UK grocery stores of today. This vast array of goods, along with the service ethos, encouraged the consumer to perceive that they were in control (Corrigan 1997). The size of the department stores also emphasised the seriousness of their majestic presence (Rappaport 2000). Previously, shoppers were accustomed to small high street stores and fairs; department stores towered into the sky and borrowed many of their features from the stately palaces and churches of the time (Corrigan 1997).

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Along with this majestic presence, department stores were in constant reflexive mode with both the consumer and the cultural and political environment (Glennie & Thrift 1992; Gabriel & Lang 1995). Gender stereotypes of women and families were constantly reproduced in their promotional material (Rappaport 2000). Like the UK grocery retailers with their healthy food leaflets and products, the department stores also demonstrated how the products should be used, and promoted ideals of behaviour and lifestyles. In effect:

*Symbolic culture was fused with material culture and values and ideals were fused with the actual purchase of commodities.*

(Laermans 1993:97)

Members of the urban society increasingly felt the need to display an identity, which could change depending on the social context. In this social climate commodities become dominant signifiers of that process (Glennie & Thrift 1992; Langman 1992; Laermans 1993).

Modern supermarkets have developed similarities with the early department stores, emerging as a territory specifically designed for and focused on women (Cohen 2000). This was accentuated by developments in the mid-seventies and early eighties when the large multiples started to develop out-of-town sites. These sites drew the focus away from the social mix in the high street (which incorporated a vast array of products and was a central meeting place for the community) and, since access to out-of-town stores required transport, there was a change of their clientele. As Lizabeth Cohen comments in her historical study of the shift from the mid-1950s onwards from the downtown stores to the larger suburban shopping centres in the United States:

*Shopping centers were planned with the female consumer in mind. As women patrons increasingly drove their own cars, they found parking spaces at the shopping center designed wider than usual for the express purpose of making it easier for them – many of whom were new drivers – to park. Women then entered a well-controlled “public” space that made them feel comfortable and safe, with activities planned to appeal especially to women and children. From the color schemes, stroller ramps, babysitting services and special lockers for the “ladies’ wraps,” to the reassuring security guards and special events such as fashion shows, shopping centers were created as female worlds.*

(Cohen 2000:254)

Initially, this same move by the UK grocery retailers to suburbia, eliminated any leisure element which the consumer may have experienced when they shopped at the high street. To compensate - guided more by economics than through any real desire to become leisure venues - retailers started to offer a variety of merchandise, including clothes. The intention was to increase the pleasurable aspect of shopping, as well as the time and money spent at the store (Bowlby 1997). A variety of services were offered and some stores began to resemble the high street or the market areas - sites they had so quickly left nearly two decades earlier.

### **Key differences between markets, department stores and supermarkets**

Although at first glance there are many similarities between street markets, department stores, and supermarkets, there are also some key differences. The key similarity between the three sites of consumption is that they constructed and structured consumer behaviour around ideas regarding masculinity and femininity, which became more structured as the twentieth century moved on, finally establishing women as the ultimate consumers (Maynard 1985; Glennie & Thrift 1992; Blomley 1996). Although all three sites sell goods, the department store primarily sells clothing and furnishings and is traditionally envisaged as providing luxuries and persuades the consumer to buy and sample this 'lifestyle' (Bowlby 2001). By contrast the supermarket focuses on the everyday and is primarily associated with food, functional qualities and control. As Kim Humphrey (1998: 143) comments, supermarkets "*straddle the divide between consumption as fantasy and consumption as necessity*", while department stores pamper consumer aspirations for a particular lifestyle. These similarities emphasise the importance of material goods and consumption practices, but the differences illustrate the tension between functionality and pleasure, particularly in regard to supermarkets. In addition, each of these shopping environments is itself shaped by social structures and practices (Blomley 1996).

Before the arrival of these large department stores, shopping trips were conducted in groups or by the whole family (Blomley 1996). However, the large department stores and later the

shopping malls and supermarkets, began to try to differentiate themselves through ideas of gender identity and leisure (Humphery 1998). Initiated by department stores, and incorporated into modern day shopping malls and supermarkets, the emphasis on rationality and convenience was dropped in favour of leisure and a “*carnivalesque atmosphere*” (Blomley 1996:234). Thus shopping became a “*skilled, knowledge-based activity, with consumers' knowledge controlled by retailers and advertisers*” (Blomley 1996:234). The following chapter (Chapter 3) will consider the modern day grocery store, illustrating how controlled and planned these sites are, through an examination of the retailing literature concerning store image and consumer behaviour. Finally, the chapter will discuss the current trends in retailing and leisure before concluding with a brief overview of the household of the UK consumer.

## 2.9 Summary

This chapter has discussed the contributions of leisure and consumption theories, and considered the parallels between them and their appropriateness for this thesis. It has also illustrated the problem of defining these concepts; the similarities between leisure and shopping; and their role in reproducing gender assumptions and stereotypes within society. The boundaries between work and leisure have become blurred, similarly shopping cannot easily be broken down into functional and hedonistic qualities (Abelson 2000). Both spheres have been marginalized in society and academic life (Deem 1999), viewed as common-sense notions in which questions of gender, power and identity are left unanswered. Leisure and shopping are vital to the ‘*status quo*’ of Western societies and if individuals do not have access to leisure or shopping then this results in the downfall of the economy (Gabriel & Lang 1995). Freedom and choice are also considered to be key ideals in Western leisure and shopping practices (Gabriel & Lang 1995). Sites of leisure and shopping are far more influential than as simply places of fun and freedom and it is in these arenas that the practices of consumption are reproduced and sustained. These consumption activities are sites of power in which gender is used to reproduce

and legitimize these practices (Humphery 1998). The next chapter will discuss some of the influential trends that have supported the rise of the retailer and the move towards leisure shopping.

# CHAPTER 3

## THE UK GROCERY SHOPPING CONTEXT

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## CHAPTER 3: THE UK GROCERY SHOPPING CONTEXT

### 3.1 Introduction

Since the post-war period the UK grocery-retailing environment has undergone dramatic changes that have culminated in an increasingly competitive marketplace (Allen & Massey 1988). These changes have occurred at macro, meso and micro levels and have supported the rise of the multiple grocery-retailer. These trends will be highlighted in this chapter's review of UK grocery shopping which discusses first the imagery and controlled atmosphere of the supermarket (see sections 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4), followed by an overview of the contemporary trends in UK grocery shopping (see section 3.5). Section 3.6 outlines the background of the major UK grocery retailers, their market share and company details. The latter sections of the chapter move towards the private domestic realm (see section 3.7), which make apparent the construction and control involved in the modern supermarket environment and the inherent tension between the rational and hedonistic dimensions of shopping. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of the relevant current consumer trends, specifically focusing on the gendered framework within which the activity of grocery shopping is constructed.

### 3.2 Store image

The grocery store has become a vehicle through which grocery retailers can project their imagery and appeal to their key customers - women. However, in the practices and literature of grocery retailing, there is a tension between the planned, rational marketing campaigns, conducted like military operations, and those attempts at persuasion and the seduction of the shopper (Bowbly 1996). On the one hand, grocery shopping is conceived as a functional convenience, whereas on the other hand, developments to increase consumer spending have brought back into the environment, the more hedonistic qualities associated with food and shopping (Bowlby 1997). The retailing literature also demonstrates this tension, as this section illustrates, between the functional, positivistic paradigm of prediction and models, and the

interpretative paradigm (Thompson, Locander & Pollio 1990; Thompson 1997). Interpretivists regard the relationship between consumers and shopping as more complicated than the simple economic act of need-buy-replenish (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982).

The concept of store image plays a key role in the relationship between the consumer and the retailer. Store image has been defined as "*a complex of meanings and relationships serving to characterise the store populace*" (Arons 1961). Later attempts to define store image have broadly outlined a set of knowledge, experience and perceptions characterising the consumer's overall image of the store (Lindquest 1974-1975; Hirschman & Holbrook 1982). Distinctions between definitions revolve around whether it is the customer or the researcher who measures and interprets the image (Hansen & Deutscher 1977). The concept of store image was first developed in Pierre Martineau's (1958) work where he differentiated between functional and psychological attributes of a store's image. Functional attributes include: price; location; merchandise; clientele; physical environment. Psychological attributes include: atmosphere; customer service; customer information; quality. Psychological attributes, in particular, are difficult to define and measure from this functionalist paradigm, despite an assumption of universality (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982). As retailers have realised that the functional attributes of store image can be easily replicated they have moved towards the more intangible aspects of shopping, i.e. store atmosphere and customer service. A key intangible aspect of the store is the 'atmosphere' as this has been found to increase the overall pleasure and satisfaction that the consumer associates with that shopping trip (Donovan *et al.* 1982). Scant research has investigated this phenomenon and this may be indicative of the more interpretative nature of this attribute for retailers. Research conducted in the early 1980s did conclude that a pleasant and congenial store atmosphere encourages consumers to spend more time in the store and presumably increases their total spending for the trip by encouraging unplanned purchases.

Thus:

*Shoppers' emotional states within the store predict actual purchase behaviour – not just attitudes or intentions.*

(Donovan *et al.* 1982 :291)

Creating a distinctive image that allows customers to distinguish between competing products or services, the Unique Selling Point (USP), has long been seen as the key to marketing success (Bowbly 1996). Store imagery has the potential to create a distinctive product with which the consumer can readily associate, defining an expected level of service and quality (Cornelissen 2000). For marketers and retailers, store image provides a vehicle for the rationalisation and manipulation of store choice and in-store decision making for a segmented group of consumers (Bowbly 1996). Store image, by its very nature, relies upon and is constructed from the generalised cultural beliefs and ideals of consumers and retailers. As Rudi Laermans notes:

*Symbolic culture was fused with material culture, and values and ideals were fused with the actual purchase of commodities.*

(Laermans 1993:97)

The problem for researchers has been to try to understand the processes underpinning these 'intangible' variables, which results in assertion of the image and its representation and measurement (Golden, Albaum & Zimmer 1987). How consumers personalise the store or how they perceive their 'abstract, gestalt natures' and the interactions between them is important in understanding the role of consumption in our society (Keaveney & Hunt 1992). The fragmentation of consumer lifestyles and consumers' extensive experience with consumption practices are largely neglected, or perhaps simply cannot be easily incorporated into a model for use within the retail business context (Belk 1988; Gabriel & Lang 1995). This methodological stance between the more functionalist positivistic paradigm and the interpretative paradigm is perhaps one of the fundamental differences between the two fields of image and consumption studies (Arons 1961; Hansen & Deutscher 1977; Glennie & Thrift 1992). As Rachel Bowbly comments:

*For some time, then, the consumer has been a fairly hybrid being, half of it (more or less a feminine half) being that unhappy, or perhaps stupidly happy, victim of advertising's forces; and the other (more or less a masculine half)*

*being a sober, rational sort of being who knows what he wants and makes the best possible decision based on the information available to get it.*  
(Bowbly 1996: 383)

Store image research is concerned with the subjective evaluations of a segment of consumers, which are then quantified and analysed from a functionalist perspective. Objectivity is seen as the key method of determining store image despite the fact that it wholeheartedly relies on subjective perceptions drawing on an individual's cultural expectations (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982). Grocery stores, for example, reflect the décor found within conventional homes - tiling, pine effects, etc. - and thus are reminiscent of kitchen interiors (Bell & Valentine 1997; Cohen 2000; Rappaport 2000). The exteriors often resemble either a town square (complete with clock) or the entrance way reflects much of the modern architecture used in churches and cathedrals (Glennie & Thrift 1992). The lack of agreement by academics over store image is not surprising given that the most intangible factors are probably those which encourage consumers to visit the store and are critically important in retaining their loyalty (Lury 1997). Therefore, empirical work that examines the meaning of shopping for consumers, and evaluates the findings within a broader political and historical framework would prove to be more insightful.

The design and layout of the store have become increasingly important in attracting the 'right' customer (Gardner & Sheppard 1989) and in directing them around the store to purchase the 'right' product (Bowlby 1997). As Robert David Sack comments on the integration of promotional communications and the environment:

*They frame idealized worlds that reveal how products are supposed to affect our lives, and these messages become part of people's attitudes towards the actual products that appear in real places. Moreover, total commercial environments such as department stores and shopping malls are themselves life – sized advertisements.*

(Sack 1988:643)

The aim of retail managers is to control the physical environment and direct consumers towards the more profitable products. Grocery retailers, for example, have utilised this concept within

their retailing environments (Channel 4 1997) and direct customers on a preferred route through the store passing several profitable items.

### 3.3 Control in the UK supermarket

As the previous discussion has illustrated, storeowners and retailers have been confused as to how to treat their customers. In addition they also require information with which to anticipate demands and fluctuations in stock. The 'science of marketing' was applied in an attempt to predict trends, although as Mica Nava comments on her research investigating Marks and Spencer, the company:

*... clearly made attempts to know the consumer and predict changes in taste but there is no evidence that their methods bore any relationship to the 'scientific fact-finding' ... the retailing strategy of Marks & Spencer was based ... on intuition and imagination rather than rationality.*

(Nava 2000: 54)

Gordon Foxall's research adopts a behaviourist perspective and emphasises the physical environment and considers how an open or closed setting can elicit certain preferred responses from the consumer (Foxall 1990; Foxall 1992; Foxall 1993). Open consumer settings allow the individual to respond relatively freely. Closed consumer settings are environments in which the organisation constructs the spatial resources to control demand, encourage selection of particular items, queuing, etc. For Gordon Foxall (1993) the investigations conducted by cognitive consumer researchers are fatally flawed because they neglect the context in which purchasing occurs. Influenced by the work of Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1974; 1978), he concludes that rather than focusing on the individual, consumer research should consider the more controllable environment and evaluate how particular stimuli can promote specific behaviours.

Gordon Foxall (1992) thus proposes a continuum of open and closed settings, ranging from closed animal behaviour experiments to open consumer settings. As Robert East summarises:

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*Thus, instead of resisting temptation - a form of internal control – the behaviour therapists change the external control on behaviour by altering the cues...*

(East 1994:17)

Gordon Foxall (1993) does however, appreciate that social influences may play a part in determining where the consumer chooses to shop. The previous learning history of the consumer is also acknowledged in his model as contributing to the purchasing environment. As Robert East (1994) described above, the external setting can stimulate particular responses from the individual through encouraging them to avoid the situation or reinforcing their choice through rewards and pleasure.

In this perspective a consumer's 'learning' history, past experiences and social surroundings have certain consequences – interpreted as rewarding, punishing or neutral – and in turn affect future learning and reactions to other consumer settings. Interestingly, Gordon Foxall (1992) discusses 'contingency-based consumer behaviour' and its four broad forms, which are sustained by reinforcement, namely: maintenance (routine behaviour); accumulation (planned acquisition); pleasure (entertainment); accomplishment (status goods).

Maintenance behaviour is particularly relevant to grocery retailing as grocery shopping is traditionally constructed as a routine purchasing event for the consumer. Despite the routine, Gordon Foxall (1990; 1992) states that, like the other broad categories, it includes both hedonic and informational reinforcement to alleviate the monotony, as he comments:

*Patronage of particular stores is often necessary to obtain specific products or services and retail outlets are arranged so as to maximise the time consumers spend in the store and to prompt particular purchase responses. All of these act to close the setting by manipulating physical surroundings. Neither hedonic nor informational consequences are unimportant since both pleasure and performance feedback maintain such purchasing in defiance of its repetitiveness and monotony, but neither has the intensity characteristic of the situations in which, say, innovative or luxurious products are evaluated and bought.*

(Foxall 1992: 391- 392)

The marketing mix and store environment can intervene and emphasise particular response stimuli or ‘rules’ and this is one of “*the primary function(s) of advertising*” (Foxall 1990; 1992). Thus, Gordon Foxall’s model provides support for the interpretation of both consumer decision-making and store image, indicating ways in which the consumer setting could be modified or manipulated to direct customers around the store. Research investigating the situational influences on purchasing has provided support for the model and concluded that the more ‘open’ the setting, implying choice and freedom for the consumer, the more likely pleasure will become a source of reward. Foxall’s (1990; 1992; 1993) work has many merits, which appeal to retailers, as it implies that they can predict outcomes through reinforcement. Despite its practical implications however, the model only partially describes one aspect of decision-making, the environment and the organisation. It does not provide an understanding of the experiences, meanings and context of the consumer – in fact they are depicted as passive subjects with no hint of diversity – gender, race, age, etc. The model describes open settings where the consumer is free to choose and describes how their responses can be controlled and manipulated. Only the current situation is of relevance and the model is presented in an objective scientific paradigm, giving mere ‘lip-service’ to the power and cultural issues underpinning consumption.

### **Customer service**

Maintaining their relationships with their customers has been of prime concern for retailers, especially since the 1990s, and customer service is the primary method for achieving this goal (Sparks 1990/1). Essentially, customer service has focused on exceeding customer perceptions of the service and in developing ‘relationships’ (Sparks 1990/1). The main emphasis has been on a return to the personal service of the high street shops in order to retain a sense of warmth in the service delivery. Thus Tesco’s objective for customer service is:

*...to provide customers with outstanding, naturally delivered personal service.  
Example: baby changing facilities, no quibble money back guarantee, 'one in front' queuing policy.*

(Tesco 2001)

The characterisation of successful customer service for delivery by the employee has necessitated a considerable degree of control and discipline from the organisation over the selection and conformity of the employee (Du Gay 1996; Bell & Valentine 1997; Ritzer 1998). The new management ideology of success, the flatter organisation and 'team work' all promote an attitude of public and private surveillance of the individual (Du Gay 1996). Corporate attitudes and norms, especially regarding the body, appearance and manner became more prevalent, driven by this ideology and the need to get 'closer to the customer' (Du Gay & Salaman 1992; Du Gay 1996; Bell & Valentine 1997). The employee is thus expected to reflect the norms and values of the organisation and identify with their target customer (Ritzer 1998). ASDA and Tesco, for example, as demonstrated through the objective quoted above, stress the importance of communicating a particular attitude to the consumer.

### **Customer information**

Grocery retailers provide consumers with a plethora of information in-store (including leaflets, videos, recipe cards and store magazines) to inform consumers how to use the products and services available within the store, and so facilitate the decision-making process. In-store information is also generally available on topical consumer issues, e.g. genetically modified (GM) products, irradiation of foods, Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE). Consumer information points within stores can supplement this information and can also help identify the types of issues on which customers require information.

Other important and more informal sources of customer information are television, magazines, cookery books, literature, and recipes handed down through the generations. Television cookery programmes and their superstar chefs are a particularly important source of information

and supermarkets use media chefs to promote products. Mennell and Murcott (1985) and Bell and Valentine (1997) comment on the popularity of televised food programmes and magazines that serve both to entertain and inform the individual. Advice is given regarding the preparing, composition and consumption of the different foodstuffs, and increasingly there is an emphasis on the ‘fun’ or leisure aspect of cooking that has become just as important as the recipe (Grazia & Furlough 1996). New and exotic cultures are experienced through food consumed in touristic settings, again emphasising the link to leisure, featuring in the programme content. Thus:

*Professional and amateur chefs are household names (British TV shows like Ready Steady Cook, Masterchef and Food and Drink bring haute cuisine into our living rooms as well as our kitchens), their restaurants given the status of temples of consumption in countless guides and features; food writers, critics and broadcasters meanwhile show us not only how to cook, but tell us what, when, where, how – and even why – to eat and drink.*

(Bell & Valentine 1997:6)

The World Wide Web also provides extensive information from the major multiples regarding diet and the consumption of food. Menus and the ‘correct’ preparation of food in conjunction with special family recipes highlight the diversity and distinctive character of food for the individual and their household. Perceptions of how meals should be constructed and the ‘correct’ cooking and serving methods compose a distinct picture of the intense socialisation process which underpins food consumption (Murcott 1982; Murcott 1995).

Just as food is essential but mundane, so the supermarket represents the most “*common and regular part of our shopping lives*” (Fine 1995: 146) and yet the volume of academic research outside of the functionalist retailing perspective is small. Some work has started to be published that examines the social construction of the supermarket, such as Kim Humphrey’s (1998) ‘Shelf Life’ which focuses on the supermarket culture of Australia and examines “*what it means to consume and to be a consumer*” (Humphrey 1998: 2). The supermarket was conceptualised and developed as a female space in order to target women as shoppers and to populate the workforce (Cohen 2000). As Kim Humphrey confirms:

*The supermarket was to be a feminised space in terms of both workers and customers. Ironically, however, the culture of the supermarket remained mediated and extensively controlled by a less visible and almost exclusively male management, often placed outside the supermarket in company head offices, or behind shop walls.*

(Humphrey 1998: 76)

Similarly, Lizabeth Cohen's study also comments on how the suburban shopping centres would draw from the local area to supplement their workforce (Cohen 2000). These practices served to empower women but also restricted them to traditional domestic roles, as family finances and credit still remained largely under the male's control (Cohen 2000). The women employees were encouraged to spend their money in the store with generous staff discounts and were thus expected to become model consumers (Cohen 2000). In my experience, working as a part-time supervisor at Marks and Spencer I received a 20% discount from the organisation to spend on store items and also received a generous Christmas bonus. Not only did this serve to encourage staff to spend their money on store items but it also restricted any complaints or strong opposition from any organised staff group, such as a trade union for example. Thus, in order to understand the dynamics and complexity of the supermarket we need to go beyond the retailing literature, which neglects these larger historical and social issues. As Kim Humphrey states:

*The supermarkets explored here, then, are not cathedrals of a manipulative and unproblematically domineering consumer capitalism, but nor are they carnivalesque arenas of playful consumers. They are not simply palaces of commodity fetishisation and the site where the richness of the life-world is hollowed out, but nor are they sites of endless permutation, personal empowerment and everyday pleasures. The supermarkets explored here, and the people who move within them, are understood to be embedded within certain social and cultural settings, to be subject to certain locational frustrations, and to be the creators of certain personal pleasures and strategies for survival.*

(Humphrey 1998: 17)

The previous chapter (Chapter 2) examined the historical processes underpinning supermarket development and consumption practices. The retailing literature examined here has illustrated the controlling aspect of the sector, and now our attention will focus on UK shopping and household patterns.

### 3.4 Contemporary shopping trends in the UK

The industrialisation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw an increase in the urban population and a concomitant shift away from production towards consumption. The post-war period however, saw rapid changes and a sustained economic boom for most Western, developed, countries. During the later part of the last fifty years, the seeds of the post-Fordist economic developments were sown. The turbulent economic climate of the seventies and eighties was a “*crossroads*” (Harris 1988: 12-13). There was a decline of older industries such as ship building and mining “*and a rise in new production methods based on a fragmented labour force and flexible labour*” (Harris 1988: 12). Developments to the transport system, employment conditions, technology and the rise in home ownership were just some of the contributors to the positioning of the supermarket as a key factor in our lives. During this period there has also been an increasing focus on the family and the home as a site of entertainment. This can be seen in the rise in television and video recorder ownership, ‘infotainment’, ‘do-it-yourself’ (D.I.Y.) and the prevalence of entertaining such as dinner parties and barbeques (Allen & Massey 1988; Gelber 2000).

Within the UK, the last two decades have seen the emergence of the multiple grocery-retailer who now dominates the grocery market sector (Gardner & Sheppard 1989). The supermarket now occupies “*a central part in contemporary cultural life*” (Bell & Valentine 1997: 138). With the supermarket’s base in key locations and a monopoly on price, smaller organizations and ‘convenience’ stores have found it increasingly difficult to compete with the larger multiples due to their size, the choice of merchandise on offer, and customer service facilities (Humphery 1998). This had led to the “*death of the city centre and the demise of corner shops, local grocery stores, etc.*” (Bell & Valentine 1997:136) and to the rise of ‘food deserts’.

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### UK grocery shopping since the 1970s

This section of the chapter will detail the statistics regarding UK consumers' shopping habits since the introduction of the supermarket, from the mid-1970s until today. Recent statistics document that there was an average increase in the number of shopping trips per household of 25% between the mid-1970s and 1990, coupled with a decrease in small UK shops - 103,000 out of 188,000 have gone in the past two decades (Mintel 1999 January). The grocery retailers not only dominate the food market, but also are rapidly becoming the only 'choice' (Mintel 1999 January).

The attitudes and expectations of UK grocery consumers have become more akin to those of their American counterparts than any other society (Mintel 1999 January). The typical supermarket customer is an affluent person aged over 35 from what can be described as 'better off families', and many are 'empty nesters' (Mintel 1998 October). In terms of whom the grocery retailers see as their customers then ideally they are:

*...over 40s, ABC1, empty nesters and post family groups. These are not as high spending as other sub-groups, such as affluent families, but represent a softer target in terms of altering shopper behaviour.*

(Mintel 1999 January).

Both men and women regularly use the edge-of-town superstores, and the two cars owned by the average UK household have made such locations easily accessible (Mintel 1998 October). Grocery multiples now offer a variety of ways for consumers to access the stores. Gone are the days when a car was a prerequisite for shopping at these large outlets, although for many people, regardless of the proximity of the supermarket, the car has become an inherent part of the grocery shopping experience. Inner city stores, footpaths, buses, taxi ranks, bicycle tracks and stands and home delivery are just a sample of the access options offered by the UK grocery retailers.

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Convenience has been the prime motivator in the multiples' success and domination of the retailing sector, resulting in the decline of smaller independents (Bowby 1997; Mintel 1998 October). The supermarkets, with their in-town and edge-of-town locations, have become the dominant location and format for shopping at the expense of smaller convenience stores and the specialist food stores which have resorted to a variety of strategies in a seemingly vain attempt to remain in competition. Thus, marketing information from Mintel warns:

*Today's consumers' needs for flexibility of time and place in shopping is contributing to a growing reliance on major outlets at the expense of small outlets. Ultimately this will lead to a reduced base of outlets from which to shop.*

(Mintel 1999 January)

The specialist fresh food stores (e.g. butchers and greengrocers) are finding it increasingly difficult to compete with the multiples and are now being used by a broad base of occasional users, which does not bode well for their future (Mintel 1999 January). Whilst the specialist shops have perhaps until recently still been able to cater for special purchases of luxury items, today even those items are catered for in the superstore.

The introduction of longer opening hours, seven-day trading, and 24 hour shopping has been a resounding success for the retailer (Mintel 1999 January). A 1998 survey of UK shoppers, which evaluated attitudes towards 24-hour-opening, indicated that 32% of consumers would consider shopping after 10p.m (Mintel 1998 October). The age of the respondent was an important distinction in deciding whether they were in favour of shopping in the early hours of the morning, with 58% of those responding positively aged 35 years or under (Mintel 1998 October).

### 3.5 The top four UK grocery retailers

The four UK organisations that prevail in this sector, controlling nearly half the market share, are: Tesco; J Sainsbury; ASDA; Safeway. This section will provide a brief outline of each of these in order of decreasing market share (Mintel 1996 October).

#### Tesco

Tesco has recently overtaken its main rival, Sainsbury, and now dominates this sector as the market leader with a market share of 15.2%. Tesco was famous in the 1970s for its '*pile it high sell it cheap*' philosophy, a label that it has been trying to erase ever since the early eighties. Price-led strategies dictated the direction that Tesco, along with the other retailers, strived to achieve, concluding that consumers would visit their store on price alone. As lifestyles moved on, and retailers realised that they could not sustain new store openings for much longer they had to consider alternative strategies. After extensive market research, Tesco realised that consumers wanted more from their shopping activity than just low price products (Disney 1999). Tesco now sells a variety of products including financial services, banking, travel insurance, and pension plans. Thus, this continued expansion of both grocery formats and the marketing mix of quality; customer service, store environment; location and price have become their priorities for success in the 1990s and beyond. With this repositioning strategy Tesco has challenged and beaten the former market leader Sainsbury (Disney 1999). Tesco now has more than five hundred small convenience stores, supermarkets, and other 'grocery emporia', and have expanded from their UK base to Ireland, central Europe, and Thailand (Tesco 2001).

Tesco's mission statement outlines aims for both staff and customer which reflect their new focus and it is notable that they seek to provide the customer with quality products, excellent service and an interesting shopping environment, as the following extracts from the mission statement demonstrate. The company aims to work "... *closely with suppliers to ensure*

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*products are of the highest quality and are delivered to stores in the best possible condition ...ensure staff commitment to giving the best possible quality of service... create in its stores an environment that makes shopping easy, interesting and comfortable (Tesco 2001).*

### Sainsbury

The second largest retailer in terms of market share in the UK is currently J Sainsbury with nearly four hundred supermarkets. Like their main rival Tesco, Sainsbury have a banking service for their customers, in Sainsbury's case, with the Bank of Scotland. Founded in 1869 by John James and Mary Anne Sainsbury, the Sainsbury family are now only major shareholders, although they still exert a strong influence on the company's corporate culture (Shackleton 1996). The store image was influential even at the turn of the century, as this extract from the company's homepage illustrates:

*Sainsbury's shop fascias were so tall that they were clearly visible from the other end of the street, or above the tallest tram or horse bus. A black glass fascia panel stretched over the whole width of the shop, with 'J.Sainsbury' painted upon it in gold leaf. Above this was an ornate wrought-iron structure decorated with matt green paint so dark as to look black. Upon this were mounted huge wooden letters, decorated in gold leaf, which again spelt the name 'J. Sainsbury'.*

(Sainsbury 2001)

The homepage goes on to comment on the interior of a new Sainsbury store opened in 1906:

*Its interior was typical of branches of the period, as from the 1890s onwards, Sainsbury's new shops shared a common 'house style'. The model for this was the original Croydon shop with its long shape, tiled walls and marble-topped counters. Sites were carefully chosen, with a central position in a parade selected in preference to a corner shop. 'Corners,' pronounced John James Sainsbury, 'are for banks.'*

(Sainsbury 2001)

The attention given to the location, décor and advertisements of the store was important as these details reflected both the anticipated clientele and the attitudes of the owners. The early stores had to be well lit and the mosaics used around the in-store environment were handcrafted. These early examples emphasise the importance of store image and support modern academic research regarding the significance of store design and layout (Martineau 1958). However, a step back in time with J Sainsbury through their 'virtual museum' reveals that image,

advertising and customer service were the basis of their development and their upmarket image (Sainsbury 2001). An early advertisement (1894) indicates that the store offered delicacies and was willing to accommodate customer requests as well as offering a same-day free delivery service (Sainsbury 2001). J Sainsbury was a very early pioneer of the store image and design which retailers rely on today with each of their stores having the same style, décor, lighting and ambience. The recent extended opening hours and Sunday trading that retailers have recently adopted was actually part and parcel of the typical week during the 1880s for J Sainsbury, as the table below illustrates:

**Table 3.2: J Sainsbury's opening hours during the 1880s**

Day	Opening Time	Closing Time
Monday	6 am	2 pm
Tuesday – Thursday	6 am	9:15 pm
Friday	6 am	10:15 pm
Saturday	6 am	Midnight
Sunday	9 am	11 pm

(Source: Sainsbury 2001)

## ASDA

ASDA is the third largest UK food retailer by market share and one of the youngest, having been founded in 1965 (ASDA 2001). ASDA has just over 100 stores. ASDA stores stock CDs (compact discs), books, videos, as well as the George brand clothing, in addition to food products (ASDA 2001). They were one of the first retailers to launch their own branded clothing and this is an essential component of their success. ASDA have their 'own label' called Farm Stores and have recently introduced take-away meals, such as Indian food and fresh pizza. According to the ASDA homepage, ASDA are the "*UK's largest fresh pizza retailer*,

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*selling 24 million a year*" (ASDA 2001). Despite comments from their Chairman Archie Norman that they "*were just concentrating on selling food*", the company has announced plans to expand its takeaway meals, have a supermarket drive-through, home delivery and online shopping services (ASDA 2001).

### Safeway

Safeway are the fourth largest UK grocery retailer with approximately four hundred stores. As the Safeway homepage notes, Safeway '*wants the family to eat together and shop together*' (Safeway 2001). It facilitates this with a supervised high quality crèche and its clothing concentrates on pre-school children's items and toys (Safeway 2001). A key feature of Safeway stores is the self-scanning facilities that enable the customer to calculate the cost of their own shopping trolley and just provide the checkout operator with the receipt. Safeway also have their own label, café, dry-cleaning, and petrol facilitates available.

### The Missions of the UK Grocery Retailers

Wrigley (1993) identifies four key features of grocery retailing: the concentration of capital and the role of the new store development programmes; retailer-supplier relations and the return on capital in food retailing and manufacturing; labour productivity and net-profit margins; retailer-regulatory state relations. To these four features should be added the following two - firstly the provision of a wide range of facilities and secondly, customer service. These two areas have become the major differentiating features in the 'store wars' of the late 1990s and the early 2000s. The range of facilities now reflects, within the microcosm of the supermarket, the entirety of the high street. Banking, credit facilities, coffee shop, crèche, dry cleaners, newsagent, photo-processing, take-away food, florist, pharmacist and even sometimes a doctor's surgery, have extended the one-stop shopping concept and as the supermarkets attempt to provide for all aspects of the day-to-day lives of their customers.

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Grocery retailers have begun to concentrate on the lifestyles and personalities of their customers and position themselves accordingly (Du Gay 1996). Lifestyle can be defined as "*the ensemble of commodity-mediated activities and appearances, encompassing clothing, hair-styles, apartments, cars, furnishings, leisure interests and work activities*" (Goldman 1987: 695). These facets of consumer personality became articulated in the design and promotional material of the grocery retailers as they concentrated on the more affluent consumer (Westlake 1993; Du Gay 1996). As Paul Du Gay comments:

*In order to stay competitive in this environment, retailers began to seek ways both of differentiating themselves from one another on terms other than price, and of moving up-market in order to appeal to those consumers with high levels of disposable income. The policies they pursued to this end encouraged the transformation of retail from dull, distributive cypher to culture industry and hence the progressive dislocation of production and consumption. The battle for market share was rearticulated, first and foremost, as a struggle for the imagination of the consumer.*

(Du Gay 1996: 110)

Despite the claim that they are merely selling food, retailers have become a central feature in UK consumers' lives, supplying not only the functional requirements of food shopping but becoming increasingly involved with more community initiatives, such as 'giving away' personal computers to schools. Grocery retailing is the archetypal marketing form, epitomizing the conventional five Ps: place; product; price; promotion; people. As Gardner and Sheppard (1989) comment:

*Marketing is in the 'social engineering' business too. It's a firmly 'activist' or 'interventionist' discipline, not simply reflecting social or attitudinal differences, but in a very real sense constructing them.*

(Gardner & Sheppard 1989: 52)

Clearly, in a target marketing sense, not all consumers are of equal interest to each grocery retailer, who have tended to focus their marketing on maintaining their affluent clientele. The reliance on the car to access the 'benefits' of these large retailers has meant that low income and retired people and mothers with pre-school children (Bowlby 1988; Westlake 1993) are unable to visit the superstore. However, some retailers, notably ASDA and Tesco, have provided access for this market segment with free shopper buses and crèches. The battle for the affluent

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customer has opened up a niche market in catering for the needs of the less affluent consumer, and interestingly in the UK this niche is now being serviced by a number of European-based rather than UK-based companies, e.g. Aldi, Lidl, Netto.

### 3.6 Shopping and the domestic realm

The supermarket is directly tied to the household and serves the consumer in two ways, through the functional ‘use value’, and equally significantly through the more emotional ‘symbolic value’ of the activity and goods purchased (Usherwood 2000). The activity is managed and framed around the goods or services available to the household and also promotes particular expectations of gender roles (Usherwood 2000). Shopping and leisure activities reflect particular ideologies of these gendered relationships within the household. This is illustrated in the retailers’ promotional material but also in the service they provide to the family – replenishing supplies (Woodruffe & Todd 1992). The move in the 1950s towards self-service, for example, had ramifications for the household, housewife and the status of the consumer (Usherwood 2000). The new self-service system, for example, made shoplifting harder to detect so certain methods were used to combat this such as the wire see-through shopping basket and, as Barbara Usherwood, notes the loss of interaction between the assistant and shopper adversely affected the consumer as:

*For the system to work effectively, people had to be discouraged from using self-service shops as places to stand and chat and this meant controlling the behaviour of shop assistants as well as shoppers.*

(Usherwood 2000: 121)

Thus, developments and expectations that are framed in the shopping context also influence the household and consumer (Browne 2000; Winship 2000a).

