

Gender and Consumption

**Domestic Cultures and the Commercialisation
of Everyday Life**

Edited by

Emma Casey

and

Lydia Martens

GENDER AND CONSUMPTION

We wish to dedicate this book to Susan Porter Benson, who sadly passed away in June 2005. May her work on women's history, consumerism and class inspire others in the way it has inspired us.

Gender and Consumption

Domestic Cultures and the Commercialisation
of Everyday Life

Edited by

EMMA CASEY
Kingston University, UK

and

LYDIA MARTENS
Keele University, UK

ASHGATE

© Emma Casey and Lydia Martens 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

Emma Casey and Lydia Martens have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the editors of this work.

Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Gower House
Croft Road
Aldershot
Hampshire GU11 3HR
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
Suite 420
101 Cherry Street
Burlington, VT 05401-4405
USA

Ashgate website: http://www.ashgate.com
--

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Gender and consumption : domestic cultures and the
commercialisation of everyday life

1. Housewives as consumers - History - 20th century
 2. Consumption (Economics) - History - 20th century
 3. Women - Social conditions - 20th century
 4. Home economics - History - 20th century
 5. Family - History - 20th century
 6. Sex role - History - 20th century
- I. Casey, Emma II. Martens, Lydia
305.4'364

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gender and consumption : domestic cultures and the commercialisation of everyday life
/ edited by Emma Casey and Lydia Martens.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7546-4386-9 1. Women--Social life and customs--20th century. 2. Women--Social conditions--20th century. 3. Women consumers. 4. Consumption (Economics)--Social aspects. 5. Home economics. I. Casey, Emma. II. Martens, Lydia.

HQ1154.G378 2007
305.43'640918210904--dc22

2006025024

ISBN: 978-0-7546-4386-9

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	vii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
Introduction	1
<i>Emma Casey and Lydia Martens</i>	
PART 1 The Commercialisation of Domestic Life in Historical Perspective	
1 Class, Gender and Domestic Consumption in Britain 1920-1950	15
<i>Judy Giles</i>	
2 The Feminist and the Cook: Julia Child, Betty Friedan and Domestic Femininity	33
<i>Joanne Hollows</i>	
3 Gender and the Destalinisation of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union Under Khrushchev	49
<i>Susan E. Reid</i>	
PART 2 Private/Public Dynamics in Gender and Consumption	
4 Making Sameness: Mothering, Commerce and the Culture of Children's Birthday Parties	79
<i>Alison J. Clarke</i>	
5 Perceptions of Commercialised Social Introduction Services Amongst Women	97
<i>Jacqueline Davidson</i>	
6 Consuming Pleasure on the Wedding Day: The Lived Experience of Being a Bride	109
<i>Sharon Boden</i>	
7 Gambling and Everyday Life: Working Class Mothers and Domestic Spaces of Consumption	123
<i>Emma Casey</i>	
8 Gender, Class, Emotional Capital and Consumption in Family Life	141
<i>Elizabeth B. Silva</i>	

PART 3 Gender and the Material Culture of the Domestic Sphere

9	The Sensory Home as a Site of Consumption: Everyday Laundry Practices and the Production of Gender <i>Sarah Pink</i>	163
10	Consumption and Sexual Intimacy: Towards an Understanding of Intimate Cultures in Everyday Life <i>Dana Wilson-Kovacs</i>	181
11	Gender at Play: Décor Differences Between Boys' and Girls' Bedrooms <i>Irene Cieraad</i>	197
	Afterword: Gender, Consumer Culture and Promises of Betterment in Late Modernity <i>Lydia Martens and Emma Casey</i>	219
	<i>Index</i>	243

List of Figures

Figure 3.1	‘Only the First Quality’, <i>Ogonek</i> No. 9, 22 February 1959	58
Figure 3.2	‘Shopping in Sverdlovsk’, <i>Ogonek</i> No. 11, 8 March 1959	59
Figure 11.1	Girl in her bedroom, 1993	202
Figure 11.2	Boy in his bedroom, 1993	203

List of Contributors

Sharon Boden is a Research Fellow in the Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, working on a British Academy funded project which investigates the social construction of sleep in the British media. Her research interests lie in the sociology of consumption and the media, including the commercialisation of the lifecourse and the ethical consumer movement. She has published in the field of consumption studies in journals such as *Sociology* and *Sociological Research Online* and recently completed her first book – *Consumerism, Romance and the Wedding Experience* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Emma Casey is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Kingston University, London. She has published a range of research on gender, class and consumption in various journals and edited collections. Current research includes a project on gender and UK National Lottery play which is funded by the National Lottery Commission, and a project on women and catalogue shopping in the UK. Emma is currently preparing a book entitled *Dreaming of the Jackpot: Gender, Class and the UK National Lottery* which is due to be published by Ashgate in 2007.