A number of authors have commented on the significance of gendered roles in heterosexual relationships and especially in households with children present (Perkins & DeMeis 1996;

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Hilfinger-Messias *et al.* 1997; Kemmer, Anderson & Marshall 1998). Despite the growing numbers of women entering the workforce, part-time and full-time, the home is still strictly gendered while the more public sphere of work is associated with masculine imagery, expectations, and norms (Deem 1988; Perkins & DeMeis 1996; Hilfinger-Messias *et al.* 1997; Sanchez & Thomson 1997; Kemmer, Anderson & Marshall 1998). Women's work and contributions are devalued, invisible, or attributed as a natural part of their gender. These gendered patterns are also reproduced in shopping and leisure activities (Perkins & DeMeis 1996; Hilfinger-Messias *et al.* 1997; Kemmer, Anderson & Marshall 1998). The broader social and political system also tends to encourage women to enter or remain in the workforce or to confine them to the home. This has implications for other spheres of women's lives, such as shopping and leisure (Kay 2000). For example, in rural areas of Scotland women are restricted in their leisure and shopping opportunities because they may not have access to a car and the local bus service may be infrequent or non-existent (Hope, Anderson & Sawyer 2000). Moreover, for some rural communities that are also popular tourist destinations the supermarket in the larger towns provide cheaper prices, more choice and an opportunity for combining shopping with other leisure activities (Hope, Anderson & Sawyer 2000). As Tess Kay comments:

*Family-related policies that discourage or encourage mothers' labour market activity may therefore have implications for gender differentiation in leisure. The influence that policies have is partly derived from their practical effects – but this is not the only factor. Social policies are also a powerful medium for delivering an ideological message about a nation's current consensus on its social institutions.*

(Kay 2000: 248)

As many other writers within leisure and consumption studies have discussed in detail, these ideologies of becoming a wife and mother dictate and effectively control women in all aspects of their lives (Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990; Kay 1996). Women may resist these ideologies but many also accept them without question and consider the household, care of the family and 'maternal instincts' all a natural part of their biological make-up (Deem 1986; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990; Wearing 1998; Kay 2000; Wearing & Wearing 2000).

Thus, any data on shopping and leisure activities reflect particular ideologies of these gendered relationships within the household. The rise in the power of the supermarkets and convenience foods for the most part is attributed to the wider social policies and the changing lifestyles of their key consumer - women. Despite the increasing numbers of women entering/remaining in the UK workforce, and women deciding to have their first child at an older age, the expectations within the home have remained relatively unchanged (Mintel 1998 October; National Statistics 2001). Women are still expected to come home and start on their second shift, housework, and they are still considered as the responsible caregivers of the family (Perkins & DeMeis 1996). Studies have illustrated that before they have children couples can be reasonably egalitarian in their contributions to the household, but as soon as children arrive the partners become firmly entrenched into the traditional gender stereotypical roles (Perkins & DeMeis 1996; Kemmer, Anderson & Marshall 1998). As the 1998 social trends data illustrates, men typically have uninterrupted lives. Women make the vast majority of shopping trips, dropping off and collecting children from school - all of which have to be undertaken by public transport unless they have access to a second car (National Statistics 2001). Shopping and visiting friends for example, especially when combined with day visits ranks highly as a woman's preferred leisure activities, while for men eating/drinking and walking were their preferred activities (Statistics 2001).

### **Shopping – a gendered activity**

The home is now firmly an area for consumption rather than production and many writers have commented on the gendered nature of this consumption and the unequal control of the finances in the home (Pahl 1989; Delphy 1995; Pahl 1995; Whitehead 1995). Shopping, whether for food or other items, has traditionally been viewed as a female activity (Gardner & Sheppard 1989; Lunt & Livingstone 1992; Campbell 1997). For Colin Campbell, due to the prevailing ideology there are two gendered attitudes towards shopping, a functional need and an experiential

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perspective (Campbell 1997). He goes on to discuss the pleasure that women gain from shopping while men attempt “*to assimilate shopping to a ‘work frame’*” (Campbell 1997: 170). Shopping for women is pleasurable, and when combined with other activities it can become leisure for them (Kelly 1991; Campbell 1997). For males, information and knowledge are the key factors to their shopping attitudes (Campbell 1997), whereas, for women the knowledge or skills they gain from the shopping environment are either ignored or devalued, and instead the focus is on the sensory or emotional fulfilment they can derive from the activity (Campbell 1997). In the future male shoppers may face a dilemma as:

*...more and more emphasis [is] placed on recreational consumption and with shopping envisaged as an enjoyable and essentially leisure-time activity akin to tourism and other ‘expressive’ forms of entertainment, then this could mean that men are faced with a choice of either becoming more and more ‘feminine’ (perhaps along the lines of the much-heralded ‘New Man’) or of being increasingly marginalized in the emerging ‘postmodern’ consumer society.*

(Campbell 1997: 175)

It emerged from such work that shopping has become a gendered activity, but one that devalues any positive expertise of women (Campbell 1997). This is true despite the fact that Kim Humphery’s work illustrates the participation of men and their enjoyment of the shopping activity.

*The high use of the convenience stores by men seemed to confirm a belief that men were somehow less organised than women in their food purchases, less economical in their spending and – contrary to the image of the rational male consumer –more ready to buy on impulse.*

(Humphery 1998: 148)

However, Colin Campbell’s arguments could be criticised for providing a very stereotypical view of shopping, which does not elucidate the power and control issues involved in household consumption. His work does not refer to the position of women in the home or to the influence of domesticity and caring attitudes associated with the role. There is no historical background to illustrate how women were constructed into the role of consumer. His work is isolated from the historical production of consuming and the relations of power between the broader structures including the retailers, consumption, domesticity, and status and shopping.

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In addition to this generalisation of the shopping activity, Colin Campbell's work also neglects the lack of financial control that women have in their household. The male partner controls the financial arrangements for the house and even when the woman works full-time (unless she earns more than her partner), she still has unequal access to her own money (Pahl 1995; Whitehead 1995). Women will spend their money on others in the household but feel guilty at any expenditure on themselves, while men are more likely to have money for personal spending and leisure (Pahl 1995). While Colin Campbell does provide some useful information, his neglect of the broader issues that impinge on the shopping ideology tends to trivialise his argument and reduces it to biological issues rather than power issues.

### **Household affairs**

Given the link between the public sphere of the supermarket and the more private domestic arena it is necessary to close this section with a brief investigation of the literature on housework. Housework is an important and necessary chore, without which the everyday activities of work and leisure would not function easily (Maynard 1985). However, this essential work is unpaid, unrecognised, and unsupported. Housework also presents challenges to Marxist feminists, who have tried to achieve public recognition of this unwaged labour, as it is firmly attached to images of domesticity, women's worth, and the home (Hartmann 1987). It also has firm ties with the 'ideology of domesticity', which has legitimised women as the 'natural' caretaker of the home (Maynard 1985). It has also validated the financial control and power of the (male) 'breadwinner' in the household - leaving women financially dependent on their partners (Delphy 1995). As these statements indicate, the household is not a neutral site isolated from the broader structures, rather it replicates the public arena in a more intimate way.

Mary Maynard comments that two key factors contributed towards this 'ideology of domesticity' namely: the link between the home as a consuming sphere and images of women

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(Maynard 1985). Firstly, the onset of industrialisation encouraged the move away from the home as a site of production and instead focused on the household as a consuming unit. As a result:

*The family is now regarded not as productive but as a unit of consumption for goods produced elsewhere. This helps to explain the reason for the apparent devaluation and low status of the work performed by housewives and mothers. As the family lost its core identity as a productive unit, their work was no longer valued as being seen to be integral to the production of commodities: it was not valued as being economically productive.*

(Maynard 1985: 131)

The second key factor was the establishment of the home and the private realm as the proper and natural environment for women (Maynard 1985). The men went to work, establishing themselves as the primarily ‘breadwinner’ and importantly they controlled the only source of financial income coming into the home.

For many Marxist feminists, the role and services that the housewife produces for the home and her husband was the focus of much of their early work (Oakley 1990; Walby 1993). Women were thus seen as responsible for the housework, along with caring and anticipating the needs of others in the home. Women were also encouraged to sacrifice their own time and needs in favour of their husbands and children’s demands. Food was dictated according to the male partner’s tastes and he even received the largest portion of meat (Mucott 1982; Mennell & Mucott 1985; Delphy 1995; Mucott 1995). Rosemary Deem’s early study in Milton Keynes illustrates the amount of time that women spent on housework, with little or no support from their male partners, resulting in their diminished leisure time (Deem 1995). Sallie Westwood’s study illustrates how women ‘internalised’ and accepted that their identity was linked to the home, housework and childcare (Westwood 1993). The women in her study felt that they were being criticised when she mentioned the lack of support from their husbands (Westwood 1993). Not only did their male partners benefit from this unwaged, constant labour of love – housework – but the wider economy also exploited this invisible work done by women (Walby 1993).

### 3.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed the macro, meso and micro trends that have influenced the development of the major grocery retailers and supported particular shopping attitudes and behaviours. The shopping environment has been restructured to accommodate these behaviours as well as developments in technology, for example, to enable the retailers to supply food in a more effective manner. Technological developments also entered the home environment, as consumers were able to afford items such as freezers, microwaves, dishwashers, washing machines and washer-dryers although not all of the changes were positive nor could everyone afford these home appliances. Similarly, consumers differ in their access to the financial and other resources required in order consume at these stores and thus not all consumers are equal (Cohen 2000). Together, chapters 2 and 3 have discussed the historical literature on shopping and contemporary shopping trends and analysed how they construct the ‘everyday’ shopping activity. The functional aspects of the activity that were initially encouraged with the move to self-service and the out-of-town sites have been relinquished in favour of a pleasurable, leisure environment that encourages dependence and an increase in time and money spent at the store.

The next chapter will discuss the theoretical framework selected and applied in the study.

# CHAPTER 4

## THE GORDIAN KNOT – PARADIGMS, EPISTEMOLOGY AND THEORY

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## CHAPTER 4: THE GORDIAN KNOT - PARADIGMS, EPISTEMOLOGY AND THEORY

### 4.1 Introduction

The Gordian knot:

*... gave its name to a proverbial term for a problem solvable only by bold action. In 333 BC, Alexander the Great, on his march through Anatolia, reached Gordium, the capital of Phrygia. There he was shown the chariot of the ancient founder of the city, Gordius, with its yoke lashed to the pole by means of an intricate knot with its end hidden. According to tradition, this knot was to be untied only by the future conqueror of Asia. In the popular account, probably invented as appropriate to an impetuous warrior, Alexander sliced through the knot with his sword, but, in earlier versions, he found the ends either cutting into the knot or by drawing out the pole. The phrase "cutting the Gordian knot" has thus come to denote a bold solution to a complicated problem.*

(Encyclopaedia Britannica 2001)

As this chapter intends to discuss the topics of paradigms, epistemology and theory and to cut through the complexity surrounding them, it therefore seems appropriate to include reference to the Gordian Knot in its title.

This chapter of the thesis presents the theoretical framework for the study and its overall contribution to the investigation. Since the study attempts to describe the social world of individuals, I felt it essential that I endeavoured to understand the essence of those individual experiences. Phenomenology therefore provides a foundational paradigm for this research. However, phenomenology lacks a critical perspective and does not explain the historical and socio-political contexts of those experiences. Therefore, feminist theory is incorporated to facilitate a more critical examination, and influences both the method of collection as well as the analysis of the data. This chapter discusses the importance of theory for social researchers, focusing on the contributions of positivism, hermeneutics, Marxism, and feminism. It will then consider how the field of leisure studies engages with these theories. The chapter concludes

with a discussion of the approach adopted in this research, focusing primarily on the significance of qualitative research techniques.

## 4.2 The importance of theory

Simple written descriptions of raw experience cannot adequately theorise the underlying motivations and needs that people experience, neither can they explain how these motivations and needs shape and are shaped by their social environment (Stanley 1990; Stanley & Wise 1990; Stanley & Wise 1993; Olesen 2000; Maynard & Purvis 1994; Beasley 1999). As Dorothy E. Smith comments:

*In the research context this means that so far as their everyday worlds are concerned, we rely entirely on what women tell us, what people tell us, about what they do and what happens. But we cannot rely upon them for an understanding of the relations that shape and determine the everyday. Here then is our business as social scientists for the investigation of these relations and the exploration of the ways they are presented in the everyday are and must be a specialized enterprise, the work of a social scientist.*

(Smith 1987: 110)

Thus, incorporating social theory can present both revelations and challenges for the researcher. Sociological, Marxist, feminist, and later, post-modern theories have all contributed to the field of leisure studies, influencing the practice and interpretation of investigations (Layder 1994). Ideally, the theoretical preferences should be made explicit as these have serious ramifications on the research questions, epistemology and method selected by the researcher (Pritchard 2000). For feminist researchers, in particular, it should be both a conscious and reflective task with the intention of examining the research process itself by evaluating knowledge production and theory development (Haggis 1990; Stanley 1990; Stanley & Wise 1990; Stanley & Wise 1993; Stanley 1997b). Theory, thus, provides guidance for conducting the research and enables researchers to draw out meaningful conclusions from their data, rather than merely describing the results (Henderson 1991).

Researchers should clearly indicate the theory they intend to use and how the theory will focus on the tensions between the individual and their interaction with the broader structures of society (Stanley 1990; Pritchard 2000). Dualisms within theories, such as: macro/micro; agency/structure; individual/society, are commonly applied to explain the relationship between the individual and the structures in society. Philosophical dualism is concerned with the idea that there are two fundamental elements in life – like Yin and Yang (Layder 1994; Layder 1998). Sociological dualism holds that these elements may not always be in direct opposition and are inevitably linked to each other. Thus, these elements possess their own characteristics but are simultaneously independent and dynamically interlocked into the features of our society (Layder 1994). Agency and structure are important features that have evolved into an ongoing debate evaluating the tension between the freedom of the social actor and the influence of the wider systems and structures on the social circumstances or activity. However, the researcher should be fully informed of the theoretical framework that they decide to apply and the different directions this analysis will lead them into. Before discussing the contribution of the different key theories I would like briefly to discuss paradigms or ways of knowing our social world (Henderson 1991; Oakley 2000).

### **4.3 Ways of knowing the social world**

Verification of research findings and defence of research design are an important consideration for academic scholars (Lincoln & Guba 2000). In their efforts for legitimacy the two paradigms of positivism and interpretivism are in competition for supremacy (Oakley 2000). Researchers are encouraged to make a clear choice between the two paradigms and to make this decision explicit within their written work. The key question then is, how do we know and judge the evidence that our research provides? Paradigms, as the table below outlines, provide a framework for interpreting, selecting and conducting the investigation. The word paradigm and its interpretation derive from Thomas Kuhn, who questioned the practices of the natural

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sciences and rather than settling on one definition, he applied the term in a variety of ways (Oakley 2000). Despite this inconsistency in the definition, paradigms are now considered to be the researcher's beliefs and assumptions about the world that direct the investigation (Creswell 1998; Henderson 1991; Oakley 2000). The logical or positivist paradigm endeavours to emulate the natural sciences, while the opposing paradigm is commonly referred to as the interpretive or naturalist paradigm. As the table below illustrates these paradigms can be separated into four key concepts: ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological.

**Table 4.1:** The key concepts of the interpretative paradigm

Assumption	Question	Characteristics
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is subjective, multiple, holistic, dynamic and socially constructed
Epistemological	What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?	Researcher as 'insider' and subjectivity
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Value laden and biases are present
Methodological	What is the process of research?	Inductive, emerging design and usually qualitative

Adapted from Creswell (1998) and Oakley (2000)

Despite research practices that defy the assumed alliances, the two paradigms have been typically seen to divide at the methodological stage (Oakley 2000). Quantitative methods have now become linked to positivism while qualitative methods have been closely allied with the interpretative approach (Henderson 1991). The conflict between the two paradigms is actually argued at the epistemological level and centres on the relationship between how the researcher should or should not interact with the participants (Henderson 1991; Oakley 2000; Pritchard & Morgan 2000). As with any paradigm or theory, each offers the researcher a 'way of seeing the data'. However, each can also prove problematic in gaining acceptance within the broader social

environment, and the researcher must be aware of the ‘pitfalls’ of that particular approach (Deem 1999; Pritchard 2000).

### The Contribution of Positivism

This section of the chapter will consider the contribution and criticisms of the positivist tradition. The positivist paradigm has been and still is an extremely influential philosophy for academics (Wearing 1998). Critics have been particularly scathing about the positivist tradition in the social sciences of late, which has resulted in a reluctance amongst academics to label themselves as positivist. Yet, ironically, the actual definition of the term ‘positivist’ has remained unclear (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Maynard & Purvis 1994; Oakley 2000). For many, the mere application of quantitative methods has been viewed as a key characteristic of the positivist tradition and this myth has remained relatively unchallenged (Bryman 1988; Maynard & Purvis 1994; Oakley 2000). The key tenets are seen as linked to the natural sciences approach and methods. Observable phenomena are viewed as the only valid knowledge, and deductive research and objectivity are paramount (Maynard & Purvis 1994; Oakley 2000). Positivist academics have a firm belief that reality is ‘out there’, can be captured, studied and understood, and that objective accounts can be given of how the world functions.

Classical positivism has remained relatively unchanged since its development during the eighteenth century and is illustrated in leisure studies through the functionalist perspective (Wearing 1998; Pritchard 2000). Positivism developed as a desire to merge scientific principles with the social world, and positivists firmly believe that there is very little difference between these two states. There is a conviction that the actual practices associated with the natural sciences can be easily transferred to the social world and deepen scientists’ understanding of human nature and motivations. Traditional large-scale surveys are often used, along with mathematical models and statistics, to assess validity and reliability in terms of percentage of agreement or deviation from the probable norm. However, these methods are not exclusively

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linked to the positivist paradigm and other techniques such as interviews and focus groups, which have been seen as solely qualitative, can be applied to the positivist mode of study. As with any paradigm, positivist academics are not a homogeneous group and there are variations in beliefs and practices that depend on which theory is applied.

Talcott Parsons' work, building on Emile Durkheim's research, has dominated functionalist theorists during the twentieth century (Layder 1994; Wearing 1998; Pritchard 2000). Despite the decline in his popularity, Talcott Parsons has been significant in developing a dialogue with which to position alternative theories of social life (Layder 1994) and draws on a number of different writers (including Emile Durkheim) and attempts to construct a general theory of social action and systems. Four different layers of society are identified and analysed in Parson's theory, with each part of these layers connected to the other three parts, and all contributing to social life (Wearing 1998). This model is useful to the researcher as it separates easily the complex, interconnectedness of everyday life and provides an ideal analytical tool with which to investigate these complicated relationships. It should also be noted, of course, that this is also the model's downfall, as social life is not easily separated from the processes which have developed and re-produced these practices (Layder 1994). Essentially, the model examines the influence of certain common values, beliefs and roles in society that people embrace and can accept. Talcott Parsons' work stresses the role of collectively held beliefs and agreed values. In essence his work emphasises the benefits and rewards of the system for the individual as long as they agree to the status-roles that are assigned to them (Layder 1994; Wearing 1998). Parsons' work thus emphasises the value of consensus and underplays conflict and individual differences between people.

Critics of positivism have argued that the analysis provided does not offer any critical examination of issues of power, class and gender. In many instances it is atheoretical and the phenomena are separated, sometimes intentionally, from the wider political and social context

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(Greenwood & Levin 2000). Researchers from the positivist paradigm using quantitative methods are rarely called to defend their work, as the inherent assumption is that their validity is more reliable than other paradigms that almost exclusively use qualitative methods (Greenwood & Levin 2000; Oakley 2000). For academics seeking to change the political environment, these large-scale surveys (with their statistical analysis) can of course, provide numerous benefits through illustrating to organizations the lack of provision or the extent of the problem (Maynard & Purvis 1994). As Ann Oakley notes:

*How does one judge, the sanity of different sorts of evidence? In a bureaucratic and literate culture, what is written down in documentary records (the certificate of discharge from the mental hospital) may seem more trustworthy than people's own labelling of themselves, but of course questions need to be asked about what such 'facts' signify.*

(Oakley 2000: 25)

Thus, issues of control and inequalities, with reference to class and gender, are not fully addressed. Nor are the historical and political processes that helped produce the current structures, roles, beliefs and values. The tradition also demands that the researcher is objective and impartial in her or his approach to the subject and the participants. Meaning is either neglected or ignored, as the researcher's own subjectivity is not included while their participants are required to adhere to the research questions and are not encouraged to deviate from the structured framework. Despite these criticisms, however, the dominance of this paradigm has encouraged these characteristics to linger as the only valid and appropriate way of conducting research.

### The Contribution of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics philosophy is a radically different way of understanding and investigating an individual's behaviour and attitudes compared to the characteristics of positivism (Schwandt 2000). This paradigm argues that we are all involved in the act of understanding and an examination of the social world requires a completely different approach from the techniques applied in the natural sciences. The approach focuses on the role of the researcher, examining

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our understanding of events and how we derive meaning from those situations. This paradigm grapples with understanding not only the meaning of the social action, text, or experience, but also the interpreter's role in producing or reproducing that meaning. The role of the researcher changes from being an isolated, passive observer to an individual who becomes engaged in a critical analysis of the phenomenon because "*understanding requires the engagement of one's biases*" (Schwandt 2000: 195). The act of understanding simultaneously encourages the researcher to understand and interpret the phenomena. Neither can this interpretation be separated from the wider socio-political and historical processes which have reproduced the meaning in the action or experience.

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Hermeneutics would consider positivism as 'naïve' and its proponents argue that there can never be a correct interpretation of human actions and experience (Schwandt 2000; Maynard & Purvis 1994). Rather, we are always in an act of understanding. Thus, meaning is a lived phenomena and one that is liable to alter depending on the situation and the individual. Qualitative methods are the preferred tools in this tradition, as the researcher can have immediate access to the event, action or experience, and have access to vast amounts of rich discussion for interpretation (Pritchard, 2000). For feminist researchers applying this framework, the interpretations of both the researcher and participant become an integral part of the investigation and the researcher can become involved as a participant in the research project (Maynard & Purvis 1994; Stanley & Wise 1993; Alterio 1998). This philosophy is not about problem solving, and for many academics (particularly feminists) this is a major obstacle. The power issues in society and the wider structures, which affect the individual are not analysed nor do they form the focus of the research. Instead, its significant contribution lies in its recognition that both the researcher and participant are involved in the act of interpretation.

### The Contribution of Marxism

Unlike functionalist and interpretive scholars, who obscure issues of power, Marxist researchers have critically examined social class, race, ethnicity and gender in a capitalist society. A key theme within Marxism is that the work seeks to bring about social change or emancipation through an investigation of the historical and economic materialism and the domination of certain groups (Layder 1994; Wearing 1998). As with other theories, there are different variants of Marxism, such as structural, socialist feminist, and critical theory. They all seek to examine the inequalities in society, which constrain access for some groups to certain resources. The structures in society represent the needs and interests of the dominant group who achieve this position through consensus or through the coercion of subordinate groups. The prevailing ideology helps the dominant group achieve and maintain these positions of power. The purpose of ideology is that it presents people with models of appropriate behaviour and stresses the 'naturalness' of the activity. Individuals are presented with a set of common-sense beliefs and ways of viewing the world and their position in society, which justifies the power relations and social position (Woodward & Green 1988). For many women this has led them to:

*...internalize the idea that womanhood ties them to primary responsibility for the care and well-being of others, in particular male partners and children, but also other dependent or elderly relatives too.*

(Woodward & Green 1988: 133)

Researchers who have drawn on these theories have been able to demonstrate the effect that these structures, particularly class and gender, have on the individual's life choices.

The key contributions of Marx's materialism is that history has a central place in the analysis, drawing attention to the emergence of power within society and the different groups that characterise that society (Layder 1994). History is thus seen as a dynamic process in which different groups are in conflict and continually struggling to achieve economic control, using a variety of hegemonic practices to sustain them. Thus, the issues of power and domination are not neglected and become central tenets of the approach. Marxist approaches have been

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criticised as too deterministic, focusing on the structures of society and neglecting individual agency. Betsy Wearing (1998) and later Chris Rojek (2000) for example, note that with regard to the socialist feminist framework, women are positioned as victims unable to achieve any change in their life. This criticism would seem to be unfair, as socialist feminists do call for change and indicate ways that action could be implemented by both individuals and the wider structures (Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990). Overall, the major strength of the Marxist approach lies in its examination of the historical process, power, and the ideology and hegemonic practices that subordinate particular groups.

### The Contribution of Feminism

For many the question of “what is feminism?” and how a feminist study differs from mainstream approaches still remains unanswered (Delmar 1986; Beasley 1999). Feminism has many different perspectives but all carry certain themes, which are evident in both the theoretical discussions and in the research process itself. Feminist thought seeks social change and emancipation for women as they suffer from the implicit and explicit practices of a patriarchal society (Reinharz 1992; Jackson 1993). Traditional ‘malestream’ theory is perceived as inadequate, as women are excluded and marginalised in Western social and political thought. ‘Malestream’ thought has been critiqued and deconstructed by feminists to reveal underlying gendered character and assumptions (Stanley & Wise 1993; Olesen 2000). Feminists focus their research on women’s lives, examining how they are oppressed and seek to benefit women at an individual level and / or at a broader social level (Green, Hebron & Woodward 1995). It is generally accepted that there is no one feminist method, so a feminist study might not apply any particular method or tool. However, it is crucial that the study provide an account of the epistemology and methodology producing “*knowing feminisms*” (Stanley 1997a: 1) that is both action-orientated and analytical. As Helen Roberts comments at the end of her research:

*Feminist research, then, is concerned not only with making women visible, but with theoretical and methodological issues, with problems of sexual divisions in*

*the research team and the research process, and with the language of research findings and the way in which these may be used when they are published.*  
(Roberts 1981: 26)

Despite the common threads within feminist research, it should also be noted that it is a diverse, complex framework and even within the same perspective there are disagreements over certain issues, such as ‘voice’ or solidarity (Kirsch 1999; Olesen 2000). There has been a growing recognition that the term ‘women’ should not assume that all women have similar experiences, interpretations or concerns (Reinharz 1992). Lesbian and black feminists have heavily criticised much of the early feminist work for their homogeneous approach and neglect of women who did not fit into the white middle-class image (Phoenix 1990; Nain 1993; Phoenix 1993). Recently, work has addressed this neglect and investigated the fractured complexities of women’s lives, investigating the multiple positions from queer theory to disabled women as a social group (Olesen 2000).

This next section of the chapter will now explain briefly, feminist methodology, epistemology and finally theory. Feminist methodology is the study of the tools and techniques, which are applied in the research process. Mary Fonow and Judith Cook (1991) along with Geta E. Kirsch (1999) have stated that a feminist study should consider: the researched – researcher relationship; the historical, cultural and social processes which impinge on the participants’ experiences; representation; the limitations of the study and its interpretations.

This comprehensive list effectively encourages researchers to reflect upon the whole process and consider their involvement and intellectual development. Feminists thus make explicit the hidden agendas and problems that mainstream research seek to ignore (Pritchard 2000). Feminist research starts with the everyday experiences of the research participants and the researcher’s attributes and involvement in the study (Reinharz 1992; Stanley & Wise 1993; Olesen 2000). The researcher’s character, actions and experiences are reflected in the choice of questions and the direction of the study. The aim for feminist researchers is to acknowledge this

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and openly state perspectives and attitudes, which in turn, are also reflections of broader structures and practices (Kirsch 1999; Olesen 2000). Feminists also seek approaches, which minimise harm and control within the study and encourage researchers to collaborate and/or provide feedback to the participants (Janesick 1994). The participant thus verifies the representation of their private knowledge and experiences in the more public, interpretation of the researcher. Demystifying the research process, encouraging participants to collaborate and keeping them informed or offering further advice if needed, are all part of the researcher/researched relationship. Analysing the participant's experiences within feminist theory and a critical examination of the historical, cultural and social processes will “demonstrate the reach of the political into areas typically assumed to be personal” (Reinharz 1992:249). Finally, feminist research typically acknowledges its limitations and emphasises that the meaning inherent in the study can be interpreted in different ways (Bartky 1977; Stanley & Wise 1993).

A feminist research study is guided by feminist epistemology and theory and may also include a critical application of some mainstream theories, such as those of Karl Marx or Michael Foucault for example (Hartmann 1987; McNay 1992). Epistemology is a theory regarding knowledge and verifies the ‘truth’ or ‘how we know what we know’. This framework details what is considered as knowledge, what versions are valued and who can make these statements. There has been much criticism and scepticism over feminist epistemology and theory, with some academics such as Chris Rojek, for example, blaming feminism for the stagnation in leisure studies (Rojek 2000). Dorothy E. Smith (1987) and Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1990) suggest that ethnomethodology and, importantly for this study, phenomenology are “*useful tools for unpacking such analytical processes, because these approaches share a concern with methodological issues as well as those of theory*” (Liz Stanley & Sue Wise 1990: 23). Feminist epistemology, however, questions the nature of knowledge, how it is produced, who verifies it, and what kinds of truths are acceptable (Stanley 1990; Stanley & Wise 1990; Reinharz 1992).

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**Table 4:2 Feminist epistemologies**

<b>Empiricism</b>	Adheres to existing research norms and standards, sees that it is possible to remove sexism and other biases from the research process. The 'add women & stir' approach.
<b>Standpoint</b>	Tries to understand women's lives from a committed feminist perspective.
<b>Postmodernism</b>	Critical of grand theories, focuses on multiple voices, stories, and flux.
<b>Fractured Foundationalism</b>	A variant of standpoint and social constructionism but accepts that there is a social reality, analyses social structure and recognises the material differences of different groups of women.

Adapted from Maynard (1994) and Stanley and Wise (1993)

As the table above illustrates, there are four key variants of feminist epistemologies. Although Sandra Harding only mentions three feminist epistemologies, I would add Liz Stanley and Sue Wise's fractured foundationalist (Maynard 1994; Olesen 2000). Firstly, feminist empiricism relates to researchers who apply the same epistemology and data collection methods as their male colleagues (Harding 1991; Stanley & Wise 1993). They challenge the actual practices of the method rather than the norms of inquiry, arguing that through following rigorous research methods we will eradicate sexist beliefs. Feminist empiricists thus suggest that the failure of functionalism lies in the method of data collection and analysis rather than the context, modes of thinking and beliefs regarding reality. Sandra Harding (1991) has extolled the benefits that this perspective can bring, although she also discusses how the approach neglects the social construction of knowledge and how its proponents fail to question the andocentric beliefs that underpin much of their work.

Feminist standpoint has provided a useful alternative to this 'add women and stir' approach and attempts to understand women from their lives and experiences (Stanley & Wise 1993). Rather

than being satisfied by a pure description of women's experiences we need to articulate them through theory. Dorothy E. Smith (1987) defines feminist standpoint as:

*...a method that, at the outset of inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds.*

(Smith 1987: 107)

Sandra Harding explains and defines feminist standpoint epistemology more clearly when she argues:

*...that not just opinions but also a culture's best beliefs - what it calls knowledge are socially situated. The distinct features of women's situation in a gender-stratified society are being used as resources...these distinctive resources, which are not used by conventional researchers, that enabled feminism to produce empirically more accurate descriptions and theoretically richer explanations...*

(Harding 1991: 119)

Standpoint theory, unlike empiricism, argues at the epistemological level and from a committed feminist perspective. Researchers applying this approach will start their investigations with the everyday lives of women and examine how the activities they undertake are devalued and rendered invisible in society (Harding 1991). The investigation will not rest merely with the experience of women and the researcher is expected to understand how and why these activities or behaviours have developed. Thus, experience is viewed as a social construction and women make sense of their realities within this framework and may find it difficult to step out of this process. The researcher is thus charged with analysing and deconstructing this reality. It is through emancipation, struggles and reflection on these processes that the social relations emerge (Harding 1991). Feminist standpoint states that, as 'others', women (and women researchers) are at a distance from the mainstream but close enough to evaluate the andocentric patterns of belief and behaviour (Harding 1991; Stanley & Wise 1993). Through their oppression women, as 'others', bring "*a combination of nearness and remoteness, concern and indifference*" (Harding 1991:124).

Feminists who apply a post-modern perspective in their work have criticised the assumptions of those who use standpoint theory (Harding 1991). Postmodernism focuses on the individual, multiple voices, language, power, symbols, culture and frequently applies the work of Michael Foucault (Rojek 1997; Rojek 2000). Feminists who use a post-modern perspective criticise the assumptions of standpoint theory that those people who occupy the ‘oppressed’ category have a privileged view of reality (Harding 1991; Stanley & Wise 1993). Instead postmodernists argue that there are multiple voices and versions of reality. Feminists who use postmodernism have in turn been criticised for the confusion and lack of clarity their work brings to the feminist project (Harding 1991). They have also been criticised for relying on ‘malestream’ theories, such as Michael Foucault’s for example, as he did not consider gender as the crucial analytical concept in his work (Harding 1991).

Just as the postmodernists, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise have also criticised the feminist standpoint perspective for its neglect of the diversity and multiple experiences of women (Olesen 2000; Stanley 1990; Stanley & Wise 1993). Drawing on Dorothy E. Smith’s work (1987) and on social constructionism they have however proposed their own ‘feminist fractured foundationalist epistemology’, which is a “*distinct epistemological position*” (Stanley & Wise 1993:8). As Table 4.3 indicates, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993) agree with Dorothy E. Smith’s (1987) comment that the researcher should try to be on the same level as those being researched. They also argue that feminists should not restrict themselves to solely investigating women but that men should also be included in the research project. For Liz Stanley and Sue Wise knowledge is both socially constructed and importantly indexical in both its content and structure (Stanley & Wise 1993). This refers to the idea that particular groups in society will use and interpret the same concepts or ‘tools’ differently (Young 1990). This has ramifications for the researcher observing and interpreting the participant’s everyday life and for how the researcher presents her or his work (Stanley & Wise 1993). As Liz Stanley and Sue Wise comment, how we know “... *that particular behaviours constitute ‘gender’, ‘class’, ‘race’*,

'industrial disputes' and so on is, however, largely a theoretical rather than experiential problem". They suggest that this "... is because theoretical categories in the social sciences are only rarely everyday ways of categorizing the world. Even where the worlds are the same the meaning rarely is" (Stanley and Wise 1993: 155-156).

**Table 4.3: The key tenets of fractured foundationalism**

Researcher and researched should be on " <i>the same critical plane</i> "
Research should investigate both men and women
Research originates from the " <i>organizational and intellectual location</i> " of the researcher
Knowledge is socially situated, indexical and competing
Research should examine structure, " <i>repetitive regularities and inequalities in social life</i> " and investigate how these affect people.
There are common worlds of women BUT importantly there are differences and researchers should be aware of " <i>the ways in which differently located women can gain and exercise power and authority, including in relation to men</i> "
Research uses a social constructionist and " <i>non-essentialist notion of 'self'</i> "
Research should recognise that there is a social reality, which we construct " <i>as having objective existence above and beyond competing constructions and interpretations of it; and it recognizes that social life is in good part composed of discussions, debates and controversies concerning precisely what this objective reality consists of.</i> "

Adapted from Stanley and Wise (1993: 8)

The feminist fractured foundationalist framework also recognises that reality is there but is socially mediated, constraining people into preconceived categories and thus also rejects essentialist ideas concerning identity and gender (Stanley & Wise 1993). In addition, rather than envisaging people as passive, the researcher also examines the social structure and processes to identify how participants gain and exercise power. Children, for example will not always be powerless, in certain situations they may exercise power over other children or adults, and eventually they reach adulthood, gaining and exercising power in different contexts. The

final key point is that this framework recognises that within categories people are not homogenous, but have different material differences and experiences.

As this study has progressed feminist epistemology and theory have become central tenets in the application and interpretation of the research. Although the study initially started from a more functionalist framework it was during the latter stages of the data collection that feminist literature became influential. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise's (1993) work has been particularly influential in the construction and interpretation of this study. A commitment to social change, a continual critical examination of the everyday realities of the participants within a broader analysis, and an examination of the research process producing an account that is reflexive of both theory and action underpins the development of this work.