Irene Cieraad is a Dutch social anthropologist who has widely published on gender issues related to the Dutch domestic interior, household technology and the history of interior architecture. She was editor of *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space* (1999) and curator of exhibitions on the history of the vernacular interior. Since 2002 she has been a Senior Researcher at the department of Interior Architecture and Design, Faculty of Architecture of Delft University of Technology.

Alison J. Clarke is Chair of Design History and Theory at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna. She has published widely on issues of gender, material culture, design and domesticity and is co-founder and co-editor of *Home Cultures: The Journal of Architecture, Design and Domestic Space*. She is working as Principal Investigator in an ethnography of design and the domestic at AHRC Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior, Royal College of Art, London

Jacqueline Davidson is currently a Research Fellow at the Social Policy Research Unit, University of York. Her substantive areas of interest include comparative social research, labour markets, social security, poverty and consumption and consumer culture.

Judy Giles is Professor of Gender and Cultural Criticism at York St John College. She is the author of *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*, and numerous articles on women and domesticity in the first half of the twentieth century. She teaches cultural studies and literature and is

the co-author of *Studying Culture*, an undergraduate guide to some of the key ideas in contemporary cultural studies.

Joanne Hollows teaches Media and Cultural Studies at Nottingham Trent University. She is the author of *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2000) and co-author of *Food and Cultural Studies* (Routledge, 2004). Co-edited books include *Feminism in Popular Culture* (Berg 2006), *Ordinary Lifestyles* (Open University Press 2005) and *Historicizing Lifestyle* (Ashgate 2006). She is currently working on gender, cooking and domesticity.

Lydia Martens is a sociologist of consumption and domestic life, and works at Keele University. She is co-author (with Alan Warde) of *Eating Out: Social Differentiation, Consumption and Pleasure* (CUP) and has published various articles on themes relating to domestic consumption in the *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *Home Cultures* and *Consumption, Markets and Culture* in recent years. Dr Martens also convenes the British Sociological Association's consumption study group and is also an active member of the European Sociological Association's consumption study group.

Sarah Pink is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University. Her academic and applied social science research has been mainly in Spain and England, focussing the visual and other senses, gender, media, domestic life and the home. Her books include *Women and Bullfighting* (1997), *Doing Visual Ethnography* (2001), *Home Truths* (Berg 2004) and *The Future of Visual Anthropology* (Routledge 2005).

Susan E. Reid is Senior Lecturer in Russian and Slavonic Studies at the University of Sheffield. She has published widely on Russian visual arts, material culture and gender in the Soviet period. With David Crowley, she edited *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-war Eastern Europe* (Berg 2000) and *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Berg 2002), and is currently editing a volume provisionally titled *Leisure and Luxury in Socialist Europe*.

Elizabeth B. Silva is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the Open University. Her current research on 'technology and personal lives' engages with gender, family practices and the material as everyday concerns. This has been developed concomitantly to an investigation of 'cultural capital and social exclusion', which has a particular focus on personal interdependencies of cultural consumption in households. Her empirical research has involved the integration of a variety of research methods and it has been strongly informed by cross-national and cross cultural comparisons.

Dana Wilson-Kovacs teaches Sociology at the University of Exeter. She has published work on women, artefacts and eroticism and was recently awarded a PhD on her ethnographic study on sexual intimacy as aesthetic practice. Her current research interests include gender, discrimination and the cultures of professionalism, and the aesthetics of everyday life.

Acknowledgements

A version of Susan Reid's chapter, 'Gender and the Destalinisation of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev' first appeared in *Slavic Review* published by the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies and is reprinted with the permission of the publisher.

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 are reproduced with kind permission of *Ogonek*.