All the major theories outlined above (i.e. positivism, hermeneutics, Marxism and feminism) have produced different ideas regarding the relationship between society and the individual (Layder 1994). The key question, however, of how an individual operates within these social processes still remains largely unanswered. The tensions and dogmatic distance between those theorists who insist that the focus should be on the structural process and those who favour more of a micro approach are still apparent (Stanley & Wise 1990). These debates and disputes within the academic community have led to a crisis for scholars and within leisure studies, a fear of stagnation and ghettoisation (Deem 1999). Rosemary Deem (1999) has suggested that we must take an interdisciplinary approach to bridge this gap, a view supported by others:

*Philosophers of social science have discussed a number of ways of constructing theories and making knowledge-claims. These specify who are knowers and what conditions are constitutive of 'knowledge' rather than mere 'belief', and also specify how to deal with competing knowledge-claims ... the alternative, which we find intellectually as well as ethically preferable, is to assess what is being said in its own terms, against its own specification of 'knowledge', 'truth' and so forth.*

(Stanley & Wise 1990: 46)

As feminist researchers have noted, the researcher should be wary of ill-conceived collections of theories, investigate their knowledge claims, and examine the inequalities between groups in society.

#### 4.4 Ways of knowing leisure

The dominant paradigm within leisure studies, both in the UK and USA, has been the functionalist perspective and it has only been comparatively recently that the interpretative paradigm has been accepted within the field. As Alan Tomlinson comments, leisure studies is still very much a divided area with much heated debate and academic conflict between the two paradigms (Tomlinson 1999). Within UK leisure studies the sociological school of thought has been influential whereas in the USA the field is dominated by a need to apply research findings to the 'real world' (Coalter 1997). Ways of knowing leisure have also been influenced by developments in other social sciences such as cultural geography (Bell & Valentine 1997). Marxist and feminist scholars have challenged and opened up the traditional functionalist perspective and instead focused on issues of power and women. As Rosemary Deem comments:

*What is distinctive about the feminist contribution is the endeavour to set the study of leisure firmly in the context of women's oppression and gender relations and the concern to bring about a positive change in the social position of women.*

(Deem 1988: 257)

#### De-constructing leisure research epistemologies

The dualism of paid work and leisure and the blurring of boundaries between the two, have been studied extensively within leisure studies. In fact, the frame of reference for many of the studies is not only definitions and ideas regarding paid work, but also a reliance on men's interpretations of leisure experiences. As the literature review in chapter 2 demonstrated, definitions of leisure were bound up with notions of activity, time and pleasure, all of which were problematic for women. Thus, different epistemologies in leisure studies have determined the focus of the researcher and whose leisure has been studied. It would be useful then to

discuss how the different perspectives of functionalism, hermeneutics and feminism have contributed to the development of leisure theory.

### **Leisure and positivism**

Functionalism, as exemplified in the work of Stanley Parker and Kenneth Roberts (Parker 1983; Parker 1993; Roberts 1997a; Roberts 1997b), dominated the early leisure studies research agenda. This approach is usually atheoretical, practitioner-orientated, and views leisure from a male perspective (Deem 1986). Women or other individuals, who differ from white males, are seen as a variant but are given little serious attention (Deem 1986; Wearing 1998). Sociological perspectives have also been extremely influential and helped define the concept and expectations of 'leisure' within this framework. Thus, leisure is seen as surplus time available to the individual after their paid, full-time work commitments, and performs the function of rewarding them, as well as socialising the person to accept society's norms and values (Rojek 1997). Leisure is seen as enhancing group norms and attributes the individual with freedom of choice. Despite the emergence of other theoretical frameworks, which have informed the leisure discipline, functionalists (such as Kenneth Roberts) still defend their position and comment that:

*The overarching recurrent issue in accounting for different uses of leisure by different social groups is to separate the contributions of choice and opportunity. The volume and structure of leisure time, and the cash at people's disposal will always account for some variations, leaving a residue to be explained in terms of the particular demands (the value aspirations) of the groups in question.*

(Roberts 1997b: 370 - 371)

The main weakness of this theory is that individuals are perceived as having some sort of autonomy and any conflict is minimised.

### **Leisure and hermeneutics**

Interpretive epistemologies, such as hermeneutics, argue that the social world is more complex and should be approached from a holistic framework. This is in direct opposition to the functionalist approach, as the interpretive leisure researcher would consider the language,

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beliefs, experiences, behaviour, and emotions of the leisure participant (and non-participant) they were investigating. The researcher would also consider the research participant as a reflective individual trying to make sense of their environment and leisure experience (Schwandt 2000). Symbolic interactionism has greatly influenced leisure theorists in North America, and is exemplified in the works of John R. Kelly and Karla Henderson (Henderson 1991; Henderson et al. 1996; Kelly 1996). This framework has been seen as a key difference between North American and UK leisure researchers (Coalter 1997). The North American approach tends to focus on the individual and their meanings of leisure, while the UK researchers investigate leisure as a situation that reproduces wider social inequalities and power struggles (Coalter 1997). The theories of George Herbert Mead and Margaret Mead are used to investigate leisure and the participant is considered as an active, reflective individual and “...is the expert and the attempt is to describe their vocabularies, ways of looking, and sense of the important and the unimportant” (Henderson, 1991: 45). Symbolic interactionists emphasises the individual and have focused on the positive benefits and empowerment issues of leisure.

However, symbolic interactionists have been criticised for focusing on the micro level at the expense of neglecting the influence of the wider social structures in society (Wearing 1998). Within leisure research, scholars using this perspective have tended to focus on white, middle-class participants and again ignored issues of diversity. Feminists using this approach, such as Karla Henderson (Henderson et al. 1996) for example, hold that women are in control of their lives and with some help or time they can remove the constraints that restrict their leisure participation. However, a further criticism of this perspective (particularly levelled at North American researchers such as Karla Henderson) has been their over-reliance on social roles and the socialisation process to the detriment of investigating power and control issues.

### Leisure and feminist critical perspectives

Over the past twenty years, feminist approaches have played a significant role in the development and understanding of leisure meanings and experiences (Deem 1999). The empirical and theoretical work has investigated the concept and role of leisure and informed public policy. However, there is a divide within the leisure field as the majority of scholars either avoid tackling the issue of gender and power, or have a "*grudging acceptance that gender is relevant, in some unspecified way, to many women, and some men*" (Deem 1999: 163). Feminist leisure scholars in North America have produced different accounts based on social roles and constraints, and have explored the positive elements of leisure for women (Henderson 1991; Henderson *et al.* 1996). Feminist analysis within the UK has offered a more holistic and insightful approach, investigating power and patriarchy within the wider structures of class, race and ethnicity (Deem 1986; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990). Leisure and gender are thus viewed as an integral part and reinforcement of the broader social relations that are inherently gendered in their structure.

UK leisure feminists have used a variety of approaches but have tended to be more critical in their approach than their North American counterparts. These studies assert that society is inherently structured around gender, with men as the dominant and privileged group within society. Marxist and socialist feminists have been heavily represented in the majority of leisure scholars' work, as they examine patriarchy and the structures that constrain women's leisure. Although gender is the central concern, other diversities are also investigated, such as class and race for example. The much-cited empirical work of Eileen Green, Sandra Hebron and Diana Woodward (1990) draws on Stuart Hall's work and examines cultural domination through hegemony. Hegemony is important in this present study because the women's own perceptions of appropriate leisure activities are not 'natural' but have become legitimised and endorsed by the dominant groups in society (Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990). It would be difficult to provide a fuller understanding of women's leisure without also analysing their lives as a whole

and importantly, their relationships with men. Thus, as Liz Stanley and Sue Wise notes, men as the dominant half of the partnership within a heterosexual household should also be included in the study (Stanley & Wise 1993).

Other feminists within leisure studies have criticised the Marxist and socialist feminist perspectives for an over-reliance on patriarchy, rigid structures, and the concept of power. Betsy Wearing, for example, argues that patriarchy is outdated and neglects the diversities and differences between women:

*The use of the term patriarchy by feminists in the 1970s served the theoretical purpose of highlighting gender differences in power which extend beyond unidimensional economic causes. Its weakness has been in its assumption of universal gender differences within one historical period.*

(Wearing 1998: 32 - 33)

In Betsy Wearing's own work she found that the rigid structures of motherhood could not always be easily applied to her own research participants (Wearing 1998). Traditionally power is viewed as a top-down, oppressive force and situates women as the victims of society with very little control over their lives (Wearing 1998; Rojek 2000). However, I would agree with Sheila Scraton, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, who argue that the everyday lives of women have not altered and are still subject to the same structural expectations and constraints as the 1970s empirical work illustrated (Scraton 1994; Stanley & Wise 1993). Women are not victims; rather they find different strategies in their lives to gain some control and power for themselves. Feminist theory continues to contribute to the development of leisure studies and actively encourages and challenges mainstream approaches within the discipline – pulling them out of the ghetto, encouraging cross discipline work and contributing to public policy (Scraton 1994; Deem 1999).

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The theories discussed briefly in this chapter have played a significant role in developing and examining the role that leisure plays in society. Leisure studies have been emancipated from its very early functionalist approach in the late 1960s, which sought to inform business and public

policy (Wearing 1998). Now the leisure academic has a choice of theories with which to analyse leisure and the meaning individuals place on the activity or experience. Socialist feminists have made a significant contribution to the development of leisure theory in the UK. From this perspective leisure research focused analysis on the structures and the inequalities inherent within them. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University has also played a pivotal role in the study of leisure. It critiqued high and low culture and brought into focus the validity of investigating mass culture and commercial leisure.

Currently, leisure researchers have been concerned about the crisis or stagnation of leisure theory (Coalter 1997; Aitchison 2000). This crisis has either been seen as a “...*crisis of theoretical confidence*” or as a “...*reluctance to engage with poststructuralist discourse*” (Aitchison 2000: 127). Structuralism and feminism are no longer seen as relevant and instead postmodernism is envisaged as the way forward (Coalter 1997). Postmodernism highlights the importance of the individual, multiple voices, language, power, symbols, and culture (Rojek 1997; Rojek 2000) and rejects the collective theorising of feminism (Aitchison 2000). Investigations applying this approach tend to concentrate on the more commercial public leisure spaces rather than the everyday reality of the individual. As Sheila Scraton acknowledges:

*Issues of time, space, sexuality, regulation, control, power remain important in the 1990s and need to be further explored. By turning our leisure gaze onto the public arena the gendered reality of the hidden private world becomes once more invisible and ignored.*

(Scranton 1994: 259)

However, all of these theories offer partial explanations and the researcher should be aware of the limitations of their chosen theory (Stanley & Wise 1993). Postmodernism presents itself in an inaccessible style and as well as focusing on the large-scale public leisure spaces it does not provide any definitive answers (Scranton 1994).

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#### 4.5 Adopting a feminist approach

This study attempts to bridge the gap between leisure and consumption, investigating the power issues in both the domestic, private sphere, and the more public arena of the grocery shopping experience (Deem 1999; Slater 1997). I will use fractured foundationalism to explore the consumer's experiences of grocery shopping, with the intention of investigating the power relations within the household (Harding 1987; Stanley & Wise 1993; Maynard & Purvis 1994). Since the work of Dorothy E. Smith, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise is particularly insightful and influential in this context, I have set this study within a feminist framework (Smith 1987 & 1999; Stanley 1990; Stanley & Wise 1990; Stanley & Wise 1993; Stanley 1994; Stanley 1997a; Stanley 1997b).

A feminist framework does not prescribe appropriate methods, as there are no distinct methods for feminism, but it does require the researcher to engage in both theory and 'action' (Stanley & Wise 1993; Kelly, Burton & Regan 1994; Kirsch 1999). Although feminist theory is not homogeneous, as there are different 'voices' and disagreements, there are certain common characteristics that all feminist factions share. As Virgina Olesen comments:

*Feminists use a variety of qualitative styles, but share the assumptions held generally by qualitative or interpretative researchers that interpretative human actions, whether found in women's reports of experience or in cultural products of reports of experience (film and so on), can be the focus of research.*  
(Oleson 1994: 158)

According to Mary Fonow and Judith Cook (1991), there are four characteristics that are prevalent in feminist research: reflexivity; action orientation; emotions; everyday life. Moreover, feminist accounts typically are concerned with how knowledge is produced, who produces it and for whom. The researcher cannot be divorced from the account because they are instrumental in the whole research process and any problems that they have affect them, their emotions, and the research process too. The researcher, the study and the participants, and any

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problems are made explicit for the reader (Woodward & Chisholm 1981). Thus the researcher's reflexive account is incorporated into the study as:

*One's self can't be left behind, it can only be omitted from discussions and written accounts of the research process. But it is an omission, a failure to discuss something which has been present within the research itself. ...we would insist on the absolute reality of this: that being alive involves us in emotions and involvements; and in doing research we cannot leave behind what it is to be a person alive in the world.*

(Stanley & Wise 1993: 161)

This study, in the tradition of feminist research, investigates the situation at hand - the taken-for-granted UK grocery shopping experience and evaluates whether this activity can be termed leisure. It explores this activity that has traditionally been viewed as women's work, particularly in the retail marketing literature. The participants are white, middle class couples, living in South Wales, with a car and with at least one partner working. As advocated by Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993), I interviewed both partners to investigate the power relations in the household. I then analysed this data in the broader context, in particular evaluating the role and influence of the retailer. My research seeks to encourage participants to collaborate and 'democratise' the research. The limitations and difficulties I faced in trying to conduct a feminist enquiry are also acknowledged, recognising that: "*...the realities of the research process are of course far muddier and more confused than this bald statement implies*" (Woodward & Chisholm 1981: 183).

The research process has been described as an intellectual journey and I would agree as I have reflected on different issues and moved from my initial functionalist framework towards a more feminist approach (Haggis 1990). My experiences, the epistemological and ethical debates raised in the works of feminist scholars have provided an analytical framework with which to examine the data but also just as importantly, the research process and my role in that process (Duelli Klein 1983; Clough 1994; Haggis 1990; Maynard & Purvis 1994; Maynard 1994). In order to investigate these broader issues, the research process should start by examining the

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individual because the beliefs, opinions, and the cultural resources used by an individual are both socially situated and stratified by gender (Stanley & Wise 1990; DeVault 1999). However, the everyday world cannot be understood merely by describing it at this micro level. Rather, it needs to be analysed within these broader structures. This study examines the household, investigating the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of leisure of both partners. Data from both partners provides a context for these experiences, and the men's and women's attitudes towards leisure and shopping are contrasted (Stanley & Wise 1993).

As a feminist study should also seek some form of social change or emancipation, this research will attempt to illustrate the powerful relations not only in the domestic sphere between partners, but also the role of the UK grocery retailer. A key dilemma for any feminist research is establishing the boundaries of the researcher/researched relationship (Smith 1987). The transcripts and this written document are all interpreted and written by me and, as Dorothy E. Smith (1987) has argued, the role of researcher as interpreter is a one-sided affair. The researcher's experiences, attitudes and beliefs directly affect the research process and, as feminist scholars have noted, the difficulties are in trying to establish a non-hierarchical relationship with the research participants (Kirsch 1999). My previous experience in conducting research for my undergraduate degree produced this dilemma and trying to keep within these boundaries was difficult. This experience has enabled me to reflect on the appropriate way to begin and end the researcher/researched relationship (Smith 1987). With emotional research topics, researchers have provided access to counselling procedures or advice to the participants (DeVault 1999). I did not envisage this happening in my research but this was of course, subject to revision in light of experience (Stanley & Wise 1990). Changes also occurred at a more personal level, as I reflect on my own discomfort in terms of culture and class and the reasons why I decided to choose these particular participants. As Liz Stanley and Sue Wise also note:

*Whether we like it or not, researchers remain human beings complete with the usual assembly of feelings, failings and moods. And all of these things influence how we feel and understand what is going on. Our consciousness is always the*

*medium through which research occurs; there is no method or techniques of doing research other than through the medium of the researcher.*

(Stanley & Wise 1993: 157)

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise argue that to overcome this dilemma the researcher should explicitly state their “*organizational and intellectual location*” as this provides the reader (and researcher) with a context in which the research is constructed and analysed (Stanley & Wise 1993: 8). I concur with this approach (see also Pritchard 2000) and below have provided my biographical details to expose my previous experiences that affected the selection of the topic and the data gathering process:

I was born in Glasgow, Scotland in a working class background. My parents were interested in Socialism and at a later date my father returned to university. When I was four years old we moved to Northampton in England and later (when I was fifteen) we moved to Caerphilly in South Wales. In July of 1998, at the age of twenty-nine, I was offered an academic post in New Zealand and have now been living here for three years with my husband and children.

My initial degree in Communication Studies introduced me to a variety of areas and provided me with an opportunity to reflect on experiences during my life that I had been previously dissatisfied with but unable to ‘name’. Here I was introduced to: language; culture; media; sociology; communication. While completing my degree I worked for Tesco’s part-time for two and a half years, rising to the rank of checkout supervisor. Later, due to the central Cardiff store closing, the company found me a position at Marks and Spencer, as a part time supervisor in the menswear department.

I entered the world of work and did a variety of jobs but I never really enjoyed them. I decided to have two children, became bored and frustrated by the way women with children are treated and the stereotypical roles that are expected from us. After completing a postgraduate course in teaching - part-time P.G.C.E. (Further Education) - I embarked on an M.Phil programme and later transferred to a Ph.D programme.

I was employed as a research student at University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) and while there I also taught some of the undergraduate courses. In 1998 I became a full-time lecturer at the University of Waikato in the Marketing Department. Finally, in January of 2000 I was offered my current post in the Management Communication department at the University of Waikato.

#### 4.6 Reflexive postscript

As researchers, we learn not only from our lived experiences, but also from others' narratives of their lives. In other words, these memories and recollections of events can enable us to learn and progress from that context. The knowledge we have acquired from each situation is both situational and indexical and patterns with which we are familiar may resonate for us within similar environments (Stanley & Wise 1993). This written thesis is a reflection of a number of those experiences. These include my own experiences, together with those of the study participants, my supervisors and the thesis examiners - not to mention those of our colleagues, students and families. It would be impossible to replicate the whole experience of this thesis and generalise to other situations. Instead, I recognise that I have learnt that reality, truth and gender are social constructions and I thus reject positivism and traditional conceptions of Cartesian dualisms. Starting with the material lives of women encourages us to view them as active participants and to confront their diverse experiences, as well as contradictions that co-exist in the process (Stanley & Wise 1993). Thus, there are no essentialisms, and gender pervades every aspect of our society, from the political, social, cultural to our intimate day-to-day lives. All of these issues are central to the feminist investigation and also inform the methodology and finally the methods that have been applied in this study.

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#### 4.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed the contribution of the key social science paradigms to the development of leisure theory and considered their appropriateness for this thesis. This chapter has underscored the importance of applying theory to the research project and illustrated how social theories can illuminate different facets of the leisure experience. It has discussed how early leisure research was dominated by functionalism and an andocentric emphasis. Later, Marxism and feminism gained prominence and their analysis informed researchers of leisure inequalities and the problematic definition of 'leisure' and 'free time'. The gaps of

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functionalism were firmly addressed by these theorists who illustrated how power, control and gender affect the leisure area. I chose fractured foundationalism, as advocated by Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (Stanley & Wise 1993), as the theoretical approach for this thesis, since it aligns with my phenomenological paradigm and desire to analyse the data through a critical lens. An approach which starts its analysis with the individual, exploring how he or she theorizes their world and how the larger structures in society shape and constrain their individual experiences, appeals to both my socialist upbringing and my own realization of the extent to which our society is saturated with gender divisions and expectations. The next chapter will discuss and review the methods that were applied in the study and the ethical considerations.

# CHAPTER 5

## IMPLEMENTING A FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

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# CHAPTER 5: IMPLEMENTING A FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter documents the methods that were used in this research study. In designing the methodology I endeavoured to combine the strengths of each of the selected approaches and the issues that emerged from one stage of the research were investigated further in the next phase of the investigation. The early part of my research was undertaken from a functionalist perspective by applying content analysis and focus group techniques. This was followed with the profile questionnaires, diaries, calendars and interviews, which were all firmly located within a feminist approach.

## 5.2 The functionalist approach

This initial approach reflected the influences of the functionalist perspective of much of the retailing and consumer behaviour literature that I first encountered (Arons 1961; Bellizzi, Crowley & Hasty 1983; Donovan *et al.* 1982; East 1994; Foxall 1993). Store or corporate identity is concerned with the idea that an organization has a unique identity, which can be managed and communicated to its key publics (Hatch & Schultz 2000). The distinctiveness of the store relies on both the controllable, tangible factors and the experiential, intangible cues. As Chapter 3 indicated, the more volatile of the two are these intangible elements and it is these cues that consumers draw on to determine the store's image. Thus corporate communications are significant as the symbols and key characteristics depicted will enable the consumer to frame the type of store shown (Hatch & Schultz 2000). The content analysis and focus groups were used to investigate the multiplicity of meanings that the consumers took from them. Much of this functionalist approach expects the consumer to react to or be affected by these images and as a result select a particular store or product. The content analysis and focus group examined the projected identity of the grocery retailers and a small segment of their target consumers' imagery of that retailer and the consumers' reaction to the retailer imagery.

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### Alternative methods considered

In seeking information on the retailers' perceptions of themselves and of their customers a number of approaches were considered. Those that were deemed suitable included: structured interviewing of the retailer, employees and their agencies; an investigation into their corporate culture or analysis of their promotional material. It soon became apparent that the organisations were a key barrier to an investigation of the retailers' perceptions of themselves. Thus, a direct approach of interviewing the retailers or organisations associated with them was not going to be possible. Moreover an investigation into their corporate culture was also deemed impossible due to this lack of access to the organisations. The next available research avenue was an analysis of the promotional material. The promotional material focuses on aspects of the organisations' identities that are considered suitable for public dissemination. At the time of this study store magazines were limited in both availability and content. Only Sainsbury and Safeway produced a store magazine – each of which differed widely in their distribution and content. Sainsbury's charge their customers for their magazine, while Safeway gives theirs away free to all "ABC" loyalty cardholders. Thus, there were issues in terms of parity of what was being analysed and a lack of comparison between all four retailers.

Another possible avenue of investigation was an examination of the retailers' identities through their commercials. The advertisements contained information regarding their imagery and indicated how they perceived their consumers. The advertisement is a carefully considered corporate view of the retailer designed to communicate, persuade and reaffirm their target market. Every nuance of an advert is carefully considered by the organisation and research has indicated that this is the preferred medium for the retailer (Du Gay 1996). The television commercials thus represent material specifically prepared for the public domain and providing the retailer's perspective on itself and its customers.

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Content analysis was deemed as appropriate for this part of the study as it provides an important pre-requisite in establishing the typical role and expectations that the retailer has about their projected ‘ideal’ or ‘typical’ consumer. Content analysis provides a descriptive account concerning the frequency with which a particular item appears. As Gillian Dyer notes:

*The basic assumption of content analysis is that there is a relation between the frequency with which a certain item appears in a text/ad and the ‘interest’ or intentions of the producer on the one hand and on the other, the responses of the audience. What the text is all about or what the producer means by the text is ‘hidden’ in it and can be revealed by identifying and counting significant features. Content analysis is usually confined to large-scale, objective and systematic surveys of manifest content using the counting of the content items as the basis for later interpretation.*

(Dyer 1988: 108)

Content analysis, however, does have certain limitations in that it is descriptive and cannot provide detail concerning the context and meaning of the commercial. It was not used here to provide a theoretical understanding of the retailing context, rather to describe the current expectations of the environment. Thus content analysis of the retailers’ television commercials was selected as the most appropriate vehicle for analysis of the retailers’ perspectives. The advertisements of each of the four major grocery retailers were recorded and a content analysis of each advertisement undertaken. It was felt that content analysis could accommodate the limitations of the research study and reveal the important attributes that retailers wished to project about themselves and their customers.

### 5.3 Content analysis

This section of the chapter will briefly examine the content analysis method and discuss why it was applied in this research. This is followed with details regarding the sample and the development of the final content analysis study. Content analysis explores and quantifies the projected message used (Kassarjian 1977) and is therefore an ideal tool for complementing other data collection methods. Importantly, it is “*the study of the message itself, and not the communicator or the audience*” (Kassarjian 1977: 8). Content analysis has been extensively

used within image research and consumer studies as it has a reputation for providing ‘objective’ and systematic data. As Richard H. Kolbe and Melissa Burnett note:

*content analysis provides an empirical starting point for generating new research evidence about the nature and effect of specific communications.*

(Kolbe & Burnett 1991: 244)

Despite its claims to objectivity it does allow the researcher the opportunity to explore the intended message and can provide a basis for comparison and further exploration of issues, such as the receiver’s interpretation and the producer’s intentions. The method also allows for the unobtrusive gathering of data and can access the different environmental data of the message content. Importantly, the commercials, for example, can be analysed without the input of the producer and their context can also indicate or support the message that was extracted. The time of day or the particular season that the commercial was aired would be an important aspect to consider in the data collection, adding depth to the overall analysis. Thus, content analysis provides an: ‘*objective, systematic, and quantitative*’ (Kassarjian 1977: 9) method for first level enquiry for the research.

Following the example set in Mary R. Zimmer and Linda L. Golden’s work, the researcher did not want to impose:

*image dimensions or language on the consumer, as the boundaries of image perception are not predetermined.*

(Zimmer & Golden 1988: 268)

Image dimensions can be highly subjective, although there are generalised definitions that are projected, particularly within advertising and are used in a thirty second commercial to allow the consumer to immediately define the product or service. These definitions are selected and then reconstructed in the commercial; black and white images, for example, represent nostalgia.

The traditional perspective of content analysis as an objective tool merely counting the occurrence of certain items in a commercial has been highly criticised, however. A number of

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researchers have criticised content analysis for its failure to distinguish between different sets of meanings, its lack of theory and its claim to objectivity (Dyer 1988; Gilly 1988; Strinati 1995). As mentioned earlier, for the purposes of this study, content analysis provided a descriptive account that was then complemented with the discussions from the focus groups. However, the lack of objectivity is accepted and is an issue for both the social and natural sciences. Obviously, the categories are selected and eliminated by the researcher, given to the coders for their evaluation and eventually analysis of the data. The bias from both the researcher and coders cannot be eradicated and nor should it be an expectation. Rather this study was seeking the general, descriptive analysis of the retailer's image rather than any inferences and accepts that bias will be present and the interpretation may not be an exact match with the retailers' expectations. However, in its defence, content analysis can identify the prevalence of the dominant interpretation of the commercial. As Dominic Strinati (1995) argues:

*Content analysis can be used to show how cultural representations of women, say in advertising, distort the reality of women's lives, portraying a fantasy world rather than the one women actually live in.*

(Strinati 1995: 196)

Numerous studies have used content analysis to illustrate the extent of stereotyping and the reflection of the gender roles in advertising imagery (Goffman 1979; Strinati 1995, Pritchard 2001). Content analysis was applied in this study as it served the function of identifying the current projected image of UK grocery retailing.

### **Sample**

Four nationally advertised television commercials, one from each of the top four UK grocery retailers televised during the months of February and March 1996, were selected for the study. The researcher was interested in the current projected message of the shopping experience and especially in decoding the televised roles of the retailer and consumers. As this was an exploratory study the number of commercials that were processed needed to be manageable,

therefore a small selection provided the basic material that could be used in the focus group discussions.

### Dimensions

As this was a descriptive account evaluating the media content, dimensions were used from previous research and adapted via the initial content analysis study. An initial study was conducted to identify which of these dimensions were relevant to a framework unifying the retailers' perceptions of the retailer and the consumer (Martineau 1958; Millum 1975; Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1990). The retailer image attributes that were eventually selected for the content analysis of the televised commercials of the major four UK grocery retailers included: location; employees; voice-over; catchphrase; values; products (see appendix 1). The consumer image attributes were categorised into location; settings; personal and lifestyle characteristics; decision-maker; values; receiver or giver of advice (see appendix 2) (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1990). William Leiss, Stephen Kline and Sut Jhally defined lifestyle indicators as: '*voluntary and temporary affinities between persons who share a set of tastes and complementary values*' (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1990: 61). The commercials project a shared understanding of cultural meanings, and although there are individual differences in interpretation, given the influence of the wider cultural environment, components of store imagery can be categorised using content analysis (Mick 1988; Tomlinson 1990).

### Coding Issues

The commercials were reviewed (see below) to identify the themes and issues for the categories.

As Trevor Millum states:

*The categories and classifications should emerge from the material rather than be imposed upon it. Each classification should be the result of previous thought and investigation, and tailored to bring out those aspects felt to be the most significant.*

(Millum 1975: 80)

An initial study was conducted to assess the appropriate categories and whether there were any disagreements concerning coding issues. The content analysis categories for this initial study were adapted from William Leiss, Stephen Kline and Sut Jhally (1990) and Trevor Millum (1975), and Pierre Martineau (1958). Volunteers were found who were willing to review the initial content analysis categories. This occurred two weeks before the final content analysis. Two academics, one of each gender, conducted this initial stage of the content analysis. They conducted this analysis in their own homes and were asked to consider whether they understood the categories. They were also asked to consider the clarity of the accompanying instructions. After the initial study, a discussion was held with the two coders. Any categories which they were unable to understand or did not feel were relevant were eliminated from the study. Also any additional categories that they felt were needed and suitable were included in the final content analysis. This indicated the categories, which I interpreted as being the most consistent. The consumer lifestyle and retailer categories that were used for the final content analysis were those considered appropriate from the initial study.

The reasons for this initial study were two-fold, firstly, the categories were taken from a generalised survey and some of them may have been unsuitable for this study. Secondly, some of the categories may have ‘dated’ in their interpretation or the coders may have found it difficult to distinguish between them. For example, Trevor Millum (1975: 95) used the terms “mod” and “camp” in his study of advertisements. The final content analysis categories used for the retailer imagery consisted of location; employees’ role; gender of voice over; catchphrase; products (Martineau 1958). The consumer imagery used for the final content analysis was categorised into setting/ location; decision maker; lifestyle; activities (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1990).

### Final content analysis study

Two academics, one male and one female, analysed the four commercials together in a quiet room in the university's library. Disagreements in the coding were resolved through a prior discussion. The pre-recorded commercials were presented to the coders who viewed the advertisement twice before starting the coding procedure. Each category was marked absent or present and the categories were then calculated to measure the percentage of agreement reached. The nature of the thirty-second commercial meant that the coders could not complete the analysis in one session; in fact it took approximately two hours before they had completed the data collection. The reliability of the content analysis was established via the inter-judge and content validity (Carey 1994; Holsti 1969; Kassarjian 1977). Inter-judge reliability was then used to evaluate the percentage of agreement between the two coders in processing the commercials (Kassarjian 1977). Content validity is confirmed through the informal judgement of the researcher who evaluates the categories to decide whether they meet the research questions and if the results are plausible and supported by other researchers in the field (Holsti 1969). Thus, the content analysis provided descriptive findings of the portrayal of the UK grocery shopping experience.

### 5.4 Focus groups

This section of the methods chapter will provide a brief overview of the focus group method and then discuss the planning and implementation of the sessions. This is followed by a discussion of the method's limitations and the move towards the 'experiential' aspects of data collection (see section 5.5). Focus groups are defined as: "*a semi-structured group session, moderated by a group leader, held in an informal setting, with the purpose of collecting information on a designated topic*" (Carey 1994: 226). They provide an ideal tool for reviewing a research area or theme; they are flexible and can generate rich data. Focus groups are particularly useful for analysing the generalised opinions and beliefs of a certain segment or

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group. The key distinguishing attribute of the focus group interview is that it is contextual. They are extensively used in marketing to evaluate the consumer's perceptions of a product or service that a firm is offering (Stewart & Shamdasani 1990). Unstructured or semi-structured focus groups provide opportunities for the focus group moderator to interact with the participants and gain instant feedback on the topic in question. They also provide opportunities for the participant to reflect and analyse the context of the question or theme; thus the volunteer is empowered to a certain extent within this process. This said, however, the standard application of focus groups within marketing, specifically in the area of consumer behaviour, has often reduced the participant to the role of passive agent and elevated the market researcher to that of voyeur (Johnson 1996).

Data collection is not an easy task, as with all research activities, planning and data collection involves the researcher in continuously monitoring the criteria. The focus group allows the researcher the opportunity to review the data in a variety of ways - from the restricted directed approach to a more free-flowing semi-structured group. The focus group is not intended as a counselling session (the ethics here would be questionable), rather it is an open discussion, which may or may not be directed by the researcher. Focus groups are ideal for generating the appropriate issues for a research theme and, particularly within cross-cultural topics, the suitability of terms before using other methods such as questionnaires. Recent literature indicates the usefulness of focus groups in allowing the moderator to learn the phrases of the researched group (O'Brien 1993). However, the enthusiasm within marketing circles for this method has raised some questions regarding ethics and the roles of the participants and the moderator. Clearly:

*The successful focus group will not impose upon the participants the prior assumptions of the funder or the moderator, but will elicit expressions of the views, feelings, and experiences of the participants, in their own words, with minimal intervention by the researcher/moderator.*

(Johnson 1996: 521)

Focus groups open up how and why participants hold attitudes towards a product, service or organisation and the group atmosphere enables synergy and generates a 'snowballing' effect within the discussions. Controversies within the group interview can arise when members have contrasting opinions and group inhibition and the 'leader effect' (Merton 1990) can have a disabling effect, although research volunteers tend to be self confident and assertive individuals (Rosenthal & Rosnow 1975). The strengths of a focus group can at the same time also be its weaknesses, thus the release of inhibitions and the generation of rich data using a small sample of participants can limit the study. Responses to a group interview situation can produce controversies, group inhibition and a generalised opinion, which may not translate on a wider scale. However, if used as an exploratory tool, as in this study, in order to examine broad issues or attributes (in this case of the shopping experience) it can provide a bank of preliminary data for further investigative research.

### **Contacting the participants**

The first step in recruiting couples for the focus group was to approach individuals personally and via mail. Each couple that was interested in participating was then given a brief profile questionnaire that served two purposes, firstly it assessed their suitability and secondly it gave the researcher an insight into the demographic make-up and shopping behaviour of the household. The selection criteria, as with most focus groups and exploratory research, were quite general and the sample was purposefully selected to reflect the core target of the grocery retailers. Essentially the criteria were that one person was in employment, had at least one car, at least one child under the age of five and lived within five miles of a supermarket store. Letters were then distributed to those couples that expressed an interest, thanking them and explaining the nature of the research. Individual availability and a suitable time and location were confirmed in a letter enclosing the focus group details and a map. At the venue, light refreshments were provided for the participants, in order to create an informal atmosphere.

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Sixteen individuals (eight couples) participated in the focus group research and were eventually divided into two groups of eight individuals (four couples) according to their location.

The difficulty in this research project was trying to find volunteers and arranging a convenient time, date and location for all the participants. A problem when interviewing couples with children is childcare; this was facilitated at the interview location by the couples bringing their children with them, who were then cared for in another room. Another challenge when using couples is finding members where both partners are equally agreeable to being interviewed - rather than being coerced. The light refreshments provided encouragement and the acquaintance link also enabled the members to view the sessions as an entertainment opportunity - something novel and different for their night out. The questions were open-ended and the participants were encouraged to discuss at length anything as long as it was within the subject boundaries. Guide questions were interjected at the appropriate moments or when there was a lull in the conversation.

### **Planning for the focus groups**

Once the focus group members had agreed to participate I began to plan the sessions. Members' age and gender were considered and consideration was given to 'first impressions' (i.e. which the respondents would have of each other and of the researcher) as these can alter the atmosphere of the group. I wore an informal style of clothing and hoped that this would create a relaxed atmosphere. Secondly, trust, respect and openness were considered at all times during the planning of the focus groups. Acquaintance, for example between myself and the focus group members, provided one potential avenue of trust and confidence in both my integrity and in how the information gained from the study would be handled. Rather than being viewed as an inquisition it was hoped that the research would be viewed as an informal opportunity for the sharing of views on grocery shopping.

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An observer was present during three of the six focus groups to assess the researcher and the study. This was to ensure that the format of the focus groups was appropriate and the researcher did not bias the session in any way. As with all data collection exercises, there are issues of validity and reliability and the debates between the orthodox scientist and social scientist will probably be ongoing. However research volunteers, whoever they are, are always potentially susceptible to tailoring their worldview to accommodate the researcher. The use of projective techniques and the establishment of an atmosphere of trust were intended to reduce researcher intervention in this study.

### **The focus groups sessions**

Once all the participants had arrived, they were seated around an oval table and I (as the moderator) then thanked the participants, reassured them of their anonymity, explained the ground rules for the discussion and then opened the session. The ground rules were that everyone should be allowed to speak, that every opinion was valued and that participants should refrain from talking at once for the purposes of recording. This was followed by an introduction to the group from each member. I then opened the discussion with a general request for the group members to reflect on their grocery shopping activities. The participants were then asked to look at the mood board (see section below for more details) to select a picture and to discuss it before deciding as a group which of several envelopes (each with a store's name on it) it should be placed in. During the session all members were encouraged to speak and I watched for cues as to whether they wished to speak or if they disagreed with others' opinions. Near the end of the sessions the members were shown the commercials that were used in the content analysis and asked their opinions regarding the material.

### **Analysis**

The first step in the analysis of the focus group sessions was transcription to establish a permanent record of the oral data. With the participants' permission this data could then be

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shared with other academics to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. The researcher then reviewed both the tape recordings and the transcripts to identify the key themes and issues. ‘Cut ‘n’ paste techniques, along with a further mapping out of the issues raised by the participants, were conducted. Coloured markers were also used to illuminate different themes and comments from the women and men regarding the retailers and shopping were mapped out. Again this information left a paper trail for an independent audit at a later date.

### **Projective techniques**

This section will discuss the projective techniques that were used during the focus groups. Discussion aids such as a mood board and projective questions serve two purposes as they provoke discussion and are entertaining. Mood boards were used as ‘ice breakers’ in the smaller gendered sessions preceding the larger focus groups to encourage the participants to feel at ease. Mood boards are a projective technique using visual cues to encourage discussion on a topic (Stewart & Shamdasani 1990). The mood board used in this study consisted of coloured photographs of approximately the same size, which illustrated either food or people. The people were depicted in a variety of formats, either alone or in a range of different groups. The pictures were chosen to ensure a fair representation of ethnic and social groups. These pictures were placed on a corkboard in the middle of the oval table, which enabled all the focus group members to see and touch the pictures. In front of the participants, in the middle of the table were four envelopes labelled with each retailer’s name. The members were than asked if they could choose a picture to discuss and then decide which retailer it should be placed with. This projective technique is unobtrusive and enables the researcher to access the participants’ inward assessment of the research question (Zubin, Eron & Schumer 1965; Stewart & Shamdasani 1990).

Another projective technique was used during the course of the second set of ‘couples’ focus groups. Participants were asked “*if the retailer was an animal what would it be and why?*” This

question proved extremely useful in evaluating the attitudes of the consumers. Unfortunately this could not be asked within the first focus group, although on a qualitative exploration it supported many of the comments indicated in retail image studies using quantitative tools. The television commercials used in the content analysis were shown during both of the larger focus group sessions, which both partners attended, to elicit their response and compare with their discussion from the smaller group sessions.

### **Limitations and summary of the focus groups**

During the focus groups it became apparent that the participants' reflections and relationship with the grocery store were more complex than I had originally considered. It was here that I realised that the functionalist theories from the retailing and marketing literature were not supported by the data. I aimed to earn trust and respect from the participants and was keen to treat them as individuals rather than 'guinea pigs'. This approach was not compatible with the traditional science of marketing as the researcher is encouraged to remain distant and "*suggests that people are more like objects than subjects. It portrays people as 'out there', and the researcher goes out and does research 'on' them*" (Stanley & Wise 1990: 114). Rather than continue with this style of research I returned to the literature and re-read issues regarding paradigms, epistemology and feminist theory and methods.

After reviewing the methodological literature I became aware of the richness and depth other tools could offer. Fractured foundationalism, as advocated by Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, has been extremely influential on my style of thinking, writing and teaching, emphasising techniques that honoured my concern to treat the participants with respect and to ensure collaboration. I also became more interested in the social and gendered relationships that framed the grocery-shopping environment. It was then that I realised that the key issue that resonated throughout the study was how are the social relationships between the retailing environment and

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the consumer constructed and defined? As chapter one indicated, I had realised the powerful role that these everyday activities play within our daily lives and much of this influence was ‘naturalised’. The gendered relations of who is required to shop and who can opt out of the activity and the functional and hedonistic tensions are just a few examples illustrating how the discourses regarding supermarket shopping were obscured through the whole framework and context of the activity. As the participants had discussed grocery shopping as a family leisure experience or a break from the other household activities, I adopted the following tools in my attempt to investigate the experiences of the consumers, particularly the women and their attitudes to grocery shopping.

## 5.5 Implementing a feminist methodology

There is no one feminist method, so a feminist study such as this investigation could apply any particular tool. It is crucial, however, that feminist research provides an account of the epistemology and methodology producing “*knowing feminisms*” (Stanley 1997a: 1). Chapter four discussed the feminist epistemology and theories that have influenced this present study. A key concern for this study was that the participants were treated with respect. Feminist methodology, compared to mainstream approaches to interviewing, encourages the researcher to develop trust and maintains that the more formal, ‘malestream’ approach to interviews can neglect the spontaneity and space that participants may need to develop and reflect their ideas (Oakley 1981). Establishing trust and a rapport (Fontana & Frey 1994) is an important prerequisite before the data collection as it provides a richer and more informed statement from the participant. Margery B. Franklin (1997) identifies the characteristics of an interview format - principally that it should be open and flexible enough for both parties to reflect on and clarify particular threads in the discussion. They can be semi-structured or rely completely on themes and should appreciate the presence and influence of the researcher. The aim is to understand, clarify and validate the participants’ responses to ensure that the interpretations that the

researcher develops from the transcripts are from the same statements or explanations of the participants (Kirsch 1999). This has wider implications in academic research, particularly the more orthodox traditions, as they would not always acknowledge privileging one set of knowledge practices over the others (Gatens 1991).

Margery B. Franklin (1997), for example, describes her data collection process and the feminist influences and implications for her work. She reviews the traditional interviewing format within the more open structure of her own research, agreeing with Ann Oakley (1981) that the traditional semi-structured interview "*reflects a masculine paradigm of how to do research*" (Franklin 1997: 101). During her work, interviewing a friend and later other artists, she used a more open format which she called a "*shared understanding view*" (Franklin 1997: 102). Margery B. Franklin's work reflects the format and perceptions, which are broadly used with feminist data collection, that of providing an understanding and reflection of the participants' lives. As she explains:

*The aim is to obtain rich, nuanced descriptive material that reflects the interviewee's experience of her life world (or some part thereof) and lends itself to qualitative analysis in one or more modes - for example, identifying and categorizing central themes, or extracting core narratives.*

(Franklin 1997: 103)

The key considerations of this study were that the participants should feel secure and involved, if they wished, in the process. This project needed to try to gain the trust of the participants while considering the ethics and responsibilities of the researcher. A pre-requisite to the data collection was awareness that this could be a sensitive subject for the participants and would involve some degree of reflection for them. Measures needed to be considered that would allow the participants some degree of control, security and confidence over the whole process. This protocol was deemed important as couples would be interviewed separately and would need to feel secure that all information would be treated confidentially and would not be shared with their partners. The data collection needed to provide opportunities before, during and after the

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collection for the participant to reflect over the process and ensure they could have access to their data, feeling free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

It was felt that if participants were informed throughout the whole process and felt free to question the research some degree of trust could be established. The relationship between interviewer and interviewee, particularly in qualitative research is based on trust, otherwise very little can be gained from the data collection which could not have been found with more quantitative methods. Consideration and support for the participant is required during the data collection and particularly in the planning and design stage before they were actually approached. In this study there were six staples to the data collection: an introductory/thank-you letter; a consent/confidentiality form; pre and post discussion; defined boundaries; copies of the consent form; copies of the transcripts and the time consequences of the study on the volunteer (Toren 1997). These strategies were important determining factors when pursuing the final chosen methods.

### **Alternative methods considered**

Several data collection methods were evaluated as to whether they would be suitable. There were a range of potential strategies which were considered for this phase of the research: observations; time study diaries; focus groups; questionnaires; calendars; diaries; semi – structured interviews.

Observations both in the home and store could have provided valuable information pertaining to the individual's actual behaviour. There were three reasons why I elected not to conduct observations: personal experience; previous indications from my data and the 'naturalness' of the setting. Firstly, from personal experience I have a particular disdain for an academic researcher observing their participants. In the working class districts of Glasgow there has been a long history of individuals being scrutinised by people in power, judging their values, attitudes

and behaviour from their own middle-class perspective. Secondly, the focus group data indicated that there was a wide degree of variation between the participants' main and secondary shopping trips but it was impractical for me to follow everyone's shopping trips. Finally, there was the 'naturalness' of the setting. The dynamics of the household and shopping trips would alter due to my presence and this does not necessarily ensure that my observations are an accurate reflection. Observation should also be carried out for a year or more in order to overcome this issue. As this was an advanced stage in my data collection phase I only had six months available. Thus, for all the above reasons observations was deemed unsuitable.

**Table 5.1:** Comparing alternative methods

Technique	Participatory	Low Interference	Detailed Description	Short Time Scale	Lone Researcher
<b>Observation</b>	Can be	No	Yes	No	No
<b>Focus groups</b>	Can be	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Calendar</b>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Interviews</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Diary</b>	Yes	Can be	Yes	Yes	Yes

Focus groups were used in the preliminarily phase and as mentioned previously they are an excellent method for generating exploratory data. However, the very nature of the group format limits individual perspectives as the confidentiality of other group members cannot be guaranteed and group dynamics can pressurise a particular response from the participant. In addition, this format did not satisfy the prerequisite of confidentiality and sensitivity and this was the reason why they were not used for the subsequent study. This method also does not provide substantial thoughts and feelings that the participant may have on the research topic.

## 5.6 Methods adopted

### Profile questionnaire

Questionnaires were not considered as a key tool in this research because they offer very little flexibility for the participant. In this study it was considered important to understand grocery shopping and leisure perceptions from the context of the participant and so questionnaires were dismissed as their questions frame perspectives defined by the researcher as important rather than the participant. This survey tool also assumes that participants are ‘knowing’ subjects waiting to be opened and inspected by the researcher. In this study, therefore, these questionnaires were used to gain ‘basic’, supplementary data regarding the participants rather than as a key technique in the whole process.

However, the profile questionnaire used did serve two useful purposes in this research, firstly enabling me to meet the potential volunteers and to assess if they met the criteria of the project and to collect basic information in relation to demographics and shopping habits. Secondly, administration of the questionnaires provided an opportunity for the volunteer to ask questions about the study and most importantly to get acquainted with me. The questionnaires were administered to participants when the diaries and calendars were distributed to them.

In addition to the profile questionnaire, calendars, diaries and interviews also offered a flexibility that complemented my feminist perspective. Calendars could be used to illustrate the participant’s shopping activities over a period of time, e.g. a month or a quarter. Diaries are excellent reflective tools where the participant can document their attitudes, behaviour and emotions. Diaries have been used in numerous projects and are particularly useful for long distance studies or sensitive subjects and can provide an opportunity for some participants to reflect on their current situation and their previous experiences (Letherby & Zdrodowski 1995; Alterio 1998). Writing in this format represents an extremely personal reflection for the

participant (Manning & Cullum-Swan 1994). Although, as with all research methods, the topic is constrained by the research while the language and nature of the diary is constrained by wider interpretations and expectations. In this study the diaries could be used to supplement the lack of observational data and gain an understanding of the participant's interpretation of the activity. Finally, themed interviews were considered as suitable for discussing and verifying the participant's questionnaire, calendar and diary.

### **Calendars**

The calendars consisted of a two-month calendar with instructions asking the participant to mark the day and note the retailer visited for each grocery-shopping trip (the amount of money spent was not important). Although the data collection was restricted in the use of the traditional observation techniques, diaries and calendars provided a viable alternative within the parameters of the study. Diaries encouraged the participant to reflect on the project and provided their input in a written form that strengthened the viability and reliability of the study, which will be discussed later in this chapter. In summary, the diaries and calendars provided verification for the interviews and enabled the researcher to discuss the profile questionnaire and the information gleaned from the diaries and calendars with the participant during the semi-structured interview.

### **Diaries**

The participants were asked to complete the diaries over a four-week period that was carefully selected to ensure that it did not contain any bank holidays, festivals or family vacations. There were three reasons for this specification namely: items selected; time constrains; indulgence. Christmas, for example, would entail a larger purchase of festive items only consumed at this period. The Christmas break does not conform to the usual routine of grocery shopping for the household and, due to the Christmas rush, shopping is usually completed under a stricter time pressure than would normally be expected. Holidays are also often characterised by the

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individual wishing to indulge in activities not normally available or in such abundance during the rest of the year. Diets, for example, are usually part of the preparation and are then relaxed over the holiday period. The diaries also provided the participants with the opportunity to reflect on their shopping activity and at a latter stage it would provide support for the interviews. This form of data collection supported the reliability of the study, as a comparison could be made between the written and verbal data and provided suggestions for the interview discussion.

### **Interviews**

The participant was contacted a few days before the interview to answer any queries and to check if he or she still wished to proceed to the interview stage. Before the interview the participant was given a consent and confidentiality form, detailing their right to withdraw, confidentiality and reiterating that they could ask questions about the study. This form was adapted from a standardised procedure required in natural science research that must then be approved by an ethics committee. Although, as yet, such forms are not a requirement of social science research in the UK they are standard practice in the USA and New Zealand. While working alongside natural scientists, I considered that these forms would affirm to the volunteer their rights and reassure them of my researcher's integrity. The participants were also informed that they could have access to a taped and written copy of their interview, diary and calendar if they wished. Both the participant and I signed the consent and confidentiality form, witnessed by their partner, a copy of which was posted to them at a later date. A pre- and post - interview discussion was held with the participant, sometimes they invited their spouse in at this stage but all were offered confidentiality if they wished. During this discussion, the participant was invited to ask me questions about the study, data collection and how the study was to be used within academia. It was during the pre-interview discussion that I agreed the boundaries with the participant. These usually identified that the financial, intimate and sometimes business aspects of the household would not be part of the interview discussion.

At each stage of the process the participants were asked if they wished to withdraw from the research. After the profile questionnaire was reviewed to ensure that the person met the inclusion criteria and the potential participant was willing to remain involved, an introductory letter was posted to them. This letter introduced the project, the nature of the data collection and myself and thanked them for volunteering to help with my study. After the letter had been posted participants were telephoned to inquire whether they would like to continue with the study, if they had any questions or concerns and when they would be available for the dairies/calendars and finally the interview. A second letter was sent to the participant detailing the time of the interview and also included a diary and calendar, with instructions for each couple. Each letter included my contact telephone numbers in case of any queries from the participant. At all times the participant was informed about the research study and that they could withdraw at any time without obligation.

The participants were interviewed alone, without their spouse; details of the interview were withheld from their spouse. The men and women were interviewed separately, one after the other, by me in a ‘private’ room in their homes. Interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to nearly two hours with the women, while the men were considerably shorter ranging from thirty minutes to an hour. I aimed to make the interview as ‘non-threatening’, relaxing and pleasant as possible for the participant following the principles of Andrea Fontana and James Frey (1994) where:

*The researcher may reject these outdated techniques and “come down” to the level of the respondent and engage in a “real” conversation with “give and take” and empathic understanding...The researcher must adapt to the world of the individuals studied and try to share their concerns and outlooks. Only by doing so he or she learns anything at all.*

(Fontana & Frey 1994: 371)

Most of the participants seemed to relax after a discussion of the research process and once their other queries were answered. The interview used a semi-structured / themed format (see appendix 3), using both questions and themes, with the interviewer following particular threads

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of the discussion as they arose. The questions or themes broadly, centred on food, shopping, household tasks, the media, and leisure. After I had completed the interviews, field notes were made on this process and the events that occurred. On returning home, I studied the field notes and considered them before making the more reflective notes. These provided a descriptive account of my feelings together with initial evaluations of what had happened during and after the interview. This process also allowed me to appreciate the transcripts as it provides the context of the methodological and decision - making process during the data collection process. Once the interviews were completed, with the prior permission of the participants, a University secretary transcribed them.

## **Participants**

Thirteen couples volunteered to participate in this study and four agreed to proceed further with the final in-depth interviews. At all stages the individuals were investigated separately and partners were not allowed the opportunity to read their spouse's data or be present during their interviews. All thirteen couples completed a profile questionnaire, which provided a basic survey of their personal details, shopping trips and household activities. Twenty-four questionnaires were returned (13 women, 11 men) of which one questionnaire was not fully completed, as the participant stated that he did not go grocery shopping. All of the men in the sample were aged between 25 and 35 and in paid work. There was a sharp contrast between those who had completed their education at 14-16 and those who continued and finished at 21 – 25. The women were of a similar age range and had a range of employment patterns – from full-time to unpaid work. Seven of the women worked full-time, two worked part-time, and four women were not involved in paid employment.

## **Final interview participants**

The four couples whom were willing to proceed further with the data collection were all in the same age group, willing to be interviewed separately and two of the couples had children and were

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living on new estates with either a semi-detached or detached house. The interviews varied in length from approximately forty-five minutes to one and half-hours. The four couples selected (as the table below illustrates) enabled this study to compare the different households, those with or without the presence of children and the different working patterns of the partners.

**Table 5.2:** Couples selected for interview

Couple	1	2	3	4
Age	30 – 35	30 – 35	27 - 30	30 –35
Children	No	Yes	No	Yes
House	Semi-detached	Semi – detached	Detached	Detached
Partners working	Both full-time	Male full-time	Female full-time	Male full-time & female part-time

### 5.7 Gender, power and data collection

The following section discusses various instances of gender and power during the collection of the data for this research, the role of the male partner and the retailer. To investigate the issues raised from the survey, calendars and diaries a small sample from the original thirteen couples were investigated further. During the selection process for the interviews it was obvious that certain couples had requested to opt out of the study, were unsuitable or it was evident that they had decided not to proceed. There were a variety of reasons why some of the couples were unavailable or unsuitable to continue with the research. Essentially the reasons fell into two categories: lack of time on the consumers' part; not meeting the criteria for the interviewing process. These couples were thanked for volunteering their time and given photocopies of their data. The selection criteria for the interviews was important as the information gleaned from couples who were opting out or who were unsuitable for the interviews was still important with regard to issues of power and gender.

The decisions involved in whether or not to proceed with the interviewing process indicated some key influences that in this case inhibited their participation. Firstly, it was evident that some couples had opted out of the research process early on in the data collection. Couple thirteen, for example, despite returning their questionnaire did not complete their calendars and diaries. Couples eight and twelve requested not to proceed with the reasons given as lack of time, work commitments and that the male partners were not keen to proceed. Couple six had just confirmed that the female participant was pregnant and was experiencing difficulties resulting in a subsequent stay in the local hospital due to a severe case of 'morning sickness'. Couple eleven were unsure of their plans as the male partner was employed for an international company and was expecting to be sent abroad at any time. Thus, from these couples it was clear that the demands of time, work and in one case pregnancy restricted their ability to continue. However, it was interesting to note that the influence of the male partner, both in his unwillingness to continue and his work commitments disproportionately affected the research process.

The influence of the male partner was particularly evident with two of the couples who were willing to proceed who proved unsuitable. The females in these two couples (nine and ten) could not be interviewed separately since in both cases the male partner strongly reiterated the point that they had nothing to hide from each other and could be interviewed together. Despite my insistence that the interviews should be conducted individually these two male partners insisted that they would not be banned into another room in their own home and wanted to be present. Couple nine were interviewed with both partners present and these tapes were later disregarded as unsuitable for the research. The male partner in couple ten eventually allowed the interviews to be conducted privately but sabotaged them. He then immediately asserted his points relating to the wasting of tax payers' money on such a study and while getting the children ready for bed allowed his son to keep running in and disturbing his mother. Eventually she had to allow the child to sit with us while she was interviewed. She was unable to concentrate on the questions and at times could not be heard on

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the tape, as the young boy was very vocal, objecting to his mother being occupied elsewhere and thus being unable to put him to bed. These interviews were deemed unsuitable for the research as they were not confidential and one partner dominated that context.

### **Participant attitudes towards the diaries**

While visiting the homes of the participants to interview each of them issues of gender and power were evident during and in the context surrounding the conversations. The power of the male partner in their 'realm' towards their female partner and the female, academic interviewer was also evident. The more powerful member of the household asserted, sometimes aggressively, his opinions and control over the other household members and any one else who encroached on his territory. This echoes Eileen Green, Sandra Hebron and Diana Woodward's study (1990), which illustrates the social control that men exert over women in public and private spaces, especially with regard to their leisure and work. As they comment:

*A key point that emerges from feminist theories of social control and available empirical data, is the extent to which male social control of women is unexceptional; it is a part of normal, everyday life. Most often such control is perceived by both men and women as 'natural' and legitimate, particularly within marriage, with husbands being seen as entitled to govern their wife's behaviour and to punish improper conduct. Women are not free to come and go as they please; if they attempt to do this and neglect or refuse male sponsorship, they may be labelled as irresponsible and 'asking for trouble'. This has clear implications for how, when and where women spend their leisure time and is a major factor in promoting and perpetuating gender inequalities in leisure.*

(Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990: 138-139)

Thus, social control of women stems from both male and female supervision of women in public spaces and in addition to this the individual will also exert self-control. Although unsuitable for this research these abandoned interviews were useful as they did demonstrate the more overt power relationship between the male and female in the household.

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On the whole, more women than men completed the diaries. The men, for example, commented that they did not have time or generally felt uncomfortable writing their personal accounts in the

diary format. Men were very 'clipped' in their accounts while women were more open with regard to their feelings and emotions at that particular time. As this women's diary extract illustrates:

*At home feeling bored. (Baby) had just woken from his nap so I decided to go down to ASDA for 1/2 hour before going to pick (son) up from school. I needed baby milk and nappies so thought I could have a browse at the clothes. Felt better after an hour out spending some money which I probably should not have done.*

(Couple 2 Female diary extract)

Compare this extract with this man's diary account:

*Called into ASDA on the way home from work. Only to get Pampers which were half price because the packaging is changing back to unisex. Bought one double pack of maxi and one single junior all for less than ten pounds normally costs eighteen poundish. Guy in work told me about it.*

(Couple 4: Male diary extract)

Only four men fully completed their diaries, four had one entry and five were returned to the researcher without any written comments. The men who did not complete their diary stressed how busy they were or mentioned that they never visited the supermarket preferring to leave the activity entirely to their female partner. The two men, who had only completed one entry, still seemed uncomfortable with either the topic or the data collection method as their comments defend both their masculinity and their voluntary exclusion from what they perceive as a female only space.

Their extracts are as follows:

*On Thursday morning when I was making my breakfast I noticed the fridge was a bit low on food and drink. Today I finished college at 1 pm and on my way home I pass Sainsbury's. So I thought that it would be a good time to shop and also fill up my car with fuel. They will not be too busy in the afternoon. When I washed my breakfast dishes I noticed that my rubber gloves had a hole in them – I must buy some new ones.*

*After: I also went to the newsagents and bought some motorbike magazines. I bought what I needed in Sainsbury's plus some special offers for the freezer and some wine and beer for the weekend. I also bought a new pair of "marigold" gloves – yellow to match my apron.*

(Couple 3 Male diary extract)

*I seldom go to a supermarket but on this occasion I spent ten minutes in ASDA (local town) side stepping a multitude of seasoned shoppers intent on foiling my aspirations of a clean quick break for the till. After a bruising 600 second adventure I managed to escape to the tranquillity of my car – never again!*

(Couple 10 Male)

The first entry, regardless of gender, was the most lengthy and detailed of the entire diary entries. The nine men completed only one entry, compared with twelve women who provided two or more diary entries. Moreover, as indicated from their detailed responses, it would seem that the women participants favoured this data collection method. The different gendered approaches and attitudes to the diary clearly indicates that the inclusion of men in the research sample warrants some thought into tools which will provide them with an adequate venue in which to ‘voice’ their concerns. A previous research study, for example, also found a gender difference in the attitudes of their participants towards the written diaries / journals (Alterio 1998). In this study, the men requested an electronic format in which to record their reflections (Alterio 1998). Thus, if a further study were conducted with male participants, a choice should be given regarding the diaries offering the traditional context along with email, electronic discussion groups and electronic journals would perhaps encourage a higher response.

### **Interview analysis**

The relevance of the data collected via interviews cannot at first hand be identified and needs to be carefully sifted to illuminate both the micro and macro implications of the research. Previous research (Oakley 1981; McCracken 1988; Fonow & Cook 1991) has been invaluable in outlining the diverse qualitative methods and the equally varied types of analysis. As mentioned previously, the lack of reliability in qualitative data analysis was one of the criticisms, which was constantly levelled at qualitative research (Oleson 1994). Therefore, to enable the progression of qualitative research and the development of the study in question, independent researchers should verify the analysis of the data. This study utilised the talents of three academics and brainstorming techniques to indicate the key points from the data and the wider implications of these results.

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Each person was asked to read the transcripts and identify different ideas, which were noted on hexagons. Hexagons were used as they tessellate more effectively than other polygons. The

resultant piles of hexagons were sorted through using a method of constant comparison, consistent with grounded theory approach (Glaser 1978). The sorting and resorting of hexagons resulted in themes, which could then be discussed, clarifying the relationships between issues. This method borrows techniques from early work on creativity and specifically that of idea writing and interpretative structural modelling (Warfield 1976). The method supports a dynamic, interactive approach to reaching consensus, increasing group productivity, eliminating confusion, using time wisely and promoting individual participation, sharing and interpretation of ideas.

In summary then, there were three important stages of the analysis, firstly the viability and reliability of the study was considered in the planning and design stage of these methods. Secondly, the raw written and audio data was used for the subsequent analysis and thirdly, independent researchers were used to brainstorm the themes with the researcher using the hexagon strategy. This technique enabled the raw quotes from the data collection to be taken grouped together under similar themes, compared with all the interviewee transcripts and then regrouped under broader themes until eventually the more macro issues are highlighted. This enabled the researcher to view the complexities of the relationship between the individual and the wider environment.

## 5.8 Limitations

As knowledge is a diverse interpretation that is temporal and indexical, the research findings here cannot be easily replicated or generalised to other locations, although it should be noted that similar patterns should emerge or resonate in other environments. An alternative method that could have been applied in this study was observation, although there were a variety of reasons, both personal and academic, as to why I declined to use this tool. The first reason, the most personal and problematic for me was that observation, whether in the traditional or

feminist format, implied a power role rather than a collaborative one between the researcher and the participant. My working class background and family experiences, illustrate the feelings and emotions of this method with regard to feeling patronised and more significantly powerless. Secondly, that bond or shared understanding of being a woman can become patronising when other issues such as class and race are neglected (Reinharz 1992). The main limitation of the research is the female only interviewer. Both men and women were involved in this study and the female only researcher could have created problems for some of the participants. The male participants may have considered that I lacked authority or credibility.

## 5.9 Reflexive postscript

The research process written up in this thesis not only documents the participants' day-to-day lives but also my intellectual development as a feminist researcher. I was initially swayed by my early conceptions of what research is and should be through school, the discourse of science and the marketing literature. As a result, there remains an unresolved conflict within this chapter, which is my uncomfortableness with the content analysis phase of the study. The data gained from this research phase has always been difficult for me to write about and when writing the thesis I was reluctant to return to edit these sections. My supervisors pointed out my reluctance and it is only now, reflecting on the whole process (including the viva voce examination), that I understand not only what I should have done but also, importantly, the learning that I have taken from this experience. If I were to conduct a similar study again, I would now consider critical discourse analysis, as this examines the context and the subject positions offered by the text. Learning from mistakes and acquiring a critical understanding of the work that we have undertaken and represented are key stages in developing as a researcher. I now consider content analysis to be influenced by the positivistic, 'malestream' research traditions, which mute the influence of the researcher and call upon objectivity, reliability and validity to verify their claims. However, the text context and the subject positions offered by the text, as well as issues

of power and researcher influence are all masked by these concerns which neglect the power relations and values used to interpret the commercials. It is important to state that it was only through re-reading and reflecting on feminist literature, which discusses issues of ontology, epistemology and methodology, was I able to move on from the content analysis phase and to develop the later phases of the project and to produce the final written thesis. Of particular influence in this process of reflection was Liz Stanley and Sue Wise's fractured foundationalist approach, influenced by social constructivism and feminist standpoint, which argues that our truth and knowledge foundations are socially constructed and thus, must be analysed for their taken-for-granted discourses (Stanley & Wise 1993).

### **5.10 Summary**

This chapter has described the research methods adopted in this study and outlined the reasons for their selection. The content analysis and focus groups methods were influenced by the more traditional, functionalist work of the marketing and retailing literature. Subsequent tools were designed to investigate the gender divisions and power that have arisen to define and frame both the grocery shopping environment and leisure. Feminist theory, as discussed in the theoretical chapter, was used to develop the selected tools and analyse the data within this framework. This also encouraged me to consider the involvement of the people who were a part of this study. Thus, the latter tools that have been applied in this research have moved away from the objective approach to one that encourages collaboration and reflection. Significantly, the research process itself has revealed the gendered nature of the household and the impact of this on the data collection has been discussed at length. The following chapter will document the results of the content analysis and focus groups.

# CHAPTER 6

## IMAGES OF UK GROCERY SHOPPING

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## CHAPTER 6: IMAGES OF UK GROCERY SHOPPING

### 6.1 Introduction

Increased advertising clutter and the diminished effectiveness of traditional promotions have encouraged retailers to turn to alternative ways of communicating their corporate images. Branding and relationship marketing have been seen as effective tools in organisations' communications to target consumers. Images of the organisation and their products have become powerful weapons in the battle to encourage consumers to associate specific 'meanings' to organisations. This chapter investigates the projected images of the four largest UK grocery retailers and the consumers' interpretations of these promotional messages. As described in the previous chapters (chapters 4 and 5) a feminist perspective will be applied to this analysis.

This chapter presents the results of the content analysis and focus group investigations described in Chapter 5. After a description of the content analysis of the retailers' advertisements (Section 6.2), the salient points of the retailer images of themselves will be provided (see Section 6.3). This will be followed by the results indicating the retailers' perspectives of their ideal consumers as depicted in their commercials (see section 6.4). The next section of the chapter provides the results from the focus groups, which provided insight into consumer attitudes to, and interpretations of, these promotional images (see sections 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7). The discussions from the focus groups fall into three areas - consumer perceptions of: retailers; consumers; commercials. The final section of the chapter elucidates the leisure dimension of grocery shopping, specifically focusing on family shopping (see section 6.8).

### 6.2 The retailers' commercials

Two distinct techniques emerged in relation to the design of the commercials - commercials were either 'stand-alone' or part of a 'soap opera' style serial. The 'stand-alone' commercial, such as that of Sainsbury's, was a form of sales promotion, informing the viewer of various 'low' prices or

particular promotions for that advertising period. The advantage of this style of advertising is that no pre-knowledge is assumed. In contrast, the soap opera style commercial requires the viewer to have extensive knowledge regarding the context and implicit humorous references in the commercial to understand the full innuendo of the commercial. The soap opera style of commercial uses the same theme or characters and there was an implied expectation that the consumer had watched the previous commercials. The advantage of this style of commercial is that the consumer develops a relationship with the characters in the same way that a relationship is built with soap opera stars. Common to both formats was the use of the voice-over, which was the prime tool used to convey the retailer's authority within the commercials. The focus was on the female characters and their perceived concerns. The following section describes each commercial that was investigated in the content analysis study.

### Tesco

Two famous UK comedy actors, Prunella Scales and Jane Horrocks, both from long-running, successful television programmes (*Fawlty Towers* and *Absolutely Fabulous*) are the main characters in this commercial, which is part of a soap opera style series of commercials from Tesco. The personalities of the characters are explored and enhanced during each screening, allowing the consumer to develop an understanding and affinity with these on-screen individuals. Thus, the characters become almost real and have a 'life' of their own, allowing the audience an opportunity to appreciate and relate to their 'real life' frustrations and dilemmas. The series portrays an extremely domineering and 'know it all' mother and her long-suffering daughter. The specific advertisement explored here juxtaposed a National Health Service (NHS) hospital with the retailer, encouraging the viewer to compare the history and reputation of the former with the image of the latter. NHS hospitals have a reputation for lacking the financial resources and as a consequence have an image of providing 'cheap', poor quality food. The NHS also has positive, 'sentimental' or 'nostalgic' attachments and connotations for most viewers. Thus, there are certain pre-requisites in

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the form of shared values and knowledge that are required before the consumer can fully grasp the significance of this commercial.

There are two locations used in this commercial, which establish the overall context of the scenes, the actions of the main characters and the voice-over. The first location is an NHS hospital whilst the second half of the commercial is set in the actual store. In the first scene, one of the principal characters, the elderly mother, is in hospital with an in-growing toe-nail, her daughter is visiting her when a meal is served which does not meet the expected standards of the mother. The mother embarrasses her daughter by complaining and the daughter leaves with the comment that "*they [the hospital] are on a budget*" and the mother replies "*so am I but I can do better than this*". The mother then decides to take action and calls on an elderly man, whom his bandages blindfold, she gets in a wheelchair, which he pushes and then leaves the hospital for Tesco. The blind man pushes her round the store while she looks at the bread - "*that won't break the bank*" - bananas and delicatessen. She makes comments regarding the price of the items and states to her companion "*Look at the price of that! – Oh, you can't can you?*"

The comical duo make their way round the store, meanwhile the scene transfers to the daughter at the checkout buying some gifts to take to her mother in hospital. Unbeknown to her, behind her, just leaving the checkouts, is her mother accompanied by her 'driver'. The final scene is of the daughter leaving the store via the opposite exit from her mother thinking she might have heard her mother's voice and dismissing it – after all she is in hospital! In the background, the mother is seen leaving through the other exit, causing chaos by barging past other shoppers in the wheelchair in her determined manner. The final strapline (catch phrase) then appears, *Tesco Every Little Helps*.

### Safeway

Although this Safeway commercial was also one of a soap opera style series, it does not require any previous knowledge on the part of the audience, except experiences of being with small children.

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The Safeway commercial used several variations on a similar theme of small children shopping with their parents to communicate their messages. The thoughts of the small children were ‘spoken’ by various actors in this advertisement. Martin Clunes (star of Men Behaving Badly) provided the voice for the small boy, who is the ongoing star of the series. Prior to this series of advertisements, a popular film had been released entitled ‘Look who’s talking’, which the commercial has copied as the film used male and female actors to ‘speak for’ the thoughts of the children and therefore the majority of the audience would have been familiar with this form of presentation.

The advertisement is set in a living room or hall of a home while the young boy unpacks the shopping from the carrier bags. All of the products shown are Safeway’s own brands and feature their distinctive labelling. A woman is vaguely seen in the background and appears to be on the telephone while the child pulls out all the shopping onto the floor. A man’s voice speaks for the child’s thoughts, which are a reaction to a female voice-over who ‘speaks’ to the viewer. The woman used for the voice-over is also a famous television comic actress, Caroline Quentin (co-star of Martin Clunes in the aforementioned Men Behaving Badly scenes).

### **ASDA**

This commercial is in a stand-alone format with a self-contained story that has two parts: the first is a scene from the past; the second represents the present. The first portion of the commercial is in black and white and shows a young man walking up to a farm where women are busy baking. This scene is reminiscent of the black and white films made during and just after the Second World War and it is evident that this is a homecoming – a son returning from a long absence. The scene then returns to the present and a family are walking around the store speaking to various staff members before getting to the checkout and concludes with a final scene of a carved tablet of stone that pledges the ASDA promise. This symbol echoes the Old Testament biblical story of the 10 commandments. This commercial was also screened prior to Easter and reflects the Christian traditions as well as a family gathering with a ‘double’ reason to celebrate. In the same vein, the

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farmhouse is a reference to ASDA's roots, as the company was originally a co-operative of farmers who sold their produce in one location.

The grainy, almost black and white, introduction to the ASDA commercial, implied values reminiscent of a romantic, idealised notion of the past and linked these with the present. Women were shown baking the hot cross buns in the grainy introduction, however, once the commercial returned to the present day the bakers featured in the store were men. The image of the farmhouse kitchen, which seemed to extend to accommodate the extra ovens, for example, gave the impression of a 'domestic' scene in which women could be seen to cook. The historical setting of the commercial perhaps hints at the reason for the women working in the farm bakery - the shortage of male labour. These scenes draw on the divide between domestic and public spaces, with the qualification for occupying these spaces based on gender. The voice-over stated that Easter was always a time for homecomings, represented by the image of the soldier returning to the farm and in doing so it also referred to the Christian tale of resurrection. Moreover, the values that the retailer was trying to project of tradition, honesty and credibility were implicit and reaffirmed in this, the idealised world of a rural, simple past. Old-fashioned quality products at old-fashioned prices – ASDA price!