Introduction

Emma Casey and Lydia Martens

The past two decades have seen key theoretical and empirical advances in social and cultural approaches to consumption. Consumer culture is now broadly acknowledged to be a key theme in the social sciences and the arts, and research and teaching dedicated to the study of its social and cultural impact has become more buoyant as a consequence.¹ It is probably true to say that early in this period key theoretical ideas were promulgated by Campbell (1987), Featherstone (1991) and Miller (1987), with the former applying Max Weber's ideas to an examination of the connections between romanticism and the modern hedonistic spirit of consumption, and Featherstone fusing ideas that had been in development during the 1980s around consumption and post-modernism.² Miller's work (1987, 1995) is of particular interest for several reasons. Firstly, *Acknowledging Consumption* (1995) was evidence of the fact that consumer studies had established a foothold into various scholarly disciplines ranging from marketing studies, anthropology and sociology through to history. This edited collection is likewise a text that brings together the contributions of scholars working from different disciplinary positions, though all also have an interest in feminist scholarship. Secondly, Miller offered an appraisal of both critical cultural theory and post-modern perspectives of consumption, drawing attention to the fact that it was pertinent to investigate consumers and their practices rather than to ignore these in favour of a primary focus on the 'production of consumption', as Featherstone had called it. Therefore, under the influence of anthropologists like Miller, Douglas and Isherwood (1979), Appadurai (1986), Bourdieu (1984) and de Certeau (1984), consumption studies developed to place the consumer and the symbolic significances of consumption at the heart of its concerns, perhaps, as indicated by Harvey et al (2001) to the detriment of holding onto the relationship between production and consumption. These developments resulted in consumption scholars turning their attention to the uses of consumption (Dant 2006; Warde 1990); to ordinary, mundane and routine aspects of consumption (Gronow and Warde 2001; Ilmonen 2004); and to material culture (Dant 1999; Miller 1998, 2001).

1 This is evidenced by the appearance of new journals such as the *Journal of Consumer Culture* and *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, which capture the research outputs of scholars working in this area; the growth of active consumption research networks in America, Europe and Britain; the UK Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Board joint initiative on *Cultures of Consumption*; and so on.

2 See also the special issue on consumer culture which Featherstone introduced in *Theory, Culture and Society* in 1983.

Whilst these later developments indicate that consumption scholarship has moved closer to the everyday experiences of women and to the social organisation of domestic life, overall it is true to say that gender has not played a central tenet in these developments. For instance, in introducing a recent special edition on Consumption, Gender and Identity in the journal *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, Schroeder states:

... 'gender is a pervasive filter through which individuals experience their social world, consumption activities are fundamentally gendered' (Bristor and Fischer 1993: 519). However, gender rarely plays a central role in framing research, with notable exceptions, of course; but generally gender has become a boutique item in the mainstream mall of consumer research. (2003: 1)

The reasons for the neglect of gender in consumption studies are no doubt diverse and connected to the paradigmatic histories of the scholarly disciplines that have developed an interest in consumer studies. However, we would argue that one reason for this neglect may be found in the continuing non-communication between feminist and consumption scholarships (see Martens 2001), which is symptomatic of the fact that an oppositional scholarly language exists that posits meaningful human activity in contrasting ways and construes diverse agendas as important for scholarly scrutiny. An instance of such oppositional language in operation is the 'consumption – production' binary consolidated for instance during the 1970s through the domestic labour debate, with Marxists construing women's activity as consumption (or as non-productive labour) and feminists pointing to domestic work as a form of production rather than 'mere' consumption.

Another instance relates to the phenomenon of shopping, with consumption scholars conceptualising shopping as a leisurely and pleasurable activity, and feminists theorising it as women's work that often displays the complex and harsh realities of women's everyday gendered existence (e.g. Charles and Kerr 1988; DeVault 1991; Jackson and Moores 1996; Oakley 1976; Parker 1992; Rubin 1976). Women have traditionally been regarded as 'shoppers *par excellence*'. Yet to date we do not have a well-developed and extensive literature on the contemporary shopping experience that takes account of gender.³ Whilst feminists have been at the forefront of taking women's everyday and hidden experiences out into the open, in relation to shopping there has been an unwillingness to move beyond the thesis that shopping is women's work. Seen in this light, it is hardly surprising that in *A Theory of Shopping* (1997), we find Miller doing what we might have expected feminist scholarship to have accomplished, and that is to fuse a feminist perspective (that of DeVault 1991) with an anthropological one in order to explain the disjuncture between the common cultural understanding of shopping and the ethnographic reality of shopping. In essence, this analysis cuts across another binary opposition; that of shopping as 'special' as opposed to 'mundane' social experience. Quite by contrast, there *does* exist a buoyant interest amongst feminist historians in the phenomenon of the early

3 For an exception see Falk and Campbell 1997.

department store (see e.g. de Grazia 1996; Loeb 2001; Rappaport 2000). This raises the question why an examination of past shopping experiences is apparently more acceptable and perhaps more interesting than the contemporary experience?