### Sainsbury

The Sainsbury's commercial was in stand-alone format in which the company promoted its equipment for schools scheme. This is a scheme in which consumers collect points that can be given to their chosen school which can then be 'cashed in' with the grocery retailer for equipment or computers. The commercial starts with a boy of approximately ten years old and a girl of about twelve who are both neatly dressed in formal, traditional school uniforms, wearing blazers and with their haircut in traditional 'school' styles - the boy has a 'basin' cut, the girl wears 'pigtailed'. The room or environment is completely white which they then proceed to fill with the contents of the carrier bag that they have brought with them. This room does not have any visible corners or

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ceilings and the door or exit is not shown. Rather, the room seems to represent a white space or void that will rapidly fill up with equipment for their school. Arguably this room is symbolic of the lack of school equipment in UK schools and implies the reason why the grocery retailer is concerned to help their key customers care for their children's welfare.

The boy pulls out from his normal-sized carrier items such as computers and rugby balls. The boy inspects the bag and takes the items out, hands them to the girl who then puts them away in a space in the background of the scene. At one point the boy brings out a guitar and before giving it to the girl pretends to play it like a 'rock n' roll' star. When the boy brings a hula-hoop out of the carrier bag the girl skips with it before finally placing it at the rear of the room. Finally, once all the items are unpacked the boy puts the plastic carrier bag in his pocket and they both leave this room. While this action is taking place a women's voice explains the scheme and its benefits ending with Sainsbury's strapline (catch-phrase) *Savings add up at Sainsbury*.

### **6.3 Retailers' perspectives of retailers**

The above illustrates, not only how the retailers perceive their role but also how they confirmed their authority in this environment. Two key ideas were communicated in these commercials: customer service and a patriarchal attitude towards the female consumer and their families. Due to the intangible nature of service industries, the organisation endeavours to promote their brand imagery and relationship with the consumer. Symbolic imagery has increasingly been relied upon to project an organisation's (or brand's) key values to their internal and external publics (Hatch 1997; Cobb-Walgren & Mohr 1998; Karathanos 1998). Within the grocery sector there are two products that are sold by the retailer – the actual physical product, such as a tin of baked beans, and the service, which is an intangible but critically important product (Cobb-Walgren & Mohr 1998). Grocery retailers in particular, have painstakingly built an ethos of understanding and ability to anticipate their consumers' needs (Sparks 1990/1; Du Gay 1996). Branding helps create the

products and isolates the expected qualities the consumer will receive by consuming this good or service. Furthermore branding creates trust, satisfaction and a relationship (albeit a tenuous one) (Bunting 2001). As Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard comment on branding and tourism:

*Brand managers try to position their brands so that they are perceived by the consumer to occupy a niche in the marketplace occupied by no other brand. They try to differentiate their product by stressing attributes they claim will match the target markets' needs more closely than other brands and then they try to create a product image consistent with the perceived self-image of the targeted consumer segment. As such, they appeal to consumers' values and self-images and in doing so they are thereby appealing to the powerful discourses which have shaped those self-same values and images.*

(Morgan & Pritchard 1998: 141)

Table 6.1 compares the perspective of the grocery retailers as depicted in their commercials.

Next a brief discussion about the commercials' settings will be given, followed by a discussion of their depiction of the store employees. The use of the voice-over and catch phrase will be examined before a brief overview of the products or brands shown in the advertisements. Finally, the Tesco and Sainsbury commercials will be discussed in detail to illustrate the key points from Table 6.1. These commercials reflect the retailer's personality and image to their external and internal publics (Varey 1997). Thus, corporate image, reputation, values and ethics espoused by the retailer are key competitive strategies applied in various ways throughout all their promotional tools. The image or branding of the store has developed into a sophisticated array of promotional efforts and while these can be managed, created and shaped, the image relies on the consumer for its interpretation. This table represents how the store tries to manage or shape its image whilst Table 6.2 illustrates how the organisation perceives the concerns, values and interests of the consumer.

As far as the settings of the commercials were concerned, the domestic environment was shown, along with additional scenes of the store and the shopping activity. The settings enabled the retailer to illustrate the more familiar domestic settings before proceeding to scenes of the store. The domestic settings will be discussed later in section 6.4. The store scenes depicted as much of the in-store environment and facilities as they could in the allocated commercial time. In some cases,

however, this proved to be too much visual information for the viewer, as the two coders of the commercials found, for example, when they commented on the ‘whirlwind’ tour around the store given by the ASDA commercial.

**Table 6:1      Retailer imagery**

	ASDA	Tesco	Safeway	Sainsbury
<b>Setting</b>	Store & farmhouse	Hospital & store	House	Other – white room
<b>Employees</b>				
Gender	Both	Both	N/A	N/A
Work role	Checkout	Checkout	N/A	N/A
	Shop floor	Shop floor		
Race	White	Black & White	N/A	N/A
Voice-over	Male	Male	Female	Female
Catch phrase	ASDA price	Every little bit helps	Lighting the load	Savings add up
Values emphasised	Freshness	Value for money	Savings	Education
Products	Branded & own label	Fresh produce	Own label	N/A

**Notes:** N/A = Not applicable

One vital theme in the commercials sampled, was how the retailer tried to establish a link between the personal, private sphere and the more public domain of the store. In the service industries developing a trusting relationship with the customer is of paramount importance and employees are essential to this process. Thus it was not surprising in these commercials that the employees are depicted as smiling and eager to satisfy the consumer. Employees represent the organisation and communicated both their expertise and professionalism through their uniform, equipment and the advice they provide for customers (Cobb-Walgren & Mohr 1998). Depiction of employees

enabled the retailer to make the ‘physical’ or human connection between the organisation and the consumer. Their employees provided the ‘face’ of the organisation and this strategy is also used in a variety of community initiatives and public relations campaigns conducted by grocery retailers (Harrison 2000). Employee roles within the commercials were stratified according to gender, with men in skilled trade professions, such as a butcher or baker, while female staff appeared in more menial roles. This adds another dimension to the work of Kim Humphrey (1998), who has commented that:

*The supermarket was to be a feminised space in terms of both workers and customers. Ironically, however, the culture of the supermarket remained mediated and extensively controlled by a less visible and almost exclusively male management, often placed outside the supermarket in company head offices, or behind shop walls.*

(Humphrey 1998: 76)

The voice-over used within the commercials also illustrated a gender bias. A female voice was used when children were the focus of the commercial (such as the Safeway and Sainsbury advertisements) while in the Tesco and ASDA commercial the focus was on a female consumer and the voice-over was male. In all cases, the voice-over used the inclusive words such as ‘we’ and this indicated that they spoke on behalf of the retailer. In addition, the voice-over and catch phrases provided the viewer with information regarding the choice, quality and in particular the price or savings that the consumer can reap from that retailer. The voice-overs in the sample selected also focused on certain values such as family, education and savings. Even if the store name was not mentioned until the end of the commercial, some reference to the retailer was depicted instead. The Sainbury’s commercial, for example, prominently displayed their name on the plastic carrier bag and Safeway’s featured the store’s own label products. The retailers tended to emphasise their own label products or fresh foods rather than manufacturers’ branded products and this is perhaps indicative of the shift in power from the manufacturer to the retailer. Therefore, when retailers promote fruit, bread and vegetables, they are not associating themselves with any particular brand imagery, except perhaps themselves in the form of ‘own label’.

The following section illustrates the above points using the examples of the Tesco and Sainsbury commercials. In these examples it is evident how the various visual and verbal messages were at work both explicitly and implicitly. Firstly, Tesco used the scenes of a hospital and their store to juxtapose a variety of meanings. The contrast and comparison of these environments linked many themes - budgets, quality, caring, community - and the value both Tesco and their consumers place on these concepts. The characters and the voice-over specifically referred to concepts of budgets. The themes of caring and community were linked through a variety of images; the lack of service/staff shown in the cold, clinical, uninviting hospital, compared to the store which is bright and clean but not clinical, stocked full of attractive products and services by warm, friendly, laughing, caring staff. The traditional notion of hospitals as caring environments is challenged – if you really know what is good for you (like the mother character) you'll get right down to Tesco. Tesco is cast in the role of carer, caring for the customer, reliable in an ever-changing world. This commercial therefore utilised a long-standing technique whereby images of the featured constructs signify and share other meanings (Williamson 1977), a communication process in which the viewer actively participates.

By contrast, Sainsbury provided a completely different environment for their commercial, as it was entirely set in a white room. This would have seemed rather bizarre but for the characters since the image of the children playing with school equipment provided a feeling of ‘normality’. Colour has been a tool used in marketing for many decades with research on the effects of colour dating back to the early retailing studies of the 1950s (Bellizzi, Crowley & Hasty 1983; Schmitt & Simonson 1997). Particular colours evoke specific responses or emotions for instance, it is well known that pinks promote a sense of well-being and that white evokes cleanliness and purity. Therefore, the white room epitomises the innocence of childhood and normalises an otherwise bizarre environment. As the preceding discussion and these examples illustrate, corporate image and promotion campaigns support a range of ideas and values to generate both customer awareness and to create a favourable climate within which the store operates.

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Before proceeding to evaluate the consumer imagery, some comments summarising this section are required. Service industries are characterised by their intangible products, which are usually consumed at the time of purchase and rely on the interaction between the organisation and the consumer (Cobb-Walgren & Mohr 1998). Store image, by its very nature, is constructed from the generalised cultural beliefs and ideals of consumers and retailers, which is then projected into specific personalities or imagery. Store personality or image, are embedded in the associated attributes that a consumer has of a specific retailer, or as previous researchers have indicated:

*...retail store image may be viewed as the total conceptualised or expected reinforcement that a person associates with shopping*  
(Hirschman, Greenberg & Robertson 1978: 3)

In this present study the key aspects of store personality investigated were: the role of the retailer; gender; the projected imagery of consumers. As discussed in chapter 3, Pierre Martineau (1958) first outlined the attributes of a store's image, divided into functional and psychological factors. The functional attributes were the most feasible factors and could be aligned with particular market segments. Consumers, for example, have a hierarchy of stores and form alliances (albeit tenuous) to a store that matches their public self-image. Here branding, layout and location are the most controlled and operationalised aspects, however, the psychological aspect focusing on consumer behaviour and the cultural context of the shopping decisions is the more problematic. Opinion remains divided both over which of these two characteristics is the most important and how to collect and evaluate the relevant data, particularly when '*the major dimensions underlying store image are not consistent from market to market*' (Hirschman, Greenberg and Robertson 1978: 9).

The results of the retailer imagery in this present study reflected their preferred role that also extended into promoting the ideal employee imagery, as managers and employees of an organisation will "*invest their settings with meaning and then come to understand them*" (Karathanos 1998: 123). Recently, research investigating advertisements used in the service industries has indicated that two distinct types of symbols are used to communicate the reliability and consistency of the service product, these are authority and product symbols (Cobb-Walgren &

Mohr 1998). Authority symbols communicate the expertise and professionalism of the organisations through their uniform, equipment and knowledge, while service symbols focus on the environment, such as the store, its facilities and its furniture (Cobb-Walgren & Mohr 1998). These symbols were used in these UK grocery retailer commercials to project the expertise and quality of the retailer and importantly, the link between the store and the domestic environment was shown in both explicitly and implicitly.

To summarise this section, it is clear, as previous studies have also shown, that the voice-over is one of the key authoritative tools for conveying the message and it therefore plays a vital role in the commercials. Studies (O'Donnell & O'Donnell 1978; Livingstone & Green 1988; Woodruffe & Todd 1992; Whitelock & Jackson 1997) that have investigated a larger sample of commercials have found that well over 90% of voice-overs are male. Men have the authoritative role within these advertisements and the dominance of the male voice-over represents this 'expertise', reflecting the divide between the feminised environment and the overwhelming male dominance in the management of the store.

#### **6.4 Retailers' perspectives of consumers**

After a brief discussion regarding the importance of the consumer, this section will illustrate the results from the consumer imagery. Firstly, the location and setting of the advertisement will be outlined, this will be followed with a discussion of the lifestyle characteristics of the consumers portrayed in the commercials. An examination of the main decision-maker follows, before an investigation of the values emphasised by the retailer. The characters depicted receiving or offering help are also discussed. The final section provides a summary of the consumer results from the exploratory content analysis. Table 6.2 illustrates the consumer imagery and provides an indication of the characteristics that the retailers projected of their customers. Themes suggested by William Leiss, Stephen Kline & Sut Jhally (1990) were used to evaluate the consumer imagery. These

include location, characteristics of the consumer, decision-maker and role, values, advice and help received. These categories all provided a stereotypical picture of how the retailers perceive their consumers.

**Table 6.2:** Consumer imagery from the content analysis

	ASDA	Tesco	Safeway	Sainsbury
<b>Location</b>	Outdoor & indoor	Outdoor & indoor	Indoor	Indoor
Setting	Rural & store	Hospital & store	Conventional house	White room
<b><u>Personal &amp; lifestyle characteristics</u></b>				
Gender	Both	Female	Male (child)	Both
Race	White	White	White	White
Accent	N/A	RP English	RP English	N/A
	2 children	1 elderly parent	1 young child	2 children
Roles	2 siblings	1 older child carer	1 parent (in background)	
	3 parents			
Dress	Casual	Casual & other (nightwear)	Casual	Other (formal school uniform)
<b><u>Decision-Maker &amp; role</u></b>	Mother	Both females	Mother	N/A
<b><u>Values</u></b>	Family	Family	Family	Education
<b><u>Receiver or giver of advice</u></b>	Receiver of advice	Both receiver & giver of advice	Neither receiver or giver of advice	Neither receiver or giver of advice
<b><u>Receiver or recipient of help</u></b>	Mother recipient	Mother recipient	Mother recipient of child's help	Boy provider Girl recipient

Notes:

RP = Received Pronunciation

N/A = Not applicable

The personal and lifestyle characteristics of the consumer were emphasised in a variety of ways during the commercials. None of the commercials depicted their main characters in a work environment instead the everyday and domestic scenes dominated the commercial. Thus, the viewer is left to assume their social status from other non-verbal attributes, such as manner, dress, hair and accent. The coders used in this study felt that the lifestyles portrayed in the commercials were professional, although ASDA portrayed a ‘skilled’ lifestyle (indicated by the clothes, characters, setting and products). Overall the other commercials tended to focus on one or two key settings and emphasised their female characters.

Few manufacturers’ branded products were shown in these commercials although the implications of such associations are twofold for the consumer. Firstly, the depiction of fresh foods suggested that the consumers have autonomy (over their choices and lives) as they do their own cooking rather than using convenience foods. Secondly, a particular level of income is needed to buy fresh foods as convenience foods, such as discounted baked beans and tinned red tomatoes are cheaper (and would appeal more to lower income groups) and last longer than for instance, apples, courgettes and cauliflower. Rather than creating a two-tier group of low-income and middle-income groups shopping within the same store, however, in this study, retailers targeted the middle-income group at the expense of the lower-income group.

The women were also depicted as the main decision-makers and they were typically placed in the role of mother. The ASDA and Tesco commercials, for example, focused on the female consumer, watching her every move around the store and looking at the items she had selected. Previous studies have commented on the tendency of commercials to use males to impart knowledge to females who may be portrayed as both the character and the viewer (Millum 1975; Courtney & Whipple 1983; Cobb-Walgren & Mohr 1998). This was particularly evident in the portrayal of store employees, whereby men were always in a supervisory role, imparting knowledge, whilst female employees were shown at the checkout in the serving role or looking after the character’s

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children. The male consumer (if shown) was either in the background of the scenes or depicted as domestically inept, or blindfolded as in the Tesco commercial. Here the elderly man is blindfolded, pushing the elderly mother character around the store - she is definitely in control, even to the point of telling him which way to go and when to stop. His prime role is simply to facilitate her shopping activity. Thus the male consumer is impotent in this female environment and serves a limited, often comic, function. This enhances the role of the retailer in providing a 'proper' service to woman as they can then depict themselves as the male providers, able to facilitate shopping experiences and 'iron out' problems for the female consumer.

In addition to depicting the woman as the key character, the values shown also placed her firmly within the domestic, family realm. Even when the family unit was not directly featured, as in the case of Sainsbury's, the advertisement emphasised family values through focusing on education which in-turn provides benefits for the children in the family. The values used added to the symbolic lifestyle portrayed and emphasised relationships rather than work. The women's position within these relationships was central, as she was shown as the main supportive structure, aided and abetted by the retailer in the family environment. The retailer's supportive role was further indicated in the catch phrases used, for instance: *Lightening the load* (Safeway); *Every little helps* (Tesco); *ASDA price* (ASDA); and *Savings add up* (Sainsbury).

Within these commercials the retailers' emphasis was placed on family ties and the parent – child theme was one that featured throughout, apart from the Sainsbury commercial. Within the Sainsbury commercial the implied relationship was between the boy and the girl, which seem to indicate that they were either friends, related or they were used as props. Trevor Millum (1975) has described how children are used, particularly within food advertising, as props to create an everyday mood to the overall scene. This seems most likely in this instance, as the ages of the children suggested that they would not have friends of either sex at that stage in their childhood.

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The consumer imagery used in the commercials reflected what the retailer considers as their perceived concerns and aspirations, while also revealing traditional and stereotypical expectations of gender roles within the family unit. The commercials portrayed images of an affluent middle-income consumer and the roles were cast along strictly gender stereotypical lines. There were more female adult characters than male and it was the females who made the primary shopping decisions. Another interesting feature of the commercials was that the women or girl was usually the receiver of help rather than the giver of help. The ASDA commercial was extremely stereotypical in this regard and the male employees imparted advice to the female consumer. The majority of female characters were characterised in the role of a parent whereas males were not. In addition:

*In keeping with their maternal role the women were depicted as informally dressed and plain, giving the impression of understanding the possibility of refinement and sophistication but rejecting it in favour of being 'down to earth'*  
(Millum 1975: 96)

To summarise this section, the ‘ideology of domesticity’ was evident as price-consciousness, health, and value for money all contributed to the construction of woman as a homemaker, with responsibilities for controlling the housekeeping budget (Maynard 1985). All these commercials were explicitly positioned to appeal to women and their perceived concerns – they were the focal point of each commercial: staff addressed them; the voice-over talked to them and their children. The grocery retailers thus provided the female consumers with a secure framework in which to make their store choice and purchasing decisions. Significantly:

*In turn this reflects an appreciation of the power of bourgeois discourses of the social world as consisting of ‘separate spheres’: a public / political sphere which is essentially the preserve of men; and a domestic / private sphere in which women are more prominent.*

(Glennie & Thrift 1996: 223)

These images again reaffirm traditional stereotypes and expectations of women and their role within the family and the shopping activity. Similar findings, as illustrated in the above tables, have been found in previous studies investigating gender roles in print and broadcast media advertisements. For example, Jeryl Whitelock and Delia Jackson's (1997) study comparing women

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in television commercials in the UK and France confirmed that the genders continued to be portrayed differently. They commented that women were more likely to be:

*Younger, more likely to be portrayed in a dependency role (e.g. spouse, parent, housewife) or be a product user. They are rarely portrayed as authority figures either as on-screen characters or voice-overs...It can therefore be concluded that sex-role stereotyping is still present in both the UK and France, and that the portrayal of female characters in television commercials still does not reflect adequately the various roles played by women in society.*

(Whitelock & Jackson 1997:303 - 304)

The previous review of the commercials highlighted the wealth of cultural information that saturates the commercials, shopping and consumers' interpretations of this whole environment. An important aspect of these commercials is that they are an interpretation by the advertiser (retailer and agency) of themselves and their consumers. The following discussion investigates this portrayal of retailer – consumer interaction (via the concept of store personality) together with an evaluation of consumers' attitudes towards these organisations and each other (see sections 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7). Finally a comparative analysis of these perspectives will be given where a number of important distinctions emerged regarding the activity of grocery shopping.

## 6.5 Consumers' perceptions of retailers

Retailers have, since the mid-eighties, emphasised their ability to understand and anticipate their customers' needs. As competition and land prices became increasingly competitive from the late-eighties (Wrigley, 1993), changes occurred in the UK retailers' philosophy, driven by Tesco. As a result, this major grocery retailer's product range expanded, offering more diverse foodstuffs and services in a 'one-stop store'. Thus, the stores were upgraded and customer service became a key tool in the battle to win and retain consumers. Employee and customer communication became increasingly important in this changed environment and symbols (both explicit and implicit) assumed a crucial role for the retailers in their promotional activity (Cobb-Walgren & Mohr 1998; Disney 1999). However, as Mary Jo Hatch and other organizational scholars within the symbolic interpretative approach have discussed, symbolic interpretation as a two-way process, relies on the

intangible aspects of consuming and store image (Schein 1992; Hatch 1997). These communications depend on the abilities of the organisations' key publics to interpret the symbolic meanings from the promotional material.

Thus, the consumer's interpretation is crucial and there can be dire consequences for companies if their messages are misinterpreted. Many companies, for example, have used logos or names that have been misinterpreted or are inappropriate in an international context (Harrison 2000). Lifestyle has been one concept that advertisers have used since the early-sixties (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1990), and it depicts the product around particular values and activities associated with a certain group of consumers. As discussed in chapter 2, this particular concept stemmed from the middle classes' desire for status symbols. As Rudi Laermans has commented:

*The occupants of these new social positions wanted to distinguish themselves from the lower social strata, especially the working class. Thus the new middle class longed for status symbols at cheap prices.*

(Laermans 1993: 97)

Advertising and consumption is thus, never a one-way communication as advertisers:

*...try to commodify meaning, that is try to make images and symbols into things which can be bought or sold. Consumers, on the other hand, try to give their own, new meanings to the commodities and services they buy.*

(Abercrombie cited in Lury 1997: 53)

The focus groups in this study sought to investigate participants' perceptions of the stores, the shopping activity and their consumers. Research techniques, such as projective questions, along with 'mood boards' and the videos, facilitated an exchange of ideas between the participants. Invariably the participants compared the commercials with their own 'reality' and their pre-conceived notions of the grocery retailer. During the course of the focus groups the participants were asked to think of an animal that personified the store and their reasons for this choice. The answers to this question proved to be surprisingly enlightening as they revealed the participants' attitudes and image perceptions of the stores. As one of the group commented:

*How about Tesco's - an elephant? Tesco's have been around for a long time. A mammoth.*

(Male-only focus group, member T, area 2)

*I have always found Tesco's to be like a tortoise – they live a long time, slow and dull, plodding.*

(Male-only focus group, member P, area 2)

Tesco, the market leader, was depicted as a mammoth, suggesting a large, lumbering, slow organisation, although other participants' comparisons with a chameleon also hinted at the changes Tesco has recently undergone through its repositioning strategies.

Sainsbury, the previous market leader, conjured up images of a British lion for the male focus group members and a Persian cat for the females:

*Sainsbury's would be like a lion... they are regarded as the best retailer in Britain.... A lion is like a king of the pack, ...a rich cat.*

(Male-only focus group, member D, area 2)

*Maybe it's because the 50+ group have got more spare money? Because their kids have grown up and everything else. Say the young executive type. What animal are we going to call Sainsbury's? How about a rich cat?*

*A Persian cat?*

(Female-only focus group, members S & J, area 2)

This is an indication of the Victorian background of this UK grocery retailer and the values that these animals portray are quintessentially English and reminiscent of the British Empire. There is an element of luxury, as the pedigree Persian cat was also chosen and this breed requires constant attention and is expensive to buy and feed.

In contrast, ASDA was regarded as familiar, relatively inexpensive and available to everyone, with the female group feeling that a household pet best represented this retailer: "*ASDA's would be like your household pet.*" The male focus group members felt strongly that ASDA should be

represented by a phoenix, as the company is changing and emerging from a difficult trading period:

*ASDA's is like a horse - work horse - mainstream. Farmer's aren't they? They have built up the business. ASDA's is like something that has lain dormant for ages and is suddenly coming to life. They are like building up now and they have also been one of the major retailers. A phoenix perhaps? Yes I think so. They have created a good leadership.*

(Male-only focus group, member D, area 2)

While Safeway for the male focus groups was regarded as a: "*Bit like a quality animal. Like a through-bred race horse*", their partners regarded this retailer in a more negative light and considered the company to represent a snake. As one woman said:

*I fell foul to one of their campaigns in store that get you to buy more goods because you get one half price. Basically, the way they worded it was not the way they meant it to be. I had a bit of a fight with them. So I've called them slippery snakes.*

(Female-only focus group, member S, area 2)

The negative experience of this consumer had influenced her attitude towards the store. This negative encounter, however, did not preclude the consumer from shopping, albeit infrequently, at the store.

## 6.6 Consumers' perspectives of consumers

Focus group work with consumers in this study confirmed that the experiences within the stores and any information they had gathered about the retailer over the years were fundamental in consumer attitude formation and the commercials were re-evaluated against their established perceptions. Tesco, for example, was still perceived to be slightly down-market despite its premier position and advertising campaigns. The instrumental decision-making factors for consumers were the location, range of products, other customers and the retailer's position in the 'social hierarchy'.

As two respondents commented:

*You go into ASDA or somewhere like that in the morning and you would not go in looking like that! At Sainsbury's they [consumers] all look immaculate even at nine o'clock in the morning!*

(Female-only focus group, member G, area 1)

*I always come back feeling pleased with all the money I have spent.  
(Sainsbury's trip)*

(Female-only focus group, member L, area 1)

*I think people dress differently in Sainsbury's... If you walk around ASDA you see some right ruffians! Then you go in to Sainsbury's and you don't seem to see any of these rough people. I know it is awful to say but you don't.*

(Female-only focus group, member G, area 1)

Implicit within these kind of comments made by consumers were underlying statements about their own 'sense of self' and their 'social status' and how they wished to be seen publicly. The transaction at the store involves a more complex set of arrangements than merely selling and buying goods, and the activity does not end there, the goods are then consumed in the home environment. Unlike other branded goods, such as cars or clothes, retailers' products do not have the same element of public display, as no one would realise where a household bought their food unless they were shown the labels or carrier bags.

As mentioned in chapter 2, Lizabeth Cohen's discussion of shopping centres in the USA comments that the move to these suburban sites resulted in the retailing sites becoming "*restructured and segmented by class and race*" (Cohen 2000: 260). The mood board exercise further demonstrated how consumers had specific ideas concerning the type of customer behaviour expected at these four major UK grocery stores. The following examples illustrate these pre-conceived ideas of the type of consumer expected to patronise the stores. The comments also indicate the appropriate behaviour expected of consumers while shopping within these stores:

*I think Safeway's is the same way as Sainsbury's but are slightly down market.  
Maybe the people want to be Sainsbury shoppers but aren't quite there.*

(Female-only focus group, member L, area 2)

*I think that one [mood board picture] is ASDA's because they're traditional foods.*

(Male-only focus group, member C, area 1)

*I have always put Sainsbury at the quality end and at the expensive end of the supermarket chain.*

(Male-only focus group, member G, area 2)

Further confirmation was given to this issue when the participants felt they had selected the ‘appropriate’ person for that retailer. Interestingly, an Independent on Sunday article also supported these comments from the focus group in its portrayal of typical supermarket shoppers (Dowling 1999). The pen portraits of the Tesco, ASDA and Sainsbury shopper mirror those described in the focus group. Compare these comments from Dowling’s profiles of typical shoppers with the previous comments regarding ASDA and Sainsbury:

*ASDA: White socks and baseball caps are still the rule for men, mismatched tracksuit top and bottoms for women.*

*Sainsbury: The truly aspirational – young couples with his-and-hers designer eyewear- have now mostly forsaken it for the nearest Tesco, leaving behind the ruthlessly devoted and people who are too lazy to learn another aisle system.*

(Dowling 1999: 18)

Consumers’ perceptions of these shoppers were not dissimilar to the newspaper journalist’s pen portraits and it would seem that particular preconceptions of the stores’ clientele are ingrained and widespread. Thus, particular consumer ‘personalities’ were associated with and complimented the stores’ projected imagery. A combination of consumer experience, store identity and advertising imagery merged to construct the core consumer of each store - an image which is both constructed by the retailer and interpreted by the shopper.

## 6.7 Consumers’ perspectives of the commercials

The mixed gender focus group was shown a video of the four commercials and asked for their initial comments regarding the scenes or characters shown. From their discussion certain themes arose and were explored in detail, namely: their recall of the commercial and any subsequent advertisement from the retailer; their reactions to the scenes; their comments regarding their activities within the store. At this point in the focus group, discussion also centred on the ‘histories’ of the retailers and the credibility that the consumer attached to each of them. These comments

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supported their earlier discussions and the content analysis findings, however rather than reiterating these findings this section will only focus on the above-mentioned themes.

Interestingly, the mixed focus groups discussed in detail both the commercials they had just viewed and commercials for other products. In both focus group areas the participants firmly stated that they were not at all influenced by the commercials, as these following examples illustrate:

*None of those adverts would make me go to any of those shops.*

(Female-only focus group, member L, area 1)

*They only guide you to the shops - it is in your subconscious.*

(Female-only focus group, member G, area 1 [my emphasis])

*The only one that might influence is the very first one with the little boy when he did go up to the crèche window in Safeway's.*

(Female-only focus group, member A, area 1)

As the latter example illustrates, the participants would either change their minds regarding the effectiveness of the commercials or later in the discussion provide statements that were contradictory, indicating the persuasiveness of these commercials. An interesting reflection from a female participant in the second mixed focus group observed that grocery shopping involved a variety of decisions other than just price, and store:

*It is more likely on product advertising to make you go one way or another. With a shop there is so much more involved as to whether you do your shopping, rather than which choice of baked beans or whatever you are talking about.*

(Mixed focus group, member P, area 2)

Consumers could not discern between the commercials for the different retailers and one advertisement would often be confused with that of a competitor, as one man said:

*I didn't realise that was Tesco's advert. The humour made me forget what store it was. I didn't really pay attention.*

(Male mixed focus group, member T, area 1)

At the time of the focus groups, Sainsbury had just replaced their computers for schools commercial (which was used in the content analysis) for one which portrayed a couple in their kitchen. In it the female character makes some ironic comments regarding the male partner's attempts at cooking creative and foreign meals. The male character endeavours to impress the

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viewer with his creative flair and mastery while the women reveals the down-to-earth reality, i.e. he bought it all from Sainsbury. This participant from the mixed focus group in area two, recalls the new Sainsbury commercial but has associated it with Safeway:

*The Safeway [Sainsbury's] one just summed up the snob value. It was up market. It says we are available for 'plebs' in Peckham, which isn't true.*

(Female, mixed focus group, member L, area 1)

The focus group study confirmed that the participants' in-store experiences and the information they had gathered over the years were fundamental in their attitude formation and the commercials were evaluated against these established perceptions. Sainsbury was still perceived as an up-market store, whilst, despite the appeal of its commercial and its repositioning, Tesco still remains behind the former market leader.

## 6.8 Leisure and family grocery shopping

The commercials projected a particular framework or corporate identity and they also reflected a 'typical' grocery shopper and their families. The content analysis study illustrates that consumers and retailers are not operating within an objective sterile environment, rather they are swimming either with – or against - the current of social and cultural expectations and environment. Regardless of gender the retailer provided the participants with an opportunity for social and community interaction and these sites articulated and accentuated on a macro scale domestic, gender and power relations. Whilst grocery shopping is traditionally seen as a female activity, the male members of the focus groups felt that they participated fully in the activity and both genders had clear images of the retailers.

The male participants also discussed their own activities in the stores, revealing that the men were also involved in the shopping activity with or without their female partner. As one male consumer commented:

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*My two are pretty good. (Daughter) likes throwing sweets in the trolley. When we go shopping we try to have it as a fun evening out. They drive the trolley and everything.*

(Male focus group, member T, area 1)

These men commented on the benefits of the crèche facility that they felt made their shopping trip less stressful.

*It saves you money. You pay £1.50 to put him in there but you haven't got him in your trolley, so you do your shopping quicker and he doesn't say - I'll have those chocolate bars - so you buy the cheapest and he never knows. So you save money. Then you go and have a cup of coffee and relax at the end and then go and get him out. Brilliant!*

(Male-only focus group, member M, area 1)

These examples illustrate two men who felt that shopping was not stressful and should be enjoyed as a family activity, despite one man's comments that "*shopping is a chore, I could do without it, I've got better things to do.*" As another noted:

*I appreciate that and those who want to do it fine, but I don't think it's that stressful. Some people relax in their own atmosphere and if you can't relax, you can't relax! Some people can't relax in work.*

(Male-only focus group, member D, area 1)

For some of the male participants the trip was conceived as pleasurable when they accompanied their family, particularly their children. This is not to suggest that the trip was always pleasurable or that men preferred the activity to women. Men felt they needed to justify the shopping trip - perhaps indicating that they were well aware that this was a female space which they usually only entered when accompanied by their partner and children.

Although many of the men did go grocery shopping, it was clear that the target consumer was female, white and was in some sort of care-giver role either to a growing family or in the case of Tesco's, to her elderly mother. The retailer positioned themselves as the facilitator and provider while the central characters were firmly anchored within a typical feminine role of carer. Some further comments from the female participants also indicated that they would browse through some of the retailers' products during certain trips. For example:

*Because I go there (Safeway) quite often now. I know it now. I don't have to browse at the items. I get it all or I go to ASDA's because I like to browse around the clothes, if I have time that is.*

(Mixed focus group, female member A, area 1)

*If you are on your own shopping and you've got time and if I had time and didn't have the children, I would go to Sainsbury's to look around the products.*

(Mixed focus group, Female member G, area 1)

Interestingly, in one of the female-only focus groups in area 1, there was some discussion regarding the crèche facility offered by some of the retailers. Some of the women who frequently used it felt they needed to justify why they used it when one of the women firmly stated that: "*I never use the crèche*" as this lengthy extract illustrates:

member L: *I never use the crèche. I have never used the crèche they come shopping with me and I have made shopping fun and they have picked things, so I am in a minority because I have never ever put my children in a crèche.*

member A: *[pre-school child] can help me out but I still like him to go into the crèche if he wants to.*

member C: *[pre-school child] wants to go in otherwise I would not put him if he didn't want to go.*

member A: *[The] crèche for me is a big bonus. It influences me going to Safeway definitely because if there is a week when [pre school child] is tired and I think is he too tired to go into the crèche I will take him to ASDA when I go shopping. It influences me definitely.*

member L: *What I am saying [is] that when you are looking at these families [mood board pictures] it doesn't necessarily mean that because they have children they are going to put them in the crèche does it?*

member C: *If you go shopping there are always children around you.*

(Female-only focus group members, area 1)

Therefore the image of the 'good mother', which is also promoted, as some of the focus group members noticed by the retailers, is an important identity which is ever present for women even when they are amongst other women. Here it would be useful to turn to Stuart Hall's (1996) arguments that these identities are not fixed nor are they pre-determined by gender or class, rather they are imposed, fragmented and:

*Actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been*

*represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation.*

(Hall 1996: 4)

Thus, the ‘body’ is constructed within these frameworks - or discourses and practices - and the individual is increasingly focusing on the future or their potential rather than reflecting on the past or their current situation. The participants were pre-occupied with where they are going or how they present themselves to the outside world. This was illustrated in the focus groups when participants mentioned their attitudes and perceptions about other ‘down market’ stores. As some of the earlier quotes demonstrated they were also pre-occupied by manners, what they could and could not do in a public place, such as eating or testing samples. There seemed to be certain ‘unwritten’ codes or expectations regarding conduct when shopping in the store. However, as Stuart Hall (1996) points out, one of the key points regarding identities is that they exclude or mark differences and it is through this exclusion that power strategies can be identified. It was particularly clear from the commercials that the typical shopper was regarded as white and female. Men, when shown as shoppers, were seen as part of the family group and were not the focal point of the commercial. Black or Asian families were noticeably absent from the commercials. In addition, when I was looking for photographs for the mood board it was extremely difficult to locate media pictures that included Asian individuals.

Thus, the commercials represented the preferred image of both the firm and the typical consumer. It was also clear that the participants in the focus groups were very clear in how they identified and positioned themselves essentially through ‘difference’. It is also noteworthy that when the couples were interviewed together they were very similar in their responses. Shopping was considered a family event and men would often participate in the weekly shopping activity. In the following examples, which have been taken from the mixed focus groups, there are some indications of leisure shopping and that men accompany the family on the trip.

*If I went on my own I would not probably go to Safeway's. I would possibly go to Sainsbury's and that is why I asked because Sainsbury's to me is somewhere*

*where I would get to look at their products more and want a browse. Why I was quite curious as to whether you took [son].*

(Mixed focus group, member G, area 1)

And later another woman comments:

*Because I go there quite often now. I know it now, I don't have to browse at the items now I get it all or I go to ASDA's because I like to browse around the clothes if I have time that is.*

(Mixed focus group, member A, area 1)

Later in the discussion another women comments:

*If I have time or an afternoon to spare with [daughter]. I will go down there and browse around because they have different products. Unusual things. When we go there we buy things we don't normally buy. Unusual sauces.*

(Mixed focus group, member L, area 1)

These images were more prominent within the mixed focus group sessions although there was one woman who responded to these comments:

*It's like when I haven't got any cash on me, [partner] uses his credit card!*

(Mixed focus group, member S, area 1)

*But it is not like that! Their money is like male dominated, I am providing for my family, here I am paying!*

(Mixed focus group, member P, area 1)

Rather than portraying a fragmented unit that rarely sat down to eat together, the participants comments depicted an idealised image of the family as this extract demonstrates:

*[Safeway] That always reminds me of smiling and linked with the crèche but it is the fact that it is a happy family shopping but it has got the crèche there, to provide for everybody.*

(Female-only focus group, area 1)

The ASDA commercial also capitalised on this romantic notion of family unity and co-operation in the first half of their commercial. The grainy images of a farmhouse with a 'son' coming home from a long absence recalls visions of simple rural traditions and honesty. These nostalgic visions of bygone days and a longing for a return to an era that probably did not really exist endorse particular sentiments of family and gender roles for the individual. Thus ASDA's, along with Safeway's, identities are constructed through their history and frames their particular corporate cultures and practices (Bell & Valentine 1997; Shackleton 1996; Hatch 1997). These concepts also

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appealed to the consumer as it touched their values and aspirations and played on the idea of wholesome, healthy foods, untouched by genetic engineering and enjoyed by happy family units.

Thus, appearance has become important in judging both other individuals and ourselves and the happy contented women and families shown in the commercials perpetuate not only the myth of a united family but also of the particular roles that are expected of individuals. Women consumers were shown in the commercials to be both comfortable with, and capable of, this activity. Women were also much more aware of how they should look and conduct themselves in this environment. Importantly, the commercial images of these happy families invite the viewer to share the experience, to stroll around the store to view the products and foods that can easily be bought and consumed and to take pleasure in the ease of the task. Thus, aesthetics was not confined to the product or service that was being marketed but also to the individual, who was encouraged to identify with this particular framework. As Wolfgang Welsh (1996) notes:

*If an advert succeeds in associating a product with aesthetics which interest the consumer then the product will be sold, whatever its real qualities may be. One doesn't actually acquire the article, but rather by its means, buys oneself into the lifestyle with which the advert had associated it. And, as lifestyles in themselves are today predominantly aesthetically forged, aesthetics altogether is not just the vehicle, but rather the essence.*

(Welsh 1996:4)

## 6.9 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the content analysis and focus group results and has tried to explore the disparity between the projected imagery of the commercials and the reality of the day-to-day lives of the consumers. The content analysis material illustrated the key themes regarding the retailers and their perceptions of their target consumers. It was evident from this data that these commercials are still grounded in traditional stereotypical imagery. Women are the focus of these commercials and the retailer 'courts' them with promises of making the shopping activity convenient and pleasurable. The chore of the shopping trip is not made explicit in these commercials, instead the service aspect is emphasised with the retailer satisfying every whim of the customer. Men as

consumers are noticeably absent, or portrayed as domestically inept, but when they are portrayed as store employees they are in professional/trade roles giving advice to the female consumer. The focus group participants discussed the various aspects of the shopping trips, with their own self-image and perceptions about the activity being indicated in the discussion. The comments indicated a feeling of surveillance by both other shoppers and the retailer on the appropriate behaviour, image and expectations of the shopping activity. A significant theme that emerged from the shopping discussion, particularly from the men, was the leisurely component of the activity. This was not indicated strongly in the commercials but the couples discussed the 'family leisure' aspects of the trip. The women also mentioned that the shopping activity could, on certain occasions, be deemed as a break from the day-to-day chores. As mentioned in previous chapters, the more functional nature of grocery shopping has always been emphasised, yet here participants were discussing the activity in the context of leisure. The following chapter explores this issue of leisure within the grocery-shopping environment in more depth.

# CHAPTER 7

## SHOPPING AND THE GENDERED HOUSEHOLD

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# CHAPTER 7: SHOPPING AND THE GENDERED HOUSEHOLD

## 7.1 Introduction

Shopping accounts have been conceptualised through many different discourses, from leisure to functional, empowerment to manipulation (Fiske 2000; Winship 2000b). In contrast, grocery shopping has tended to be conceptualised as work and thus, firmly placed within the rational realm (Miller *et al.* 1999). The previous chapter provided empirical data that differed from the conventional rationale regarding grocery shopping. For the focus group participants grocery shopping had the possibility of being transcended into a leisure experience. However, I was suspicious that, this issue may have emerged as a result of the focus group method and the participation of both male and female partners concurrently. I felt this would need to be affirmed through use of other methods, which would allow interaction with partners individually, so the presence of a partner would not influence the data. This chapter presents the data resulting from the implementation of a feminist methodology through a series of progressively more searching methods, involving: profile questionnaire; calendars; diaries; interviews.

The focus of this chapter will be on in-store behaviour and attitudes to grocery shopping. The chapter begins with a discussion of who does the shopping, the frequency of their visits, their preferred shopping day and the influence of store location on their choices (section 7.2). This will be followed by an examination of the male and female partners' responsibilities for other domestic tasks (e.g. household chores and caring for others) (section 7.3). The participants' descriptions of family shopping trips are included in Section 7.4. The data also gave some indications of the participants' attitudes and behaviour while actually doing their shopping and these are detailed in section 7.5. This is followed by a discussion of the participants' perceptions

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of grocery shopping as both work and leisure (section 7.6) and of their relationship with the retailers (section 7.7).

## 7.2 Who does the shopping?

The calendar results supported growing evidence that consumers visit grocery stores more than once a week (Cowen 1999; Mintel 1999 January). All of the female participants shopped at least once a week, both for their immediate family and sometimes other 'dependents'. The women usually went grocery shopping either on their own or accompanied by their children – their partner was rarely present. In contrast the males shopped infrequently- with one individual stating that it was an annual event. The men rarely went alone to the grocery store, when they did visit the store it was with their partner or their whole family. The participants were loyal to one retailer for their main shopping trips, while a variety of other stores were visited for their secondary trips.

Having established that the women were primarily responsible for the household shopping the next issue of concern was the frequency of their store visits. Regardless of employment patterns, the majority of the women (7) visited the supermarkets more than once a week, most of them (11) indicating in their calendars that these trips included lone visits. Thus, despite the burden of working full-time, many of these women still spent much of their 'free' time grocery shopping - clear evidence of the reality of their double day. The calendars also indicated the differences between the genders, both in terms of frequency of visit and whether they shopped alone or not. The male participants visited grocery stores much less frequently than their female partners, only four of the men went to a supermarket more than once a week and only one man regularly accompanied his partner on all of her main shopping trips and occasionally on her secondary trips. The calendar entries also indicated that some of the women (4) had a preferred day to visit specific stores. This did not preclude them from visiting other retailers during the

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same week or at other times; in fact two of the women visited four stores in one week and two visited two retailers in one day.

It would seem from the calendar results that the proximity of the grocery retailer to the women participants' home and work was a major contributor to visiting those particular stores more often. For women, paid employment constrained the decisions of store choice and the frequency of the activity. Women in full-time work for example, frequented the stores close to their work and home, while other women visited a variety of retailers regardless of location. Men did not visit a store near their work place, preferring to visit a store near their home when they accompanied their partner.

### 7.3 Taking responsibility

Grocery shopping is tied to the domestic realm and thus, an investigation of grocery shopping would not have been complete without a review of the household activities of both partners. In the profile questionnaire (26) and in the final interviews (8) each participant was asked about the division of household labour. Both data collection tools indicated how the household was run along stereotypical, gender-segregated lines. As the table below illustrates, housework was still seen as the province of the female.

**Table 7.1 Activities in the home**

Women	Always	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
<b>Take out the bins</b>	1	6	3	3
<b>Change the toilet rolls</b>	5	8	0	0
<b>Clean the bath</b>	6	4	2	1
<b>Change the bed sheets</b>	9	4	0	0
<b>Clean the fridge</b>	8	3	2	0
<b>Ironing</b>	8	5	0	0
<b>Cook</b>	7	6	0	0

Men	Always	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Take out the bins	7	3	1	0
Change the toilet rolls	1	8	1	1
Clean the bath	2	7	1	1
Change the bed sheets	0	5	4	2
Clean the fridge	1	4	4	2
Ironing	0	5	3	3
Cook	0	9	2	0

This table demonstrates the chores that the participants said they performed, illustrating the gendered structure of these activities and how little men actually contributed, apart from taking out the bins. Overall, the survey indicated the gendered nature of the shopping activity, the domestic responsibilities and the leisure activities allocated to the individual. Women were generally solely responsible for ironing, cooking and changing the bed sheets in the household. The comments from the interview data, below, revealed some interesting results regarding the different perceptions each partner had of the other person's contribution to the household. Both tables illustrate that an unequal division of household labour is an everyday reality for these households.

The additional responsibilities placed upon women, particularly for those in paid employment (the double-shift) were accompanied with an added emotional constraint – guilt seemed to occupy most of their waking thoughts. It was particularly evident that the woman in the household was more accommodating to everyone else's needs while her own concerns came a poor third – after her husband's and children's needs. It is important to note however that the women were not passive participants, but questioned their stereotypical role, finding different strategies to achieve their goals and often questioning the futile nature of household tasks. As this woman for example, was prompted to reflect on the repetitive nature of her trips in her diary: "*Am I getting boring?*

ASDA again." (Couple 12 Female). Whether they enjoyed the shopping trip or not, women performed an extensive range of chores, juggling their roles and responsibilities to ensure the smooth running of their households.

**Table 7.2 Household tasks: what each partner said they did and what they said their partner did.**

	Me	My partner
Couple 1 Female	'I used to think I did all the housework!'	'He does washing, sometimes the washing. He does tasks by request. He cooks when I am too tired or every now and then.'
Couple 1 Male	'I do wash up as a bowl full of washing up bugs her.'  'Sometimes on weekends I'll make a proper meal'.	'She does the clothes washing.'
Couple 2 Female	'I feel as if I do most of it – the washing, the ironing, the cleaning, as well as the gardening.'	'He does tidy up. He helps with the children, especially the bathing and he washes up after tea.'
Couple 2 Male	'I have always tidied up in this household under duress. I do wash up'.	'She likes to try and keep things tidy. She cooks the meals.'
Couple 3 Female	'I always do the ironing, the washing'.	'He puts the bins out and rubbish, washes cars and mows the lawn. He normally does the hoovering as well.'  'Sometimes he'll have a bit of a fit and do all the dusting. I mean no point in moving dust around'.
Couple 3 Male	'Cooking, cleaning, washing up, a bit of everything just like a housewife, I am a househusband'.	
Couple 4 Female	'I wash the dishes and the clothes.'	'He washes the toilets, takes rubbish out and cleans the kitchen floor.'  'He probably has a little 'go' at the windows'
Couple 4 Male	'I do most of cleaning. I put washing in machine and set it. I do all the decorating. He does kids breakfasts, all DIY and all the gardening.'	'She does all the washing up. She hangs out the clothes.'

Men, however, articulated no such frustrations or guilt complexes and were entirely comfortable with their various roles of father, husband and ‘provider’. For them, their partners were a constant source of frustration, threatening their roles, self-images and their plans for the day. The real irony is that these men did not recognise, and even criticised, the work of their female partners in facilitating and stabilising all aspects of their family lives. The men, blinkered by their own concerns and assumptions that this was a ‘natural’ division of roles, failed to appreciate the efforts and skills of their female partners.

Women have always shown, and indeed been expected to demonstrate an interest for other family members – especially if they have children – as discussed in chapters 2, 3, and 6. This next extract from the diaries illustrates the constant attention and efforts that women with children give to the household especially, as in this case, when the woman works at home. The woman noted in her diary how she hated shopping but she still visited the store more than once a week. Her main shopping trip had occurred the previous day and this extract refers to a secondary visit to purchase specific ingredients that she needed to make a particular meal, she had never cooked before. Her final statement illustrates that her prime concern is the satisfaction of her husband and that his preferences are a higher priority.

*Before: was looking through the Safeway magazine and saw a recipe I fancied trying. I have all the ingredients except the continental garlic and herb cheese spread. ... off to Safeway's with (son and baby) bought the continental cheese (spread) and also a large bottle of Robinson's for (daughter) she loves it. That's all I bought, cost me £2.84. Tried the recipe it was delicious it was called haddock and prawn tagliatelle. (Husband) enjoyed it anyway.*

(Couple 10 Female diary extract (my emphasis))

Those women who did not have any children also wrote of their concerns for the needs of their partners, as the extract below illustrates.

*Also purchased some very nice soup for after Tai Chi when we get home at 10 pm! Need something light afterwards or (partner) can't sleep and will complain all night.*

(Couple 1 Female diary extract)

This quote implies that the woman had a choice between listening to her partner complain all night (thereby being effectively ‘punished’ for her lack of consideration towards him and his needs) or developing alternative meal solutions. Choosing the latter, she tries to ensure that the former scenario does not happen with some forethought and planning. Similarly, there were also examples of partners ‘offering to help’, indicating that the responsibility for that chore resides with their spouse. A typical example was one man “offering” (couple 7 male) to go to the supermarket to save time and to “get a few odds and ends while (partner) cooked tea”. Another example, detailed below concerns a women shopping on her own to enable her partner to finish installing bedroom units:

*Before: I needed to go shopping but had to call into the school. I hope I've got enough time to do the shop before the baby goes to sleep or before swimming. I must remember to get ingredients for curry on Sunday.*

*During / after: I went into the shop and saw a great offer on a baby tractor – good for a friend's baby. Reduced from £20 to £10 – bought it! Left it at desk while I did my shopping because there was not enough room in the trolley I had. I bought lots of fruit and vegetables and had to get skimmed milk. I do hate shopping when on my own. But (partner) has to ‘build’ the furniture in our house tonight. I wanted to save him shopping!*

(Couple 4 female diary extract)

In comparison, the men showed little of this concern for other family members, displaying annoyance if their own routines or activities were disturbed. One man described his annoyance that his partner decided to visit the store on an evening that was designated as ‘his’ night out. While at the store she bumped into several acquaintances that further delayed their trip and increased his frustration. She was aware of this and also recognised that his frustration level would increase when he had to pay the bill. Interestingly, she also mentions that she was not in the “*shopping mood*”, a quote that seems to imply that there is a “*shopping mood*” which requires more time and that provides opportunities for socialising during the shopping trip. Her extract, followed with her partner’s, are worth quoting at length:

*My partner, my daughter and grandson are with me and she is doing her weekly shop. I've decided to incorporate some Christmas goodies weekly. So this week I've bought some chocolates but my shop was mainly groceries. Why, when you are not in a **shopping mood** do you meet so many people you don't*

*want to talk to and they keep you talking for ages? This was one of those days and my partner was getting agitated -it's his night out. Now the worst time (partner) has to pay and [he] hates parting with his money. I keep telling him Christmas is coming but £3 on chocolates still didn't seem to reassure him. Needless to say he wasn't willing to treat us to dinner [and] we headed straight home.*

(Couple 9 female (my emphasis))

*I am not fussy on shopping on a Friday as I go out – or 'try to' before 7 pm. So I can play snooker before bingo [starts] at 9 pm [Social Club]. Today we were running late and I was feeling agitated as my wife would not put it off until the next morning. As you can imagine I was not in the best of moods for shopping, and when my wife started talking to every Tom, Dick and Harry I was reaching boiling point! She then started to look for extras to put away for Xmas. If there had been a Father Christmas on that night I would have clonked him. That little excursion cost me over £100 and half my night out. We finally arrived home at 8:45 pm.*

(Couple 9 Male (my emphasis))

As the above quote illustrates, the lengthy extracts from the men detailed their annoyance with either their partner or the store when it posed a threat to their plans for the day.

To summarise this section it is clear that the majority of the responsibilities for the home still largely rest with the women, with men 'offering' help with certain activities. The household chores are still segregated according to gender and the women were also planning and accommodating the needs of 'others' before their own. It is important to note the different types of 'autonomy' within the shopping activity and household. The women were constrained by the demands of other family members and the presence of children in the family further entrenched the parents' stereotypical roles. The following section will explore this issue in more detail and investigate the obligations and restrictions that surround the household and shopping activity.

#### 7.4 Constraints

The diaries and interview data clearly revealed certain tensions around issues such as finances, childcare and family shopping. During the mixed focus groups the couples had discussed grocery shopping as leisure, this however masked several tensions around the shopping trip. In this section it is evident that this concept of 'family leisure' restricts the freedom of certain

participants. The women in particular were constrained when their spouse decided to accompany them on the shopping trip. As a result, the usual strategies that they women employed to reclaim some financial power and to enjoy a break from the demands of family life were negated or diminished.

## Finance

One of the underlying tensions between the couples was financial arrangements, for example, the amount of money spent on grocery shopping, with the women being sensitive about the price of goods and the total amount of their shopping bills. In some of the diaries, for example, they explicitly stated that they would not tell their partner the actual amount that they had spent on their shopping trip. Furthermore, as the above discussion has indicated, the male partner sometimes withheld 'treats' from the family if he considered that his partner had spent unwisely. At the same time, the women would give their children sweets as a reward for their good behaviour. These simple acts clearly reveal the delineation of power in the household, with men rewarding women for their good (financial) behaviour and women rewarding their children for their good social behaviour. To revisit these extracts:

*Now is the worst time (partner) has to pay and my partner hates parting with his money. I keep telling him Christmas is coming but £3 on chocolates still didn't seem to reassure him. Needless to say he wasn't willing to treat us to dinner and we headed straight home.*

(Couple 9 female diary extract (my emphasis))

*[I] Spent £86 – mustn't tell (partner)! £70 on groceries and £10 on non-grocery. Glad the 'shop's' done today and I can relax tomorrow. I went straight home and unpacked.*

(Couple 8 female diary extract)

Both the above extracts come from women who were working full-time and despite earning their own income they still felt powerless when it came to spending and often did not reveal the amount for fear of a reprimand from their partners. Whether the women were in paid work or at home looking after the children the man was still in control or at least dominated the household finances.

## Children

One of the most powerful constraints within the family was the presence of children. Women in particular, were severely constrained as they shouldered the main domestic responsibilities. This was especially evident for women who worked at home caring for their children, their day-to-day choices being dictated by the mood and sleeping patterns of their child. In fact, the women rarely went out alone as their whole existences centred on their young children and this was illustrated in their statements as whenever they mentioned that they went on their own it was actually with a young child. It was clear with these women that their "*identities are often constituted through emotional and financial investment in their children and that such investment may be experienced as a loss of personal autonomy*" (Miller *et al.* 1999: 97). When they did manage to snatch sometime away from all the family it involved some negotiation and usually intersected with their unpaid work. As the quote below illustrates:

*Sometimes I'll go on my own. (Partner) doesn't usually go on his own [or] not very often. I sometimes go on my own or we'll all go together all according what mood the kids are in, if the baby is sleeping or not. I go on my own because usually the baby will be sleeping, (son) is out playing and (partner)'s here. So I think - "ah I'll go shopping now, I'll go on my own". I prefer going on my own because as a family the kids usually end up being naughty and we all end up arguing by the time we're coming home. So it's better to go on my own.*

(Couple 2 female interview extract)

The men rarely went grocery shopping on their own or with their children. Although prior to the births of their children, some male partners did accompany the women on the shopping trips, as the quote below explains:

*Before we had the children, me and (partner) used to go together all the time. I very rarely went alone then. That was something we used to do one evening was go and do our food shopping together but since we've had the children it's usually (partner) staying home with the children and I'll go shopping. We enjoy food shopping. (partner) likes food shopping and I quite like it so we used to say "oh let's go shopping tonight" and we might have tea as well then while we're out. I used to enjoy sort of going out and picking up all the goodies coming home and eating them all! ... nothing sticks in my mind particularly that I used to enjoy about it but it was just, I think it was just a much more enjoyable experience when the two of you went shopping than it is with children.*

(Couple 2 female interview extract)

And she adds that she now enjoys grocery shopping on her own as a break from the demands of family life:

*I can enjoy it on my own, I'll wander around and think "oh this is a nice hour out on my own" and I look at things. I'll look at the clothes and the household stuff and I think when I'm on my own more about what meals I can make up. I'll look in the basket and think "now have I got enough here to make meals for all the week?" Usually when we go as all of us we all usually get harassed halfway round and we think "oh just put that in and put that in".*

(Couple 2 female interview extract (my emphasis))

For the mothers with children, shopping with the whole family was more likely to become a stressful event and any potential enjoyment was harder to sustain during the trip. On the occasions when the men did accompany the women it was framed within the discourse of family leisure and the sharing of 'labour'. It was also clear that the men wanted to ensure that they controlled the grocery-shopping trip.

The previous quotes have illustrated how the men ensured that certain boundaries are placed around the shopping trip and these include finances and time. The women thus lost any sense of autonomy over the trip regarding the length of time, purchases and opportunities for socialising with acquaintances. The following quote illustrates how the male partner reviews the shopping list to ensure his requests were included in the shopping trolley:

*When we go shopping she makes the list up then she'll give me the list when it's finished and say, add anything on there we need. So I put cleaning fluids, washing powder because I know what goes in there. Toothpaste, children's toothpaste, mouthwash, I put those things on there. Filter coffee because she wouldn't know what filter coffee looks like anyway. It's things like that. She makes the list up and she plans the food out for the week practically so when we go around, it's her list. She writes it out in the order of the aisles because she knows the order of the aisles. Fruit and vegetables firstly when you go to Safeway. Then bread and milk, then cereals, then chocolate bars then you come back up then, she does it in order, that's why we get around Safeway so quick.*

(Couple 3 male interview extract (my emphasis))

Here the male partner ensures that his requirements are included by inspecting the list but at the same time clearly emphasises that it belongs to her – it is her responsibility, he is merely ensuring that she has completed it properly. There is a sense of control here from him, as he

needs to review her list and clearly undermines her capacity to ensure that everything they need would be included. To summarise this section, children can make the shopping trip stressful and family shopping trips are clearly occasions that reveal and cement gendered household roles. The final quote also begins to indicate the control of the partner when the shopping trip becomes 'family shopping'.

### Family shopping

As chapter 2 demonstrated, the retailers were well aware of how to construct the environment to try to provoke specific responses, attitudes or feelings. The discourses of these happy, family images "*serve as a kind of shorthand for the kind of ambience that shopping centre managers are trying to create (clean, warm, safe, friendly, welcoming)*" (Miller *et al.* 1999: 104) Partners were a major influence upon the individual's shopping patterns, the extent of their involvement in household chores and the amount of time available for leisure. Again it was evident that women's work was facilitating the men's leisure space and time. It was also apparent that men would constantly undermine their female partners' efforts - "*I've always done the DIY because (partner) can't bang a nail in a wall and I wouldn't let her anyway*" said one (Couple 3 male interview extract). However, this ownership of a particular skill was not solely exhibited by the male participants, the women could be similarly protective over their own space and activities. Thus, the negotiations of day-to-day life encompassed inter-play between individuals for power and dominance.

Often, women had to persuade their partners (as in the following quote) to undertake certain household chores or they left very specific instructions (as the second quote illustrates) for tasks they wanted completed:

*I do the washing. (Partner) will sometimes do the washing when I'm doing my course. Then we argue over how to peg it up and which is the proper way and which is the way I like it and which is the way he likes it. I used to think that I did all the housework like all the hoovering and cleaning the toilets and all that kind of stuff and the tidying. I probably do a lot of the tidying actually. If I go*

*out on the weekend and I have to do my course, I'll say to (partner) "go on will you do that?" and when I get back he'll have done it all so he's quite good like that. He's not the kind to do it off his own.*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

*He cooks for himself now because I'm not here. Sometimes he used to cook when we were both here together but it would have to be, you know, I would have to leave instructions ... I'd have to get a little tray and put all the ingredients on and this is what we're having and I'll be home at such and such a time and he'd do it then. If I hadn't left instructions or told him to do it then he would wait for me to come home and he'd be going out ten minutes later and he'd say what's for tea and he'd been sat here all afternoon so he'd go hungry.*

(Couple 4 female interview extract)

Clearly the men had a choice of whether or not to opt into this 'female space': their participation was neither essential nor expected. The women were facilitating the smooth running of the household and their partner's activities, although the men clearly held the dominant position within the household, failing to understand their partner's efforts. The following extract illustrates a male participant's inability to appreciate the tiring and stressful aspect of his partner's unpaid work within the household:

*(Partner) would probably tell you something completely different but I haven't really known her to do any exercise. I know you probably think it's strange, she says looking after children and running up and down the stairs and going to the school and things like that keeps her busy throughout the day and keeps her quite fit but I don't know.*

(Couple 2 male interview extract)

This man fails to understand why his partner does not wish to participate in any form of structured exercise or leisure and fails to appreciate that she works continuously on household tasks taking small breaks in between her chores.

Another form of control was exhibited through the men's preferences over the time and nature of the shopping activity done as a couple. The women were encouraged to alter their spending habits and approaches to shopping - moving from the browser attitude to a more functional approach. If they were to accompany them on a shopping trip, the female partner accommodated the man's preferences and expectations, as this extract illustrates:

*There was one time I had an obsession with the dog food aisle. Since we knew we were going to get her [dog] I would just sneakily go down there and*

*(partner) would find me. Now I'm allowed to seriously go down there and look for the things that confuse me beyond belief because I don't know the difference between the complete or the mixer or the tins.*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

Here her partner legitimises her shopping trip by controlling the aisles that she is allowed to visit, thus ensuring that she cannot be tempted. The next comment illustrates how, despite her orientation to a more leisurely attitude to shopping, her partner has encouraged her to adopt his approach if she wants him to accompany her on shopping trips:

*Speed round the supermarket is really important now. I used to be a real wanderer and it would take me forever and I would really enjoy the experience, now it's like a raid. A bit like a fight too. So we are just in, out and gone. Apart from today when I had to go and get lunch and I did what I was supposed to and I had a tiny wander but not a lot, and he said to me when I came out 'did you enjoy that?' and I said 'yes I did thank you'.*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

He persuades her that they should adopt a particular approach and, like an indulgent parent, allows her to 'treat' herself sometimes. The woman is constantly being persuaded to accommodate not only the needs of others but their particular approaches. If men are willing to 'offer' their time and opt into this process, they expect the woman to compensate and transfer control of the situation to them.

The quote below illustrates the male partner's control of the shopping trip and his particular delight in operating the new scanner technology. This technology is reminiscent of the television remote control and allows the shopper to scan the product barcode, which is then collated, and the final amount is printed out from the machine via the checkout till. At the end of the trip the scanner is placed back into its compartment in the wall and prints out the final total of the items selected. Thus, instead of the shopper having to place their goods from the trolley onto the checkout conveyor belt they simply hand over the receipt and pay the amount:

*When we go round together I push the trolley. I'm always in charge of the trolley and the scanner. See technology again, machines. I think it's great - yes I like the scanner.*

(Couple 3 male interview extract)

The male participant ensured that he controlled the trolley and the scanner and not only did this allow him to dictate the pace and the selection of the items but also in effect the expenditure. The extracts in this section have illustrated the subtle nuances that are exhibited between the couples to ensure their competence and control over certain activities within the household. Gender was a significant influence on the division of the household chores and the demarcation of power.

### 7.5 In-store attitudes and behaviour

The calendars and diaries revealed the changed nature of contemporary shopping patterns. Gone were the grocery shopping trips as monthly or weekly expeditions that the participants recalled from their parents' day. The diversity of products available and the diminishing number of traditional high street shops have encouraged consumers to visit these large retailers more than they did even five years ago (Mintel 1999 January). This section will illustrate the attitudes towards the in-store shopping behaviour. The diaries and interviews indicated how consumers would patronise one store for their main shopping trip while another provided the secondary shopping trip for more luxury and indulgent goods.

The physical environment of the store, along with the products sold, encouraged participants to patronise certain retailers. As the quote below demonstrates, the store environment (particularly for this woman who worked full-time) is important. The intensity and stress levels that this woman incurs in this trip are aptly visualised as she compares it to Gladiators (a game show based on physical activities, then showing on UK television):

*We go to Safeway because it's not as cramped as ASDA on a Friday night and you can buy something in Safeway. In ASDA on Friday it's like Gladiators and you wish your trolley could have spiked wheels on the side so you could rip people to shreds on the way past because they just do your head in don't they. So we go there because it's empty which is not a good idea because it's more expensive but then if we could go in the daytime we would probably go to somewhere like ASDA.*

(Couple 1 female extract)

Other features of the store also figured greatly in the interviews, especially the take-away foods and the coffee shop. The couples with children would use the coffee shop to satisfy their hungry family and save the mother from cooking when they returned home. The women also occasionally met their friends at the store to combine their shopping activity with a social arrangement. As one women said:

*[I go to] The coffee shop if I've got time and it's coming up to (baby's) sleep time and I know I've got half and hour and I've got to meet somebody down there, a friend, and we might go in for coffee.*

(Couple 3 female interview extract)

The children's crèche was well used by the parents in this sample and came to be an essential requirement of the trip affording the children an enjoyable hour while their parents had time to themselves. Rather than a quick trip around the supermarket, the once-a-week shopping trip would then encompass more of the individual's time and money. The shopping activity was being described as a trip or traditional day out with amusements for everyone and somewhere to sit and eat. The stores were used for a variety of reasons, with different stores being used for different items, as this quote describes:

*I use Safeway as a general, you know, everything. If I want bits and pieces I use ASDA, for the small 'shop' and clothes. If I fancy something in particular that I know they've [ASDA] got or if there is a particular bargain on and I'm down there or if I want a change in the crèche area just to give my little boy a little bit of a change, a difference. Although they are getting to be a bit older and paying for the hour there, so it is only if it's a quick shop. You've got to pay extra if you go beyond the hour and little boy always wants to go in there.*

(Couple 3 female interview extract)

Even couples without children described the coffee shop as the focal point of either all or some of the trips- as the quote below describes:

*It's very, very big on our agenda. If we both go together to the supermarket we tend to have coffee and something to eat before we even embark on the whole thing rather than just go straight in and do it. To us the coffee shop is the most important thing.*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

From the couples' interviews and diaries, a picture emerges of the supermarket of today replicating certain elements of the traditional high street - offering a convenient, organised

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version of the corner shops and the markets. The next section explores the leisure and chore dimensions of the activity in more detail.

### **7.6 Grocery shopping – chore or pleasure?**

Shopping and grocery shopping in particular, has tended to be regarded as work and often discussed within the functional concept of need and replenish. Colin Campbell (1997) has, however, commented that the more ‘choice’ the consumer has in the shopping realm, the more likely it is that the activity will become pleasurable and start to be envisaged as ‘leisure’. Returning to table 2.1 in chapter 2 (reproduced below as table 7.3), it starts to become apparent from this present study that the participants’ perceptions echo the categories of pleasure and maintenance discussed by Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen and Pasi Maenpaa (1997). Although there is some ‘blurring’ of the boundaries between these two categories, it can be seen from the diaries and interviews that leisure shopping for the women involves: spending time; impulsiveness; pleasure; emphasis on experiences. By contrast, the main family shopping trips are firmly located on the maintenance side of the table. I would argue, however, that the discourses of leisure that have been brought into the retailing sphere actually mask the work and skill involved in the activity. This supports the ‘status quo’, allowing the male spouse to opt out and de-skilling the women’s expertise, thus allowing the retailer to maintain authority in this feminised environment.

**Table 7.3 Shopping: pleasure versus necessity**

Pleasure	Maintenance
Spending time	Scarcity of time
An end in itself	A means
Purchases not always necessary	Planned purchases
Impulsiveness	Planning
Pleasure	Necessity
Emphasis on experience	Emphasis on rationality

(Adapted from Lehtonen and Maenpaa 1997: 144)

In line with previous studies on women and leisure (Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990), the women in this study were more restricted in the time they had available for 'conventional' leisure activities. The men (even those with children) still managed to find time to attend their own, regular leisure activities. In contrast women with children in unpaid work were very home-oriented in their leisure activities and seemed to have less time to attend these 'structured leisure activities'. The extract below from a woman who is based at home demonstrates that her leisure activities are more domestically oriented:

*Going out for meals is probably my favourite leisure activity, which I don't do that often... - just not cooking - I really enjoy going out for a meal. I don't do any sport so that can't be a leisure activity. In the summer I do a bit of gardening. Usually in the evenings after (partner's) come home after we've had tea I find it quite nice in the summer to go out there and potter around for an hour... in the summer that's quite a nice hour. [Before the birth of our children, we] probably had more meals out, up the pub, not so much on the weekend because even on the weekend before we had children we would still perhaps drive down to (local seaside resort) have a walk go and have a bar meal or a drink. We can still do that sort of thing perhaps not so much go and have a meal when we're out with the kids but go to the same places and have a walk.*

(Couple 2 female interview extract)

Women with children were snatching breaks between chores or trying to vary their activities:

*I can't stay in all day. I'll usually only stay at home for the baby to have a sleep, once he's woken up we're off out somewhere, whether it's shopping, play group, visiting. [I usually do food shopping]... Saying that, when you've got little ones*

*you've got so many birthdays and things so it's not always food shopping it's out for a birthday present, birthday cards. I'm not saying we go food shopping all the time with the children it's shopping for things like birthday cards, birthday presents [and] clothes. I do go shopping for clothes mostly for the children really not for ourselves - kids isn't it!*

(Couple 2 female interview extract)

Thus, this woman's leisure is either subsumed into unpaid work or sacrificed for other members in the household leisure activities. In contrast, her male partner has an extensive range of leisure activities that he pursues:

*I try to play football on Friday night [although] not very often ... obviously with having the children and by the time you've sorted out the kids out or the phone goes, all these sorts of things. What I do is I tend to go out lunch times, I go out for a run or I play five a side football or touch rugby or something like that. It's members from all the different departments - we've got our own changing facilities there and showers and things like that. Sports facilities are there and we just go out for run or we take the football out or whatever because we've got parks across the road from us. I really enjoy it. As I said, we've got our five-a-side team in the finals now. So there's a sports weekend coming up in about 3 or 4 weeks time that we've entered and got through.*

(Couple 2 male interview extract)

The participant then carried on to describe the extensive range of leisure activities that he enjoyed - although he commented that his children did constrain these activities. Whilst many of the men discussed their leisure activities at length, which in some cases occurred twice weekly or daily, the women described how their leisure was enjoyed around their work and household commitments. In some cases, the women had no energy left for leisure activities after having met these commitments. For example, the female in couple two fitted in some gardening while her partner bathed the children, before she finished the household ironing. Women's leisure activities were both flexible and less time-structured, in many instances, leisure for them simply meant being relieved of their domestic tasks such as cooking (i.e. they enjoyed dining out or having take-away meals).

Interestingly, many of the women with children used grocery-shopping trips as a break from the house as this extract illustrates:

*Before: At home feeling bored, (baby) had just woken from his nap so I decided to go down to ASDA for ½ hour before going to pick (son) up from school. I needed some baby milk and nappies so I thought I could browse at the clothes. Picked up my baby food and milk with ½ hour to spare. I did have in mind that I might buy myself something to wear as you can imagine I ended up buying something for the kids. Spent about £10 on grocery items. Felt better after an hour out spending some money, which I probably should not have done.*

(Couple 2 female diary extract)

Women who did not have children would also use such trips to ‘indulge’ in self-oriented leisure, although these women were able to enjoy a wider range of leisure pursuits. As this quote demonstrates, this woman has become involved in more leisure activities, which takes the focus away from the home, and onto the individual:

*I do Thai-Chi, not very well and not very often. Unfortunately I don't practice. I don't do it very often because I can't be bothered to get up in the morning. Though recently I am getting up really early in the morning but I just don't do it any more. I [also] do the gardening, seemingly single-handily. I am learning reflexology and I can't think of anything else. Reflexology I do on a course and I do people's feet after work during the week. Gardening I do on Saturday's. I don't have to do my course on a Sunday and I walk the dog. I don't sleep so much and I do a lot more exercise than I ever did and I seem to walk the dog all the time.*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

The women’s diary extracts considered not only family members but also other important social and community networks in their lives. Extended family and social connections were important to them and were maintained despite the extra time and effort incurred as a result. Most women commented on the friends and old school friends that they met during their shopping trips. One woman discussed her lunch trip to the store near her workplace to meet her friends for lunch. The store provided an avenue for the women to maintain their established contacts in their local community. For the women the secondary trips recounted in the diaries were more social occasions in which friends and relatives would accompany them, or meet at the store or visit them before or after the trip to display the products they bought. The functional nature of shopping for the two women mentioned earlier is perhaps contrasted with these next two extracts. The following woman worked at home and it is evident from her extracts that there is

a difference between the main shopping trip and other more casual trips or even trips to different stores.

*Before: I quite enjoy shopping usually but didn't really feel like going today – not sure why. Possibly because it is ASDA week and I don't enjoy shopping in ASDA as much as Sainsbury. I go to ASDA every other week because it is cheaper than Sainsbury and I stock up on their reasonable items. I do the complete family shop every Tuesday and only buy fruit and vegetables at the corner shops during the rest of the week.*

(Couple 5 female diary extract)

In contrast, another participant revealed how ASDA provided a break from her particular household regime. Grocery shopping was often accompanied by other trips to other retailer stores, especially if the man was involved in the trip. One woman went to ASDA and Sainsbury on her birthday with her partner, daughter and grandson. Her partner mentioned in his diary that he suggested they visit ASDA so he could treat her for her birthday (couple 9 male).

Another woman recalled the sense of excitement that grocery shopping was for her as a young child. This was a monthly expedition, which entailed a long trip to reach the hypermarket. Her extract below highlights the sense of excitement and novelty of this once-monthly grocery trip, with the end result of a 'treat' for her.

*As a kid you look for the little niceties and because my mum went every month she'd stock up on a few nice things as well. I'm sure we had food there sometimes as well, I'm sure they had a bit of a restaurant. I vaguely remember sitting up there, it was like big adventure because we all went as well as a family so I suppose it was. We go as a family now and the kids enjoy it. (Daughter) particularly likes sitting in the trolley!*

(Couple 3 female interview extract (my emphasis))

As a child, it was for her and is now for her own family, a 'family event' in which everyone participates. This was a family event, which required the labour of everyone and emphasised the sharing, community aspect of shopping rather than seeing it as the responsibility of one individual. The leisure space that the supermarket provides for the women reproduce certain discourses that despite the initial suggestion of autonomy and leisure, actually mask the relations of gender and power between the household, retailer and wider cultural sphere.

## 7.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed the gendered household and the interaction between grocery shopping, gender and power. It has also clearly illustrated how grocery shopping can be constructed as a chore or a pleasurable act. The presence of children has been seen to further entrench these gendered roles and expectations. The male partner constrained the woman's access to available time for leisure activities. Men, for example, had the freedom to choose whether they wished to participate in the grocery-shopping trip and would sometimes frame the activity as part of their family time. In contrast, women were not only obliged to consider the needs of the household but also assumed the role of the grocery shopper for the family, responsible for the weekly (or more) provisioning. Thus the discourses that surround both leisure and shopping, also served to restrict opportunities for women (Woodward & Green 1988; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990). These discourses constructed particular leisure and shopping tasks as 'natural' activities, interests and skills, and with respect to grocery shopping, the sole unquestionable responsibility of the woman in the household.

Leisure for women, especially those with children, was constructed around domesticity. For many of the participants there was real tension between work (unpaid and paid) and leisure. Previous studies investigating women's leisure have discussed how the presence of men restricts the type and frequency of women's leisure opportunities (Green & Hebron 1988; Woodward & Green 1988; Green, Hebron & Woodward 1990). These instances illustrate the social relationships and construction of leisure and shopping, which encourages some women to:

*...internalise the idea that womanhood ties them to primary responsibility for the care and well-being of others, in particular male partners and children, but also dependent or elderly relatives too.*

(Woodward & Green 1988: 133)

However, a cautionary note needs to be sounded here. The women in this research were not all passive victims. They did comment on the futile nature of constantly replacing and worrying

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over food. These women also found other ways within these restrictions to find leisure. Women at home found that grocery shopping on their own could provide opportunities to mingle within the community and browse through the store at the various grocery and non-food products. As many feminist researchers have commented, we should be careful that our values and our judgements of participants' lives are not superimposed on their own interpretations and realities (Phoenix 1990; Nain 1993; Kirsch 1999).

As indicated previously, men had clear boundaries between the different parts of their days. In this study, some men found it difficult to understand why their female partners could not find the time or energy for certain leisure activities and why they preferred to meet and socialise with their friends and relatives. As other studies have indicated, the social aspect of leisure was just as important as the activity (Dixey 1988). Interestingly, during the mixed focus groups, the men mentioned that they liked the weekly grocery-shopping trip. However, their diaries and calendars demonstrated that the male partner was an infrequent shopper, either accompanying their partner occasionally or choosing to shop for a few items alone. Therefore, it would seem that men had the freedom to choose when they would like to participate in the grocery-shopping trip, and undertook a more managerial role in terms of overseeing the budget and the time spent on the activity. At this point it seems that the more relevant and productive question we should be asking is not 'what is leisure?' but rather 'how does leisure differ between genders?' and 'how is it constructed/influenced through social relationships and the role of gender?' The next chapter will discuss the social cultural framework that contextualises the grocery-shopping trip.

# CHAPTER 8

## CONSUMPTION AND EXPERIENCE

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## CHAPTER 8: Consumption and experience

### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I argue that the cultural framework that provides the context for the grocery shopping trips has been forged around the more intimate relations of the family. The participants' families, both in childhood and adulthood, operated along gendered lines of labour, which were further, entrenched with the advent of children. The study's participants were asked to recall any memories that they had of grocery shopping from their childhood and food figured strongly in such nostalgic reflections (see section 8.2). The central significance of food should not be particularly surprising in a study considering the grocery shopping experience (see section 8.3). Food experiences were both pleasurable and difficult, providing opportunities for both leisure and work. The participants' childhood experiences also provided a context for some of their later attitudes and reactions within their own shopping activities and households. As other studies have noted regarding shopping in the wider realm, status plays a significant role in the choice of store and products (Glennie & Thrift 1992; Bourdieu 2000). Status also enables the individual to associate themselves with particular identities and in this study images of the good mother dominated women's self-definition and constrained their activities, although no such images appeared to structure the experience of men (see section 8.4). There was also a substantial discussion from the interview participants regarding the specific pleasures that they gained from food and how these indulgences are incorporated in the more leisure-oriented secondary shopping trip (see section 8.5).

### 8.2 Growing up

Within the study, it was interesting to note the degree of reflexivity exhibited by the research participants. Participants reflected, quite extensively, on their childhood and parents and how these experiences had influenced their relations in their own home. In these reflections, they were quite literally "*turning back ... the experience of the individual upon (her – or himself)*"

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(Mead 1934: 134 as cited in King 1997). Parental relationships, gender roles and responsibilities and the primacy of the maternal figure in the participants' private world of childhood provided the major points of discussion and focus. Parental relationships, whether positive or negative, proved to be highly significant in determining the participants' childhood and adult experiences. Fathers could be both confidante and judge, in the majority of instances however, they were largely absent figures. Conversely, for most participants, mothers played a central role in their reflections on family life – mothers shopped and cooked and passed on their experiences to their offspring. These experiences served to structure their adult encounters. In some instances, participants' mothers operated as the yardstick against which their adult partners' culinary and household efforts were measured. Significantly, parental evaluation and judgement, whether directly experienced or internalised by the participants, were key aspects of participants' food, familial and shopping experiences. One female participant had a particularly positive relationship with her father – he was her confidante and her judge. She sought his advice and mentioned him as the person she turned to when she had experienced any disasters in her childhood, several of which involved food and home economics experiences. In this following example, she recalls an experience from school that was publicly embarrassing; this incident has only been re-told to both her father and now to me - her partner is still unaware of this memory. It is an experience, however, which has helped to shape not only her cooking but also her food purchasing habits:

*My pastry was so bad that I dropped the pizza on the plate and the plate cracked and the pizza stayed whole! I haven't told many people that. Taste my mum's pastry and you'd die, taste my pastry and you really would die for the wrong reasons. My mum's was to die for and mine is to die from. Then I remember a charity event at school and they made us make mince pies and I had to make mince pies and ... some of them fell off the plate. (I have a problem with plates and things staying together!) She [my teacher] said she saw some sparrows and now they're so full they couldn't fly they were walking around! I haven't told him [partner] that, otherwise I wouldn't have him to this day. Have you ever had home economics trauma yourself? Obviously not on that scale. Then years later I actually did manage to perfect the pizza with the rising dough and it's a damn good pizza. That pizza stone base will stay with me for the rest of my days and when that plate cracked and the pizza stayed whole and my dad thought that was the funniest thing ever! He still talks about it and I was at Boarding School and I phoned him to tell him, I must have been*

*mad. So I buy pizzas ready done, I've been traumatised and scarred from my experience I feel!*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

For this participant, male approval of her cooking and shopping efforts is a key theme and in childhood her father's opinion was vital. In adulthood, the positive relationship and events that she shared with her father are now replicated in her experiences with her partner. Participants' relationships with their fathers were not always so positive - as this next example illustrates - although their impacts were similarly long lasting. From this participant's recollection it would seem that his father was largely absent from the home and as a result the son effectively replaced his father, completing the majority of male-oriented household tasks while also working closely with his mother in female-oriented activities. Also from his nostalgic reflections of his childhood, it is clear that his father – unlike his mother - was not considered highly within that household, significantly, this attitude has influenced his current home and partner experiences. For instance, he constantly undermines his partner and her efforts within the household as this one quote illustrates:

*(Partner) can't do any DIY so I do that. She won't do the toilets; she won't clean the toilet ever. She wouldn't even know what to use to clean it. So she's taken a decision not to do that but she does empty the bins more now but she doesn't do toilets. Mowing the lawn and all that, anything that involves machinery she's knackered. So she can't drill a hole and she can't mow the garden. I had her switching the computer on tonight and using the packages. I'd stand by her telling her which buttons to press so (partner) and machines don't get on. So she doesn't do anything that involves machines. Even mixing if she's making a cake, she doesn't do that very often that's a bad example, but if she was mixing a cake she would say how do I turn this mixer on? How do I get this can opener to work? This microwave's not working? It's not plugged in, how do I press record on the video? I don't know how to programme it. Except when we're entertaining, if we're entertaining I do the cooking. She can't do fancy stuff. She does the plain stuff and the roast cooking like Sunday lunch because I can't do a Sunday roast. I do the fancy stuff, beef bourguignon and all that stuff. My mum tends to do something and you think that was nice, how did you do that mum? So the beef bourguignon is off my mum... These are the 10 things we cook for guests. I think we've done nearly all of them now, we're running out and half are from my mum and the other half are from scattered around people.*

(Couple 3 Male interview extract)

From the above quote, it is evident that he does not consider his partner is capable of handling any kind of appliance. This respondent would constantly undermine his partner's efforts through

his own criticism and by encouraging her to rely on both himself and his mother. His partner is a professional woman with a university education yet she is treated as a child incapable of managing without his assistance. The quotes shown above illustrate the family relationships and their effects on the participants within their own adult relationships. In the first case the friendship between father and daughter was replicated in her current relationship with her partner who had in effect replaced her father. Unfortunately, the second example demonstrates how one partner can criticise and undermine the other; her efforts and even her mother's are evaluated against his mother and in both cases found wanting. In both instances, however, the male operates as an important judge or critic of the female's efforts in what are perceived to be traditionally 'womanly skills'.

As the above discussion has indicated, gender roles and responsibilities were key aspects of the participants' reflections. Childhood memories indicated either that the individuals had been taught gender roles that were then reflected and reproduced in their adult practices and division of household responsibilities (Miller *et al.* 1999). Women, unlike most of their male counterparts, were taught to cook and fend for themselves early on in their childhood and were encouraged in this independence. Unlike many of the men, many of the women reminisced about their food experiences and the childlike naivety of certain food-related events. Food and the associated activities played a dominant role in their experiences thus, helping to cement social relationships and gender roles and expectations – echoing the work of Deborah Lupton (1996). The women recalled their memories of either cooking with mother, as the extract below illustrates, or of feeding themselves and the household while still at school:

*...my mum's kitchen ...had this table and she'd stand there and roll the pastry. As we'd only eat pastry and then we'd all sit on this little kind of thing she'd made like an ottoman and she'd put the stuff underneath and she give us a little lump of pastry. I would make a little person out of it and it had to be glazed, mind you by the time we played with it, it would be black and baked! Sometimes my poor father would come in and he would have to eat one! Poor thing - I was worried he'd survive the experience of three blobs of greyness.*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

The only male respondent to indicate a similar experience was one participant who was encouraged by his mother to practice both the traditional male and female domestic tasks from woodwork to sewing, as this extract demonstrates:

*My mum taught me how to iron and sew. I used to keep breaking the needles taking the jeans in to make 'drainpipes' and turning them up. I broke a few needles and she noticed so instead of giving me a 'row' she showed me how to thread a needle, how to put a zip in. I made a dress once as well I followed a pattern for a laugh. I don't know why, it was just a waste of material. Mum said, "Do you want to make something? Do you really want to make something?" So I made a dress. Got it out of my system now. I've put zips in jeans and I can thread a machine, I can use a sewing machine. I can use a sewing machine better than (partner) and she [mother] sort of taught me... Mum's always been, you know, she sews she makes wedding dresses. She made (partners) wedding dress. She makes the cakes now, ices the cakes now with all the little flowers, expert at that. She went on a course as well, she enjoyed that and ... she does a lot of cooking.*

(Couple 3 male interview extract)

Compare this to the other male participants' experiences that were very limited - in the majority of cases most men were discouraged from cooking or their efforts were ignored or dismissed:

*We used to do home economics at school and bring stuff home. None of us were very good at it. So it usually did end up in a disaster, like exploding flapjacks in the oven and stuff like this. So that used to put her [my mother] off and everyone else off. [We] didn't do more than sort of make our own breakfast like cereal, maybe snacks at supper time - sort of get a few bits out of the fridge, that was all we really did I think.*

(Couple 1 male interview extract)

The interviews confirmed that cooking and provisioning the household was almost exclusively the province of women. From food to clothes, women ensured the family were provisioned and their world, whether they worked or not, was the private sanctum of the home and domesticity.

The interviews recalled that during their childhood years the roles and work of their parents were very much aligned with their gender. Participants' memories were laden with references to the maternal domination of certain chores or spaces within the household, certain items for example could not be touched, as these were the sole provinces of their mothers. In such an environment, fathers appeared as temporary and transient people within what was an essentially female domain.

Males one and three during the interviews recalled both the amount of food available and the items

they were not allowed to touch as those belonged to their mother. Having said that, fathers did occasionally intrude in this domain and the following quote is also useful because it demonstrates that when men cooked they tended to focus on the more exotic, pleasurable aspects whereas women's cooking revolved around the mundane and functional:

*My mum would do what I would consider to be the food you would survive on, which was really nice but it was five days a week. My dad would cook something that would be really special and interesting like Tandoori chicken or something really 'fab'. It would be really different and my mum was quite happy to let my dad do it all the time. Because he always does really interesting food he doesn't do anything run of the mill.*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

### 8.3 Creative cooking

In many ways, this childhood experience of fathers involving themselves in occasional leisurely cooking activities was repeated in the participants' adult family life. For men cooking was something they would either do to help out if their partner was busy or on special occasions to demonstrate their flair and creative skills. For them the fundamentals were not important, men cooked using different criteria and for different purposes. During the interviews it was evident that the male participants wanted to demonstrate their knowledge and their mastery of cooking a particular dish - they were seeking the 'authentic' and 'right' way to prepare a meal. Therefore their cooking and the search for the ingredients became a quest for the 'right' ingredient to demonstrate that they had mastered the art of cooking. Women, however, regarded cooking as a chore - they had to plan meals within a budget, which would not only satisfy health requirements but also members of the household's food preferences. Men discussed cooking as an intricate knowledge-based skill, while women's cooking was usually a chore (as has been previously noted), which very occasionally could become a creative outlet. Regardless of the function, however, the male partner, who in some cases did not even notice these creative culinary attempts, judged their women's efforts.

How women and men interacted with food was both interesting and revealing. Overall, women tended to work within the cooking framework but would alter certain aspects of the ingredients while men strictly adhered to the instructions. This difference between the genders was an indication of the discourse of, and their familiarity with, cooking. The men insisted that when they did cook they adhered to the recipe and included ‘authentic’ ingredients, although, arguably these statements actually obscured their lack of familiarity with, and experience of, this sphere. In the next extract a female participant succinctly describes the creative autonomy that she experiences in her approach to cooking. Rather than a precise function dictated by a recipe, the creativity described here was reliant on word-of-mouth recipes to which she would then add a dash of her own personality. In this instance, cooking for this woman has occasionally become a creative and rewarding outlet to relieve her stress that is incurred at work:

*[It] tastes nicer, it's nice to do something from scratch and a real creative thing I think. I really enjoy that, I like getting my hands in and really going for it but I just don't have enough time now. On the weekends sometimes I'll do it or on a Friday night I'll probably do it and then sometimes if I come home from work and feel like I really want to cook something I'll make lots of little different things just for the sheer hell of cooking and sometimes when I get in I really. It just comes upon me; I just have to make fairy cakes. That's the only thing I can possibly say, sometimes I'm at work and I have to make fairy cakes. And sometimes I make these fairy cakes and it's quite nice. Sometimes I put them in the food processor, blend it to within 2 inches of its life and that makes me feel really good as well. I just get this fairy cake urge... It's so much easier to go to (local shop) and buy some but I just enjoy making them, I don't know why. I can do that!*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

Despite still expecting others to judge her attempts, she still feels some control and creativity within this area that at other times is a chore for her. Above all else, however, the women used food to demonstrate their love and caring for others – their children and their male partners, while men did not feel as emotionally attached either food or cooking. Men were overwhelmingly concerned with the more public world of work and when offered or faced with the challenges of the home they sought to control and master these tasks too. The extract below exemplifies both

the male and female's perspective of consumption. Firstly, the female respondent was asked her preferences and dislikes regarding the grocery store:

*Yes, I probably [dislike] the cleaning, washing powders, toilet rolls, kitchen rolls, you sort of come to that and think "oh, pop that in, put that in". There's sort of no interest really. At least when you're going up and down the food aisles you think "oh yes that's nice I'll have that, we'll have that for tea" but when you come to the cleaning you think "oh".*

(Couple 2 female interview extract)

Notice that she differentiates between the work items and those items, which are - or at least could be - seen as 'treats'. The next extract is an example from a male respondent and similar comments reoccurred throughout other male partners' discussions regarding their mastery of cooking:

*I cook when, she's too tired or every now and again. Sometimes on weekends I'll make a proper meal, like a Chinese meal or I'll get the recipe book out and make something that takes a lot of time. I don't get time to do that very often. I do enjoy cooking like a recipe, something a bit interesting like Chinese or curry but it's so time consuming because sometimes you have to go shopping to buy some odd ingredients and then you have to prepare it all. Whereas (partner) will put things together that are edible without a recipe book, she knows what's in the cupboard and she knows what she can make from it. Whereas me it's the other way around. I've got to think of a recipe from a book and then check whether we've got the stuff.*

(Couple 1 male interview extract (my emphasis))

This man cooks if his partner is tired or for leisure and strictly adheres to a recipe while he comments that his partner is more flexible in her approach and will make a meal from the contents of the cupboard. It is clear in this section that cooking, like 'family shopping' can be conceived as a leisurely pursuit.

One interesting foodstuff, in this context, was ice cream as it evoked a powerful and pleasurable memory for one of the respondents. This food brought back fond, nostalgic, memories of childhood; the actual food of childhood indulgence was repeated as an indulgence in adulthood:

*I make good ice cream, my dad taught me, and I make very good ice cream. Actually I make rum and raisin and I soak the raisins for three days. If you soak them really well they swell up and if you soak them for three days they look like prunes and they're really rum-filled. If you make ice cream with them you get a shot of rum every so often!*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

Margaret Visser (1987; 1991) discusses the relevance of ice cream to Westerners, particularly Americans. She describes ice cream as the symbol of purity and “*the food of relaxation, of crowds on holiday*” (Visser 1987: 314). Ice cream is the symbol of modern technological advances with the advent of freezers, but importantly in respect of the respondents’ memories, it is the product of nostalgia (Miller 1991). As Margaret Visser continues:

*There are today two kinds of nostalgia, and ice cream appeals to both of them. The first looks back to past time. Ice cream is the delight of children and therefore evocative of childhood memories; eating it makes people feel young and at least temporary secure and innocent ... The other nostalgia is for Elsewhere. For city dwellers, the ultimately other place is the country.*

(Visser 1987: 315 -316)

This following quote from a male partner exemplifies the blurring of the lines between the relaxing, leisure environment and the role that food plays in consolidating this experience, especially for the women:

*(Partner) says, “I'd love to have an ice cream” now when there's something on telly. We don't buy ice cream on the big shop, so we don't have it unless we go and get it. Like sort of 9 pm when there's something on the telly and we'll say “we'll watch that” and she'll say, “let's get some biscuits and have a cup of tea”. We wouldn't have any biscuits in the house because when we go to Safeway or ASDA we don't buy things like biscuits or any sweets, very rarely. I don't know, it could be that we've got too much else to buy like reasonable food that we've got to eat like meat, vegetables and stuff like that. It could be that I hassle (partner) because I want to leave before she does so she doesn't have time to wander around and pick a luxury item. Obviously it's lower priority or it could be that she thinks if she starts putting luxury items in the trolley I'll get wound up because the bill would be too high. She'll think that I'm going to shout at her for being too extravagant.*

(Couple 1 male interview extract)

The leisure activity provides an avenue to justify the inclusion of certain foods, which as this man indicated would not normally be considered during the main shopping trip. Their main shopping trip was dominated as far as his perspective was concerned by price and functionality. The male partners have the freedom to select their activities and when they want to cook or go shopping. In contrast, for women these activities are mandatory and they have very little autonomy as they have to consider the needs of the other individuals in the household. Significantly, as David Bell and Gill Valentine (1997) have found in their research, the man’s

cooking did not necessarily relieve the woman of work, as they may have to clean up or wash the dishes as a result of their partner's creative efforts.

#### 8.4 Status and self-image

Families do not exist in a social vacuum. Grant McCracken (1986) has argued that commodities help establish identities and links with particular ideals for individuals. In a similar vein, Paul Corrigan notes how class and status are closely intertwined with matters of taste:

*So far from taste being something bizarrely individual, ineffable and innocent, it seems to lie at the very basis of social life, orchestrating it in a way that should ensure harmony and social order, while at the same time reflecting social struggles.*

(Corrigan, 1997: 32)

The items that are consumed represent to the individual a sense of their identity and it was clear from the interviews that retailers, food and knowledge were key distinguishing points for the participant. Issues of class, status and style featured prominently in the participants' description of the store and the food that they expected to find there. In a similar way, actual food products could themselves reveal high status values. One of the participants came from a large family and as might be expected finances were often stretched and she recalls her mother searching through the reduced sticker bin to find an appropriate bargain. Certain brands or types of foods acquired a mystique or aura, which in the participant's view became a prized and luxurious item. Here she recalls that a branded trifle was highly valued and it would only be served at special occasions. The food then become a symbol of the extravagance in which that household could share:

*Birds Trifle, you had to be rich to have Birds Trifle. I don't know why because it had jelly in it. My dad used to say to me when you went to children's parties when you were younger "did you have Birds Trifle?" "Oh yes we had Birds Trifle", "make sure it's Birds Trifle".*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

The supermarkets that people shopped in were also strong indicators of taste, sophistication and social status, both in themselves and in the range of products they stocked. The retailer's credibility was based on their identity, image and reputation, all of which reflected their clientele and the food that they would expect to find there, as this woman describes:

*[It] probably has more choice, possibly reputation as well; I'd trust something from Sainsbury. But I don't know if I'd trust something from 'Joe Bloggs' on the corner. Even though saying that sometimes the high street might be a bit cheaper but often it isn't because they're trying to make a profit out of a smaller market I suppose but no the Supermarket for choice, variety and reputation I think.*

(Couple 4 female interview extract)

The following extract details the type of food and expectations participants had regarding the store and the customers who shop there. In much the same respect as in any other aspect of consumption the supermarket that you shop at is an indicator of your social standing; class and status are thus embedded in the shopping decision:

*Lidl's is really close because (partner's) mum likes Lidl's. It's like you know worse than Kwik Save and Giant. Well from a sort of subjective sort of thing you know poor people go there. When you think about it the reason I don't go there is because they don't carry the range of things. We could never do a full shop there because we wouldn't get all the things we would want unless you're prepared to put up with some German baked beans or something like French labels and you think what the hell is this like, it's probably fine for dogs and cats, you know cat food, it would do a cat or something.*

(Couple 3 male interview extract)

The right store brand however, did not necessarily provide consumers with what they wanted. One of the participants worked in a small, rural town during the week and then travelled back to the city at weekends and she commented on some significant differences in both the urban – rural supermarket and customer attitudes to shopping. The rural supermarkets did not have the novelty and exotic foods that she had come to expect and the customers were more concerned with stocking up on staple items. The situation she describes is reminiscent of the shopping trips that some participants recalled in their childhood where more functional staple shopping dominated:

*I mean when you are shopping in (city) their trolleys are quite full but something I've noticed in (rural town) is their trolley's are stacked with staple stuff like milk and long life stuff and bread and like really basic stuff that you could put in the freezer or whatever. So I don't know whether they don't get down from the mountains very much! They don't open many checkouts at all but people seem to wait, like in (city) if that happened you could probably guarantee the fact that somebody would say "can you open another checkout?" and they would open another checkout because in (city) people are much more, sort of a faster living than it is in (rural town). Like in (rural town) they will just stand there really laid back like they've got 3 days to stand and pay because they have that sort of mentality that everything is laid back and you*

*know don't worry about it, no rushing around. Also their choice of food. I've really noticed a big difference. If you go to Safeway in (city) it isn't the same as in (rural town), I'm still waiting for the chicken fajitas to get there. They got lost outside (city) I think! There's stuff like that, you know like the ready sort of convenience stuff. The choice there is very limited even though it's the same company, it's very strange.*

(Couple 4 female interview extract)

The difference between the city, its surrounding towns and the rural town is captured in her statement. The attitudes that she considers rural people to have are reflected in the above comments about her supermarket trip, the food and the seemingly 'stress-free' or 'laid back' rural attitude. The 'simple' country life, however, does not appeal to the urban consumer who has become accustomed to novelty, variety and convenience living. Men, for example, discussed the kind of foods that they liked to view on their shopping trip – such foods were frequently exotic and novelty items, which required expert knowledge in terms of how to eat and appreciate them. Not only do these foods provide interest and variety to their shopping trip but also for some men they were their treats, providing the interest in a trip that was otherwise unpleasant and task-oriented:

*There are very few bits I do like. I like the Deli area where they do the ready made up Chinese and stuff like that because that's interesting, you can buy it and eat it. Fruit and vegetables don't really do much for me. I don't know, it's more interesting food I think. You know Chinese; I like that sort of thing and the French cheeses and stuff like that, the salami. That's the sort of food I like and I think if I'm eating that I'm treating myself so that, I suppose I would like that part of the store. The rest of it turns me cold because it's not something I like doing. The alcohol section I quite like for obvious reasons. We don't actually buy much alcohol so I usually end up wandering around thinking I don't want any of this and I get bored after that and I want to leave.*

(Couple 1 male interview extract)

Similarly, the foods and some of the items mentioned by women in their diaries indicated their lifestyles and aspirations, which tended to be more family-oriented. One woman recorded her pleasure at finding some Christmas toys for her grandson and noted that they were educational toys (couple 9 female). Another mentioned her wine purchases, which she required to relax after a week of child rearing. Compare the first extract below with the following extract - the foods consumed by the individuals provide an indicator of their lifestyles:

*I got mainly my basic foods but I did splash out on a packet of mixed seafood and tiger prawns a bit expensive but why not? Also got 2 bottles of red and white (wine) for the weekend I need this after my stressful week.*

(Couple 10 Female)

*In Poundstretcher and BeWise we bought some good educational toys for around £20. At Kwiksave we bought some cheap food like Chinese flavoured meats and tins for £25. It was a good all round shop. Of course we all had our usual hot dogs from the van outside a super saver day for (partner).*

(Couple 9 Female)

It would seem that for these respondents the food and the store were important in replicating their class and status expectations. Food was used to distinguish the stores and branded food was held in high regard whether they actually bought that brand or the stores' own label. The shopping trip and the supermarket had, over the course of the participants' progress from childhood to adulthood, evolved into a less functional, more diverse consumption arena, reflecting the consumer's knowledge, class, taste and identity.

### **Status and the individual**

Issues of knowledge, class, taste and identity were not merely reflected in the supermarket situation, they were also significant in how the food was consumed. The example below illustrates this participant's embarrassment over her partner's table manners. As she goes on to describe it would seem that her parents, in particular, her mother, were very concerned with manners and social etiquette as a method of distancing themselves from the rest of the community. This concern has been absorbed by this participant and is reflected succinctly here in this statement:

*I don't think we'd have anybody posh because (partners) friends are like quite down to earth. The thing about (partner) is it's quite difficult because if somebody is coming to dinner I'd put a tablecloth on and have the table set really nice. But (partner) just says, "well people make a mess when they eat so what's the point of putting a tablecloth on? Let's just put newspaper down".*

*I haven't told my mum that because my mum would freak if she knew I ate off, not ate off the newspaper but newspaper underneath your plate. It's all right when (partner's) friends come around because they know about this newspaper thing but I used to get very embarrassed when they first started coming around. I'd have to say something about the newspaper such as: "it wasn't my idea" because I felt embarrassed about it you know I felt really peasant. They just used to laugh and say, "yeah we know, we find it strange as well" but if my*

*parents come around then I will insist on putting the tablecloth on. When my brother came to stay once, I cooked the dinner and (partner) had set the table, you know the newspaper on and my brother just looked and I had to explain to him. Then I had to say, "Please don't tell mum" because I was so afraid that he would tell my mum that we ate off newspaper, she would go ballistic.*

(Couple 4 female interview extract (my emphasis))

As the above extract emphasises, despite holding a professional job and owning her own home she was still worried about her mother and the lapse of manners, which she demonstrated through not using a tablecloth. For another participant it was her social taboo around eating food in the store that made her feel uncomfortable. The fear of disapproval from both store employees and other shoppers made her reluctant to sample any food – even when trial testers in the store ‘legitimately’ offered it. As the following extract illustrates:

*If you've got children with you they usually run up and want a taste of whatever they've got. I don't always have a taste. I feel a bit embarrassed, sometimes when you go up and having all these little tasters. I don't know, all these people wandering around the store and you're walking round munching a bit of pizza or something.*

(Couple 2 female interviewee extract)

### Self-image: the good mother

Internalised images of self were particularly important to the women participants in this study. Images of the good mother dominated women's self-definition and constrained their activities although no such images appeared to structure the experience of men. Women cared for the entire household and in doing so allowed their male partners to focus on not only their work but also their leisure. Mothers, whether they were in paid work or at home, expressed guilt towards any expenditure on themselves. Instead they were haunted by images of the 'good' mother who puts others' needs before her own and ensures that her offspring are happy and healthy. Particular rituals were completed or planned for to ensure that the impending season of Christmas and New Year would proceed smoothly and happily for all concerned. Feelings were put aside as women planned and prepared for the festive season as this participant comments: "*I used my Sainsbury reward card – more points towards my Xmas shopping! Feeling quite tired but I must make the cake today.*" (Couple 7 female, diary extract her emphasis). School

holidays are an example of another occasion which can be quite stressful for women (but not their partners) working full-time who either need to find childcare for the duration or to book leave from their work. In addition, it was expressed in some of the women's diaries that they felt they needed to be proactive with the children rather than babysitting them through the duration of the school holidays.

*Before: It was Thursday one of my days off work, my usual day for shopping. It was also half term so felt I ought to do something with the children (daughter 4 and son 1). I went shopping at 9:15 am and I wasn't looking forward to it.*

(Couple 12 Female diary extract (my emphasis))

Here the mother is continuing the cycle of the good mother in her relationship with her children, something that men are excluded from and thus, serve to reinforce the notion of the supermarket as a female space and shopping as a female function. Mothers and daughters frequently accompanied each other on their shopping trips and in contrast the men did not mention that they went shopping with any of their children. Young girls were given trolleys to 'help' their mothers, while older women either accompanied their daughters or provided advice on their shopping skills, as one said: "*my mum has a 'restrictive' influence on me and I only bought what I really wanted!*" (couple 3 female). In fact there was almost empathy between women, whether there was a family tie there or not, as one respondent experienced and recorded in her diary:

*Felt tired and wanted to be home. Another shopper spoke to me saying, "hard work this!" I must have looked fed up.*

(Couple 4 female diary extract (my emphasis))

The happy family image also came through the diary extracts strongly, with men joining the trip to the supermarket expecting a happy and stress-free time. The diaries suggested that there were certain societal expectations and pressures on the day-to-day lives of the participants, in particular, the gender roles for women in which happy families were expected to dominate.

Other interviewees revealed how images of 'togetherness' and households made up of nuclear families dominated the shopping activity (Miller *et al.* 1999). Such representations of belonging

and togetherness, whether as a couple or family, dominated images of grocery shopping in this study. So dominant were these that one participant, who was currently working away from the home, needed her partner to accompany her on her weekend shopping trips. This quote is also revealing because it illustrates the degree of control her partner has been able to exert on her own shopping behaviour:

*I would have said once that I like to go on my own because I enjoy it but I actually like to go with him because I just sometimes can't be bothered to go on my own. Sometimes it's very lonely, it's very nice because you get to see everything but sometimes I just think "god I'd rather be home" or I'd rather be doing something else. On the weekend, I'd rather be with him because I don't see much of him in the week anyway. I think now it's because I don't see him, I like to be with him and I like him to come with me. Anyway why should I suffer, why shouldn't he suffer too! I know he hates it - I get even. The other thing he has influenced me on because we have a cash only system. I used to just buy anything. I used to buy all the new things and whatever it was that looked new and interesting and it didn't matter what it cost. Now I kind of much more "oh I don't need it" and I don't need this. I don't tend to be quite so mad.*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

## 8.5 The influence of media and authority

Significantly, this study also showed that the media heavily influenced images of self and the ways, in which people interact with food. Notwithstanding the prevalence of images of the happy, nuclear family, it is evident that the food we buy, the places we shop, the books we read and the programmes we watch all reinforce and redefine the leisure experience associated with grocery shopping. The media figured prominently in all of the participants' discussions and these sources of information came from both the formal, authority figures of documentaries and from entertainment cookery shows. The 'right' and 'wrong' way to cook and eat would filter through these various media sources and were deemed to be credible, factual and informative. One participant, for example, recalled her grandmother who was convinced of the magical properties of self-raising flour, like white bread it was originally conceived as better than its natural counterpart. The expensive refining process had improved the natural qualities of the product and therefore the price and positioning techniques, along with the established authority figures had convinced her grandmother that this flour was better than plain flour.

Many of the respondents had collected recipe books or saved them from particular magazines and as this respondent goes on to detail, would devour the books for their entertainment value as much as the information gained:

*See that bottom one there that's all my cookery books. I have eight. Before I started my course I had a mania for cookery books I mean really bad you wouldn't believe it and in the mornings, on Saturday mornings I used to just pick up every cookery book - I wanted to look at what they had. I would make something interesting for Saturday. I'd go back to bed and I would sit in amongst a pile of cookery books and I would just read them and look at them. We've got little ones and I've got my one from my grandmother which is the Daily Mail cook book which is like 19... god knows what! I've got the red one, which is gastronomic, which is all about every food there, is in the world. I've got simply fish, which is about every kind of fish there is in the world. (Partner) bought me another shell fish one and then I've got dairy cook and stuff like that and good house keeping. My favourite one, which my dad bought me because I asked for it, is a book for chefs and stuff like that. Actually I've made duck and orange sauce with my mum many years ago from that. It's a 'fab' book to look at; it's really complex and makes you feel good. One day I will make something from it. Unfortunately I sometimes subscribe to things, I sometimes buy magazines, which is a bit of a downfall. Especially like good food ones those are the ones I like and I had even subscribed to those cards. I've got a box of cards. I haven't cooked anything from that box of cards but early days, I'm still subscribing! I've got a huge amount of cards I haven't even tried yet.*

(Couple 1 female interview extract)

In this quote it becomes apparent that cooking has become a leisure activity for these participants at particular times or on certain occasions. In contrast, the convenience of the 'one-stop' shopping format offered by retailers, in addition to the proliferation of 'meals in minutes' has de-skilled everyday cooking activities. One of the female participants, for example, mentioned that they had followed through and cooked a meal from one of the Sainsbury commercials, which used celebrities to demonstrate a quick and simple recipe. The store facilitated these efforts by ensuring that the purchase of the ingredients was easy for the time-starved consumer.

*Some of the ones that I did copy the recipes from was when Sainsbury had the adverts with all the different things people had made and cook something. I did a few of those and they were quite good because they were really easy, as well as quite straightforward. But then you got the recipe card in Sainsbury anyway. Because the commercial ones were sort of, you had like, 3, 4 or 5 easy steps to make this thing and it was done really quickly. Although it was done quickly because the advert was only so long, they got it all in and it was easy for you to remember rather than somebody that does maybe a 10, 15 or 20-minute slot. We've got to remember to put a sprig of this and a pinch of that and half a*

*teaspoon of this and sometimes that's too much to take in and then they say oh you can write to this address for the recipes but you never bother to do that. So the ones from Sainsbury you could remember it from the advert and if you couldn't when you went shopping after they had done a particular advert you'd go in and the recipe card and any particular ingredients that you needed for that particular advert at that time the recipe card would be by all those relevant aisles so you could just pick them up as you went around so it was easier really.*

(Couple 4 female interview extract)

Cooking has thus become a specialist leisure activity that is enjoyed when the individual creates the appropriate time and space. For the majority of the participants in this present study, however, these television shows, books and information from the retailer were more about information and entertainment, than practical applications as few people actually cooked these foods. Interestingly, and paralleling the earlier discussion of men's involvement in creative as opposed to mundane cooking, men discussed the cookery programmes in greater detail than their partners. They expressed an interest in certain types of 'exotic', harder to cook food items, which were more novel and exciting than the 'every-day' functional (and thus more boring, less worthy) meals that were served to them by their partners:

*'Ready Steady Cook' is one of my favourites. I like the fact that they can cook up anything from nothing, like stir fry cooking. I love stir-fries. We don't do enough of it ourselves. We've got our wok we get it out now and again but I would like to get it out more often. There are quite healthy foods. We tend to buy too much packet foods. Sometimes (partner) will cook a meal but we should do it more often. I would like to. With stir fry there's a little bit of preparation, as you are doing the vegetables but the cooking time is about 5 or 10 minutes and that's it. It's all nice and hot and I love Chinese food. We take turns but I enjoy doing it, the cooking. During the week she tends to do it but on the weekend or if we're doing something I'm quite happy to do it or get the BBQ out in the summer time, you know things like that.*

(Couple 2 Male interview extract (my emphasis))

The media also provided ideas for other areas of their home life and the proliferation of programmes regarding cooking and other domestic activities, such as decorating, provided an easy source of obtainable information. Thus, certain types information was picked out from the clutter of messages to enhance the participants' understanding and knowledge. Whether they actually cooked from these recipes or not, did not matter, these programmes provided entertainment value for the participants.

*I watch the DIY programmes, 'Changing Rooms' and those. I love them, just to see the people's face when they come into their red room and they don't like red and they go, "oh that's lovely". We're still looking for ideas because it's a bit plain, we think 'blue oh I don't like blue like that but it looks nice'. So we watch those programmes, they're quite entertaining I suppose. I like Carol Smillie. I like her she's quite nice. So I watch her and Handy Andy, he's a good laugh as well on Changing Rooms. He's quite entertaining when he tells people what he thinks.*

(Couple 3 male interview extract)

In addition to providing entertainment, these programmes gave the consumer a plethora of information about the food they were eating. One of the male participants was extremely well informed regarding the recent food scares that had occurred in the UK. There was a feeling of distrust over the food they were eating and this might have been why this couple (couple 1) was keen to use the local 'farm shop'. Although, the 'farm shop' did not guarantee that its products were organic rather the aura of the 'barn' and straw on the floor provided assurance of its authenticity.

*I think a lot of the additives they put in foods are bad for you. I have this vague feeling that they must be bad for you because they're not natural. You hear from the news and stuff like that you know and all these reports of people getting hyperactive because of caffeine and E numbers and stuff like that. I don't really know much about it but I think a lot of the colourings you can either get allergic to or can stimulate you in some ways. I don't think that's particularly good. I don't listen to and study the reports but I think it just seeps in and over a period of time I've just got a general feeling that additives and preservatives and stuff like that are bad. Magazine articles and the news and people talking in work because I don't know, I can't think of any examples, but every now and again there's a scare and they're all oh anything with this in it is bad for you. I tend to think it's pumping chemicals into your body when you don't need them.*

(Couple 1 male interview extract)

In fact this participant discussed these issues in further detail and was not the only participant to express these views, thus, the media and authority figured prominently in their descriptions of the types of food they bought and their opinions of food generally. Through focusing on and emphasising the entertainment aspect of the television programmes the media obscured the chore aspect of the activity from the viewer. This was particularly evident for women who had many jobs and responsibilities expected of them, (the so-called 'double shift') which increased if they worked full-time or part-time, as this respondent laments:

*There are differences for me now with less time in the day to do things because of the child's age. That's going to alter again in 6 months because she'll be going to school so the children influence a lot of what you do especially me because I'm with them at home in the day. The amount of work that I have I'm more tired especially if I've been working [at paid work] as well in between. There is less time to do things. I'm spending the evening tidying up instead. If I'm home more I probably do tend to go out to the shops and just wander around. Then I tend to get in a couple of little [grocery] 'shops' then rather than one big one. Silly things I think have influenced me like the amount of work and the kids.*

*(Couple 3 female interview extract)*

Women had many influences that inhibited their actions and access to certain activities. Their work was strung out on a continuum of work and leisure which was also contextual - depending on who they were with and the time available. Grocery shopping could be both a chore and an outlet or break from the other responsibilities of their lives. In contrast, men were more structured in their leisure and work and they did not need to blur the lines between work, leisure and family. Even the presence of children did not restrict their involvement in leisure activities. For the women there were certain aspects of the grocery shopping that they felt offered opportunities to exercise their power over – in particular food and the secondary trips to the store. A key concern for them was the struggle to gain control over their body shape through controlling their diet and food impulses. Whether they were on a diet or not foods were categorised as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Thus, a prominent feature of the diaries was the body and their attempts to ensure they could control themselves and any negative influences or temptations. Women mentioned their healthy purchases or that they were trying to lose weight “*Mustn't forget diet food! Must be good!*” said one (couple 8); whilst others noted that indulging the family often led them to temptation. One mother commented on her daughter’s willpower against choosing sweets, something that she decided to eat (couple 11 female):

*(Daughter) and I went to Tesco's on the way home. (Daughter) needed some of Tesco's yoghurt, she won't eat Sainsbury's. Spent £50 on groceries at Sainsbury this morning on the way to work. Arrived at Tesco in time to pick up some reduced items - lots of sugar snap peas for (daughter). Also sweets for me – I should not go shopping when I am hungry! (Daughter) was hungry too – she has more willpower than me.*

(Couple 11 female)

Women, as some of the previous quotes have also indicated, would try and exhibit self-control, which seemed to be an essential part of the primary shopping experience. Treating and indulging themselves became either a reward or food was combined with other activities to enhance the leisure activity dimension to this secondary shopping experience. Food that would not normally be considered during the functional shopping trip was often the staple item of these subsequent visits. The main shopping trip was the functional chore to replenish the every-day items and was more akin to work. By contrast, the secondary trips for the majority of women, as some of the diaries indicated, could be regarded as self-indulgence, browsing at other possible items. ‘Luxury’ food was considered within the context of a relaxing or leisure activity and it would provide an avenue to indulge the whole body. The taste, smell and sight of certain foods warranted their inclusion in an activity, which could not be considered leisure without this element of ‘playful’ food.

## 8.6 Summary

As this study has revealed, as with other forms of shopping, grocery shopping is shaped and organised through particular social conceptions (Smith 1999; Riddy 2000). The activity of preparing and nurturing for the household, in which food plays a significant role, is controlled and shaped into particular discourses and practices (DeVault 1999). Grocery shopping is an essential part of our everyday life and it has largely been dismissed as a functional activity, women’s work and therefore not particularly important. The male participants, in particular, were unaware of the intense emotions and important role that it holds for the household. The particular ways of knowing that surround grocery shopping have been constructed around male claims, as women have never:

*...been given a voice of authority in stating their own condition or anyone else's or in asserting how such conditions should be changed. Never was what counts as general social knowledge generated by asking questions from the perspective of women's lives.*

(Harding 1991:106)

Who or what is valued or discussed within leisure and retailing illustrates how knowledge is socially constructed and cultivated. Who is excluded or included in the definitions and perceptions surrounding grocery shopping indicates the inherent power relationships and judgements within the activity.

In this chapter I have argued that the consumption and experience of grocery shopping is framed within discourses of gender and the family. In this study it is evident that food and shopping experiences could be both pleasurable and difficult, providing opportunities for both leisure and work. For women it is also evident that participants' childhood experiences have helped to shape their adult attitudes and reactions to food, shopping and the household. In a domain still dominated by notions of the good mother, the involvement of men remains transitory, optional and specialist. The evidence presented in both chapters 7 and 8 illustrate that leisure masks the underlying tensions in the household regarding the allocation of tasks, freedom and independence. Many of these women are constrained through the household but also by the expectations of society. Women have traditionally been linked with the household and food preparation, but the shift from production to consumption and now the 'one-stop-shopping' concept (complete with convenience foods) has further devalued the skills and expertise of the women. The next chapter will conclude the thesis and discusses in detail the key points that this investigation has uncovered regarding leisure and grocery shopping.

# CHAPTER 9

## CONCLUSIONS

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## CHAPTER 9 : CONCLUSION

### 9.1 Introduction

This thesis represents my struggle to gain recognition of grocery shopping as an arena of consumption, which negotiates, rationalises and legitimises ‘everyday’, ‘common-sense’ notions of gender, power and leisure. The common-sense view of grocery shopping as a mundane, insignificant activity is intimately bound up with discourses of gender and power. It is clear however, as chapter 2 illustrated, that whilst grocery shopping has been considered from a functional perspective, its cultural meaning in the fabric of the everyday lives of ordinary men and women has not been explored. While attending conferences and during the course of doing (or living) this research, I was questioned as to the value of examining grocery shopping - after all, surely it was ‘just doing the shopping’? For many marketing academics the research was unwarranted, as it was unlikely to inform practice. Yet, such statements not only diminish the significance of grocery shopping but reveal a failure to understand the complex social relations involved in the activity.

Inherent within this struggle to gain recognition for the significance of grocery shopping has been my development as a researcher and my commitment to the value of a feminist approach in understanding grocery shopping through the everyday experiences of the participants. However, this study does not suggest that women are passive shoppers, nor that they are manipulated in the consumption process. On the contrary, some of the women found grocery shopping (particularly on their own) empowering and it could become a time and a space for leisure. This final chapter of the thesis will present the major findings of the study (Section 9.2), before reviewing the contributions the research has made to theory (Section 9.3) and practice (Section 9.4). Following consideration of the study’s methodological contribution (Section 9.5), as with all feminist research, I have included a review of the study limitations (Section 9.6) and my

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reflections on the research process (Section 9.7), together with a reflexive postscript (Section 9.8) before concluding by discussing possible further avenues for research (Section 9.9).

## 9.2 The study's major findings

Previously, researchers have either neglected grocery shopping completely, or have investigated the phenomena from a functionalist, male perspective (Campbell 1997; East 1994). Moreover, little of the work on consumption has focused on the everyday acts, preferring to see the shopper as a flaneur, a voyeur in the new malls of Edmonton or Minneapolis (Fiske 2000). My research demonstrates that the everyday reality for women does not fall easily into the stereotype of a passive, voyeuristic shopper. By contrast, the present study clearly illustrates through the participants' voices, that the store environment and, indeed, the *context* of grocery shopping is far more complex and reflects gendered power inequalities at a macro and micro level. The major finding of this research project is that the context of grocery shopping is not mundane and functional as many writers have previously thought, rather, it is an arena of complex, intangible experiences that are structured through gender (Bowlby 1988; Bowlby 1996; Carter 1984). The three key findings of this thesis are: the gendered nature of grocery shopping; the importance of micro-political and power relationships to the grocery shopping act; the discourse of leisure which pervades grocery shopping for the study participants.

The historical literature demonstrates that grocery shopping has, on certain occasions, provided opportunities for leisure and socialising. For individuals who were deprived of financial or other resources, the mix of shops in the high street and the street markets once provided cheap entertainment as well shopping opportunities. However, during the post-war period and particularly under the influence of American shopping trends (Winship 2000a), this view of shopping as a leisurely, community-based activity changed. These ideas rationalised the

shopping activity through a more ‘scientific’ perspective and brought with them the concepts of self-service and later, the large out-of-town store.

During the 1990s, in an effort to distinguish themselves from their competitors, a myriad of facilities were offered by the UK supermarkets which also emphasised the importance of customer service. The retailers endeavoured to ensure that the supermarket offered a comfortable, pleasurable and leisurely shopping environment. I would argue, however, that these practices conceal real tensions within the shopping activity, obscuring the fact that shopping is a mandatory activity for women in heterosexual households, whilst men have the opportunity to opt in or out of the experience as they wish. The retailers’ advertising images of happy families shopping together in harmony do not reflect the everyday experiences of the participants in this study. The women only achieved any sense of autonomy when they shopped without their male partners. When their partners accompanied them such was the dominance of the men that the activity ceased to provide time or space for female ‘leisure.’

Thus, the shopping activity fluctuated between a functional chore and a pleasurable, hedonistic experience for the study’s female participants. Their weekly, family shopping trips were largely functional but the secondary trips were more likely to have a leisure dimension. Significantly, the women had a degree of control over those secondary trips, compared to the ‘household’ shopping days. When the men did accompany their partners they controlled and manipulated every aspect of the shopping trip in both discreet and explicit ways. Although the women employed a range of strategies in order to regain some control for themselves, not only did the men define the nature and duration of the shopping trip but they also controlled the finances, sanctioned shopping lists and approved product choices.

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Reflected strongly throughout the data are the participants’ perceptions of what was appropriate or ‘natural’ behaviour and actions. The focus group comments regarding the use of the crèche

facility (chapter 6) and how to eat and prepare food (chapter 8) are all examples of cultural hegemony. These ideas and behaviours were legitimised and endorsed by the dominant groups within society. The retailer's promotional activities provide a case in point. Their commercials not only focused on the woman as a consumer but also through the voice-over, assumed that they are talking to her and that she has sole responsibility for the food requirements for the household and her family's physical and emotional well being. Yet, despite the retailers' assumption that women are their core consumers, men also influence grocery-shopping behaviour and therefore this study could not neglect their attitudes and behaviours. Men were also an integral part of the data gathering process as in certain circumstances they provided access to the household and illustrated the power process within the relationships (Stanley & Wise 1990).

Whilst grocery-shopping patterns and behaviour reflect the personal, gendered politics of contemporary heterosexual households, the store environments themselves and the retailers' promotional imagery affirm and contribute to macro gender inequalities. The retailers have played an active role in re-producing powerful, widely 'bought-into' constructs, in particular those of the female consumer and of shopping as a family activity. The men in this study and the grocery retailers both exercise power through these 'norms' and expectations surrounding the grocery shopping activity. Although the leisure dimension of the grocery shopping experience does serve to empower female shoppers, it also reinforces the power of the retailer – prolonging the store visit and increasing secondary spend. Today's grocery retailers construct themselves as providers of convenient, 'one stop' shops for their ideal consumer, easing the burden of *her* household chores and even creating time and space for *her* leisure activities. Ready-cooked, chilled, convenience foods, takeaway meals and crèche facilities all serve to position the supermarket as an essential partner of today's time-poor female shopper. This collaboration, however, simultaneously reinforces a natural acceptance of the legitimacy of the double-shift, releasing men from the burden of provisioning the domestic realm. In addition, by

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'deskilling' the task of grocery shopping by providing convenience, the retailers' advertisements and store environments also arguably belittle the 'traditionally' female skill of shopping and food preparation.

### 9.3 The study's contribution to theory

The functional and economic critiques offered in both the leisure and consumption fields do not adequately explain the meanings and experiences of consumers when they engage in leisure and shopping activities. The intangible, symbolic and cultural values that are embedded within this human activity are ignored, along with the historical and cultural process which construct and maintain them. This thesis has contributed to theory through illustrating that leisure, and especially grocery shopping, is just as complex and culturally-produced as other aspects of life. Influenced by feminist theory and the tradition of research initiated by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, I have investigated the question of how grocery shopping can become leisure and importantly, how it serves to reproduce patriarchal power (Bordo 2000).

Leisure researchers have lamented the current stagnation and ghettoisation that has occurred, calling for various strategies to overcome the insular attitude within the field (Aitchison 2000; Rojek 2000; Aitchison 2001; Pritchard & Morgan 2001). One suggestion from Rosemary Deem, for example, has called for leisure and consumption researchers to work together as there are many similarities and indeed in some areas overlap, between the two disciplines (Deem 1988; Deem 1999). This thesis contributes to this suggestion through an investigation of the everyday, mundane context of grocery shopping and an examination of how at certain times it can be constructed as leisure by the participants. Chapter 2 demonstrates that definitions of leisure and leisure shopping have suffered from similar difficulties and also neglected certain groups in society. Much of the work within leisure studies had, until the early eighties, been from a male-centred perspective. Similarly, within consumer studies and the relatively new field of

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consumption studies, a ‘malestream’ approach also dominated the definitions and interpretation of how consumption was constructed and experienced.

In addition to providing empirical work for leisure studies this thesis also examines the social relationships surrounding leisure and grocery shopping. A historical analysis provides evidence of how shopping, and later grocery shopping, has been organised around particular discourses. These discourses illustrate the tension involved and the patriarchal power structures inherent in the activity. They also provide examples of hegemony, as the practices are ‘naturalised’ or ‘normalised’. Women are still expected to visit the grocery retailer, while for other members of the household, particularly the spouse, grocery shopping is still optional. The grocery shopping activity also symbolises and elevates the status of the nuclear family and provides an image of togetherness and household unity. Despite the work involved, grocery shopping, not unlike holidays, provides both a chance for leisure and escape as well as the more functional aspects of provisioning for the household. For many women the activity provided a convenient space and break in their busy lives where they can browse at a wide range of products. It could also provide an opportunity for women to exercise some control over the finances. However this was usually conducted in secret with receipts or purchases hidden from their spouse.

Furthermore, this thesis provides a voice to neglected groups, particularly women, and illustrates the blurring of leisure, consumption and work. The mundane and functional discourses used to contain and describe grocery shopping hide the powerful strategies that the retailers employ and the impact of wider cultural structures on our lives. These structures promote the unity between the stereotypical heterosexual household positions, emphasising the woman’s position as nurturer and caretaker of the family. When men do volunteer to accompany their family on the trip it is a novel and almost leisurely experience for them. Their presence diminishes any control, power or expertise that the woman may have otherwise

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demonstrated during the activity. The time of the trip, the products bought and even the people who are spoken to are all curtailed in line with man's desires.

Although often described as mundane and functional, the grocery shopping trip to the supermarket has increasingly moved away from simply being the once-a-week trip to now occurring two or three times a week. The supermarket now occupies a central part of our lives and has moved into meeting all our needs in one location - the chemist, doctor, baker, café, crèche etc., can all be accessed 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Now is the time to take the grocery shopping experience seriously, rather than just seeing it, as some marketing academics at conferences have stated to me, as: "*just shopping and anyway my wife does it*".

#### **9.4 The study's contribution to practice**

This thesis contributes to practice as it examines the image of the store and then proceeds to delve deeper to investigate the experiences of grocery shopping for the women participants. For the retailers analysed in this research, this thesis provides a holistic investigation regarding their store or corporate image, the experiences of the grocery consumer and their effects on their satisfaction and loyalty. The focus groups, calendars and dairies for example, illustrate the importance of image in the satisfaction and loyalty relationship. The thesis can provide retailers with a better understanding of how grocery stores communicate their store image in both deliberate and unconscious ways. Store or corporate image has long been recognised as a determinant of organisational success, and has been used for developing a cohesive communication and branding strategy. In the present competitive UK environment, positioning and differentiation through distinctive corporate images have been considered key strategic variables in both attracting and retaining customers (Andreassen & Lindestad 1998). Moreover, Christian Grönroos (1984) argues that a service firm's image is extremely important and is largely determined by the consumers' assessment of their service experience since services are intangible and based on performance.

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Researchers, however, do agree that image is both complex and dynamic. Joep Cornelissen (2000) argues that image formation is an iterative and continuous process formed from various sources, which are constructed in the minds of the receivers. Image is thought to be a totality of the receiver's perceptions of how the firm presents itself, either through planned or unplanned communications. It is formed through single encounters with the service resulting from the individual's experiences, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, knowledge, and impressions about the organisation. As such, a retailer's image is unique to each individual as it is shaped by her/his distinct and selective exposure to the organisation, objectives, social and cultural backgrounds (Cornelissen 2000), and values (Erdem, Oumlil & Tuncalp 1999; Thompson & Chen 1998).

The prevailing marketing research has conceptualised and measured image as a complex combination of tangible and intangible service attributes. In contrast, Joep Cornelissen (2000) and Bertrand Moingeon and Bernard Ramanantsoa (Moingeon & Ramanantsoa 1997) argue for an interpretive-symbolic perspective to understand the complexity of the process and subjective dimensions of corporate image and its effects. As such, image is created through a shared negotiation of meanings between the service firm and customer. I also argue for a more inclusive approach, using feminist theory to examine how image is based on the consumer's construct system, which is mediated by his/her previous experiences and socialisation. The focus groups, in particular, illustrate how a consumer constructs image, and how the above factors are embodied within the process in which image contributes to quality, value, satisfaction, emotion, and behavioural and attitudinal outcomes. Besides illustrating the importance of image in the satisfaction-quality-value-loyalty relationship, these stories can provide management with a better understanding of how service firms communicate image in both deliberate and unconscious ways. Thus, allowing for improved communication marketing strategy, service quality, satisfaction, value and loyalty.

The second issue that this thesis supports is the success of the ‘one stop’ shopping concept, which now encompasses a leisure / pleasure aspect of the grocery shopping trip. For many of the women, whether they were in paid work or not, the supermarket could on certain occasions provide some form of snatched leisure or ‘rest bite’ in their hectic day. The facilities and services offered enabled women to capture two things at once, their household responsibilities and some aspects of leisure shopping by browsing through the non-grocery items. For women the shopping experience was more enjoyable when they went on smaller shopping trips without their male partners. Although interestingly men, when they did accompany their partner on the trip, considered the shopping activity as a family pastime. If retailers wish to appeal to families and, in particular women, it would seem that focusing on the female alone and empowering her through the shopping experience rather than patronising her would be more appropriate. Promotional material should illustrate the realities and complexities of women’s lives as they juggle the different tasks. Appreciating women as a diverse group rather than as a homogeneous stereotype would certainly be more appealing to their target customer (Nelson 1994). This again, would demonstrate the appreciation and support the retailer provides for women with families. This was the key to the retailers’ appeal to women as the retailers enabled them to function more efficiently within the household, in effect replacing the male partner who typically still did not equally participate in household activities. These issues of support and leisure are almost intertwined as the women enjoyed the trip when it enabled them to effectively ‘kill two birds with one stone’ - work and leisure.

## **9.5 The study’s contribution to methodology**

The dominance of men in both social science research (Aitchison 2001) and in the retailing industry has distorted the experiences of the female grocery consumer. The domestic sphere, which figures strongly in women's lives – whether or not they engage in paid work - has been neglected in favour of the more exciting realm of the mall, fashion shows and department stores

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(Bell & Valentine 1997). Similarly, until relatively recently leisure studies have too often been subjugated to approaches that also neglect the significance of gender and the everyday experiences of women (Aitchison 1999, 2000, 2001). Thus, by applying a fractured foundationalist approach (Stanley and Wise 1993) to a study of grocery shopping, this present study examines from a feminist perspective the day-to-day experiences of couples as they negotiated leisure and their shopping activities.

By applying a feminist framework I have attempted to make visible the gendered structures of women's everyday lives - their leisure and their work. My use of a phenomenological approach has provided a descriptive analysis of the women's experiences, whilst the location of the study within a feminist research framework has politicised those experiences through my examination of the historical, cultural and social processes by which their gendered identities are reproduced. A feminist analysis also encourages an awareness of the research process and how the multiple voices of those involved in the project are represented. I considered that ensuring that my participants were aware of their rights during the data collection process and collaboration was important (Kirsch 1999). In addition I endeavoured to be aware of the emotions and experiences of being research subjects, the intrusion into their private lives and the changes that might occur in the household as a consequence of their participation in my research project. As Karla Henderson and Deborah Bialeschki note, I tried to be: "*Sensitive to the diversity and differences among women in terms of relative power and disadvantage associated with such life aspects as class, race, sexual preference, mothering, occupation, and education*" (Henderson & Bialeschki 1991: 52).

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The theory of knowledge, or epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the researcher and the researched. It is also concerned with the value of knowledge, its assumptions and beliefs, and how they are justified or verified (Harding 1991; Duplis 1999). Epistemological questions ask what is the appropriate relationship between the researcher and

participant (objective or subjective); who is allowed to be a researcher and define appropriate research topics. As Sandra Harding comments, the knowledge that is extracted in answer to these questions is as: “*noteworthy for what it excludes as for what it includes*” (Harding 1991:107). Conventional epistemology differs from feminist epistemology in that it relies on dualisms and ‘malestream’ theories for its knowledge claims. Sandra Harding identifies the three main tenets in feminist thought regarding knowledge as: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint, and feminist postmodernism (Harding 1991). Feminist empiricism applies feminist principles to conventional knowledge discourses, practices and techniques. It works within the standard conventions and follows the rules and principles of science more rigorously. However, it has been extensively criticised by many feminists for preserving the status quo rather than challenging the knowledge conceptions that have been promoted by the powerful. Feminist standpoint, as chapter four has outlined, starts from women’s experiences and argues that all knowledge and ‘truths’ are socially situated and therefore merely legitimate the powerful. Feminists using postmodernism advocate that there is no ‘one truth’ instead there are multiple realities, representations, and reflexivity. Critics of feminist postmodernism, such as Sandra Harding, have argued that these academics do not advance feminism, nor do they place gender at the forefront of the research (Harding 1991).

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993) have offered a fourth perspective that draws on feminist standpoint theory and social constructionist perspectives. They advocate that we need to begin with the social experiences of women’s lives and then theorise the data. Moreover, these experiences are just as socially situated or “*indexical*” (Stanley and Wise 1993: 8) and critiquing these practices provides women with a ‘voice’ regarding their experiences that previously they may have dismissed as ‘natural’ or ‘common-sense’. Women also mediate between the social institutions and their everyday experiences and will often prefer to validate the dominant interpretations of how they should behave and think - blaming themselves, not society. This was particularly evident in the focus groups and in some of the interviews, as the

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participants were concerned about the public sanctions of their behaviour. Sandra Harding captures this well when she says:

*...within the same culture there is in general a greater gap for women than men between what they say or how they behave, on the one hand, and what they think, on the other hand. Women feel obliged to speak and act in ways that inaccurately reflect what they would say and do if they did not so constantly meet with negative cultural sanctions.*

(Harding 1991: 125)

The women who felt that they had to dress a certain way in order to shop at a particular store or refused samples of food offered in the store, and the woman who felt guilty that her partner used newspaper instead of table mats, were all concerned about the public sanctions for these acts. Unlike their male partners, it was difficult for the women to have strict boundaries around different areas of their lives. Paid work, housework, caring for others, and leisure were mingled; and this tangle of different activities made her male partner's life easier to manage – although he was unaware of the effort invested by his partner.

## 9.6 The study's limitations

This research has examined the context of grocery shopping and investigated the household relationships of heterosexual couples. Feminist theory and techniques were influential, particularly during the latter half of the research. I feel that this study has enhanced and extended our understanding of the gendered structures that are imposed upon women in their everyday lives. Although the content analysis and focus groups provided some insight into how grocery shopping is built into daily lives, it was the diaries and interviews which gave the participants voice and enabled them to describe in their own words their experiences of shopping and leisure. However, as with all research projects there were certain limitations inherent in the methods chosen, that in retrospect perhaps could have been altered.

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Observation and interviews are applied in typical ethnographic studies and enable researchers to observe the actions and occurrences in participants' lives. Feminist ethnography could have

provided a viable alternative to the multiple methods applied here. The key advantage and difference of ethnography is that: "*it makes women's lives visible, just as interviewing is an important feminist method if it makes women's voices audible*" (Reinharz 1992: 48). Observation could have been applied in this research and would have provided additional data regarding the participants' behaviour during their store visits. However, there were certain difficulties associated with the inclusion of observation within this project and these challenges are fairly common for all researchers who might be considering this particular method (Reinharz 1992). Shulamit Reinharz (1992) notes ambivalence towards ethnography and the observation method. Ethnography, and observation in particular, is also time consuming, there may be difficulties in gaining access to the site and it is an extremely labour-intensive. Time and access issues were just two of the reasons why this study opted not to use observation. Additional concerns were also raised by Judith Stacey's work, which also questioned ethnography regarding the inherent manipulation and power differences of the method (Stacey 1988). Many other feminist researchers, such as Shulamit Reinharz, have argued against her and state that, like Ann Oakley's study on interviewing, we should seek to reform the method rather than merely dismissing it altogether (Reinharz 1992; Oakley 1981). Although I agree that ethnography needs to be reformed because, as Judith Stacey's (1988) comments, it raises strong issues regarding the balance of power between the researcher and participant.

## 9.7 Reflections on the research project

I have come to realise that this research was as much about me as it was about the participants. Throughout my life I have struggled with my experiences and feelings regarding particular events and societal interpretations of these moments. People in authority considered me to be a contrary child and adult, as I was always encouraged to question activities and instructions, rather than merely accept them. Motherhood and my entrance into the academic world, intensified this process for me and it was through the research process and my readings (and re-

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readings) of feminist literature that I have been able to understand and validate my battles, desires and feelings. I can relate both to the struggles and joys that my participants described in their lives, and I have enjoyed the support and friendship circles that will exist long after my children are out of nappies.

Ethics and reflectivity are an important part of the feminist research process. It is critical to consider our responsibility to our participants. Whilst wishing to encourage them to verify and collaborate, the responsibility for the critical analysis rests with me, as researcher. I have chosen the quotes used to reflect aspects of the participants' lives and it is my representation of their lives that is made among these pages. It is only now as I near the end of the process that I have come to realise and account for the role that I played throughout and how the investigation was shaped by my interests and personal development. Through an examination of the participants' lives I have also investigated my relationship and identity as a woman, wife, mother and academic.

## 9.9 Reflexive postscript

A key aspect of this thesis has been the articulation of the researcher's voice and the transparency of the research process. Recognising this, it remains for me to render visible my final experiences of the process. After my first experience of defending a version of this thesis I reflected on my beliefs, conceptions and what I was prepared to defend. I also had to accept that I had limitations and that I needed to critically reflect on the challenges that these presented. Firstly, I had not only reflected on my beliefs and knowledge but also my personal skills and abilities in order to convince myself that I could achieve this qualification. I then considered ways to try and overcome my main weakness of writing. I read widely, I practiced on other colleagues' work and I attended some classes. Finally, I mapped out, along with my supervisors, the structure of the PhD right down to the paragraphs. I continued with my reading and also

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reflected upon the examiners' feedback before settling down to tackle what I considered to be the heart of the thesis, the theoretical chapter. This was quickly followed by the literature review with the introduction and conclusion left until last. Once the core of the thesis was written – then came the editing process to delete those aspects of the narrative that detracted from my story. All these practical activities disguise the fact that it was the consciousness derived from a critical engagement with feminist literature that gave me the power to name and re-name these experiences and ultimately the 'knowledge' to gain acceptance and credence within the academic community for both my thesis and myself as a scholar. I finally realise that I was involved as both 'knower' and participant, in effect researching my self and my 'double consciousness' as both insider and outsider to the study, academia and myself.

## **9.8 Potential avenues for further research**

It seems fitting to conclude the thesis by considering potential avenues for further research. The thesis provides some empirical data and an attempt to bridge the gulf between leisure and consumption. It is evident that the discourse of leisure needs to be extended to encompass a variety of sites and activities, beyond those traditionally considered. Rather than focusing on definitions of leisure, future research should continue to move towards examining the relationship between leisure and other aspects of the participant's life. Leisure studies should broaden its focus to embrace activities, such as shopping and watching television – areas that are considered the province of consumption and media studies. This thesis has illustrated how leisure can be constructed within the grocery shopping experience and shows how leisure can mask tension between chore and pleasure.

Whilst feminist theory provided the framework for this study, debates in leisure and consumption studies have provided a backdrop to the analysis of the experiences of grocery shopping provided by the participants. Leisure researchers have lamented the fact that

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conceptualising and defining leisure from the participant's viewpoint has become increasingly difficult. Karla Henderson and Deborah Bialeschki, for example, have tried to define leisure as the: "*Dimensions of freedom, intrinsic motivation, and enjoyment as perceived by the respondents*"(Henderson & Bialeschki 1991: 3). In the light of the present study, even this statement appears problematic.

**Content analysis checklist for the retailer****Date** .....**Retailer** .....

Please circle the appropriate category if the item is present in the advertisement.

If you circle other please specify.

<b>Setting</b>	Store	House	Farm	Other
<b>Employees</b>				
Gender	Female	Male	Both	Other
Work role	Checkout/ shopfloor	Butchery, bakery	Supervisor, manager	Other
Race	White	Black	Asian	Other
<b>Voice-over</b>	Male	Female	Both	None
<b>Catch phrase (please write)</b>				
Values emphasised	Price, savings	Family, education	Choice, quality	Other
<b>Products</b>	Branded	Fresh produce	Own label	Other
<b>Who would you say is the advert addressing? (please write)</b>				

**Content analysis checklist for the consumer characters****Date** .....**Retailer** .....

Please circle the appropriate category if the item is present in the advertisement.

If you circle **other** please specify.

<b>Location</b>	Indoor	Outdoor	Other	
Setting	Store	Rural	Conventional house	Other
<b>Personal &amp; lifestyle characteristics</b>				
Gender	Female	Male	Both	
Race	White	Black	Asian	Other
Accent	English	English dialect	Scottish, Irish, Welsh	Other
Roles	Parent	Child	Elderly	Other
Dress	Smart, business wear	Fashionable	Causal	Other
<b>Decision-Maker &amp; role (please write)</b>				
<b>Values</b>	Family	Price, savings	Education	Other
<b>Receiver or giver of advice (please write)</b>				
<b>Receiver or recipient of help</b>				

**Interview schedule**

**Discuss questionnaire results**

**Household**

Household activities - who does what and why?

Do you have a budget?

Do you have a store loyalty card?

What day/time do you tend to go shopping and why?

Do you like shopping alone or with other family members?

Can you remember going shopping before you were married? What was it like?

**Store**

Is there a part of the store that you like best and why?

Are there products or foods you like buying more than others?

When you are at the supermarket do you use any of their other facilities?

Do you have any cookery books or do you watch any cookery programmes?

Do you shop in the local shops too?

Do anybody or anything influence you when you shop?

**Discuss some aspects from diary**

What are your leisure activities at the moment?

Do you prefer to shop on your own with a friend/partner?

Who mainly cooks in your household?

Can you tell me what sort of things you like to cook and why?

Has anything changed since last time we met?

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