The argument we put forward, then, is not that there is a complete feminist silence in this area, but that feminists have tended to identify their own agendas and have shown little interest in engaging with the literatures coming out of consumption studies. The agendas that connect with consumption studies include the above mentioned analysis of women's domestic activities, where in addition to shopping, feminist researchers have examined domestic practices such as food and eating, financial management and general household activities, with the theoretical questioning concentrating on how couples manage and divide domestic labour and responsibilities between each other (e.g. Charles and Kerr 1988; Gregson and Lowe 1994; Jackson and Moores 1996; Oakley 1976; Pahl 1990). There is also an old and persistent feminist interest in the effects of domestic technology on domestic practices and gender relations, stemming from an early questioning of whether the products of modernity would release women from their domestic burdens (e.g. Cockburn and Ormrod 1993; Cowan 1976, 1983; Myrdal and Klein 1968; Silva 2000). Another agenda is women's and girls' popular culture, where we find research on women's and teen magazines, Barbie dolls, romantic fiction, fashion and the soap opera (for example, Ang 1990; Lovell 1987; McRobbie 1989, 1991; Radway 1984 and Rand 1995) with some evidence that here, too, there is increasing interest in the 'reception' of cultural texts by female 'consumers' rather than solely a cultural reading and critical interpretation of the texts themselves.

Yet, there is evidence that despite these interests, there has been little engagement with the kinds of perspectives coming out of consumption studies.⁴ Early theoretical explorations make it clear, for instance, that consumption plays a key role in the struggle for status and power in contemporary western society. Thorstein Veblen pointed out as early as 1899 that individuals consume conspicuously in order to gain esteem from others by providing evidence of wealth and power (1953: 42). More recently, Bourdieu (1984) has shown how individuals seek to gain social status and power via the careful presentation and display of consumer goods. It is interesting that there have been very few feminist attempts to use this literature in order to examine the particular importance of consumption for women or to deduce how gender may inform such accounts. Skeggs (1997), who shows how women seek respectability through the appropriate display of homes and bodies, forms the exception rather than the rule. Indeed, whilst consumption is a central tenet in the work of a number of feminist scholars – and we would argue this is most clearly the case in the work of Rachel Bowlby, Victoria de Grazia, Angela McRobbie, Mica Nava, Susan Porter Benson and Jennifer Scanlon – few have explicitly addressed it as a substantive topic for research in its own right. This reticence is clearly apparent in major feminist

4 Of course, one explanation for this is that some of these feminist agendas were already well-established before scholars developed an interest in the gendered subjects of consumption.

journals, with very little coverage of consumption appearing in articles and book reviews in *Signs* and *Gender and Society* in the past 20 years. *Feminist Review* may be regarded as an exception here, perhaps because its special issue on consumption in 1997 came out at a time when Mica Nava was involved on the journal's editorial board. Given this feminist reticence, it is perhaps no coincidence that consumption has appeared on the scholarly agenda at a time when men 'have become' shoppers (Bowlby 2000), a phenomenon which has sparked interest in its own right through studies on men's fashion, the rise of the male magazine and imagery of the male body in the literature of consumer culture (Breazeale 1994; Edwards 1997; Nixon 1996).

Celia Lury pointed out some time ago that a more comprehensive understanding of consumer culture would surface from more gender-specific theories of consumption (1996: 121). This edited collection takes up that challenge in an explicit manner by bringing together chapters that fuse the literature of consumption with a feminist inspired interest in consumption and gender. The chapters have been selected on the basis that they address some crucial conjunctures which we regard as salient to the development of gender informed analyses of consumption. In this collection you can thus find chapters which focus in one way or another on domestic consumption, on practices with material culture in domestic life and on the mediation between the public sphere of the market and the private and domestic concerns of consumers as markets expand into new areas. The book's chapters further offer contributions of a historical nature and account of research on contemporary consumption experiences and practices. With few exceptions, the chapters in this collection concentrate on women's consumption experiences and practices. The reader might question whether this is appropriate given our aim is to elucidate ways of communication that cut across scholarly camps in order to further *gender* informed outcomes. In answer to such a challenge we would point out that we did not purposely set out to select studies that take 'woman' as their consumer subject. However, by bringing together chapters that take account of research concentrating on domestic consumption, it was inevitable that female consumers would stand central and this collection offers a space for those chapters without further apologies.

Of course, one might further wonder what it actually means to develop gender informed analyses of consumption and consumer culture. The answer to this is more complex and gives a more measured rationale for the inclusion of studies in which the 'woman as consumer subject' takes centre stage. Drawing on *woman's standpoint* theory in feminist studies (Smith 1987), life in a gendered world generates a reality that is skewed because of the male-focused perspectives it engenders and drawing on women's lived experiences offers a methodology to remedy this. In fact, in relation to domestic consumption practices, we find heightened reasons for drawing on women's lived experiences precisely because this has also been neglected as a topic of feminist interest. As Hollows outlines in this collection and echoing some of the concerns about linguistic antagonisms expressed above, feminists have not been keen to conceive of consumption as a domestic activity. In a sense, then, we have identified a feminist prejudice that works in a similar way to the more

general scholarly prejudices identified by Smith. It also has the same effect: in characterising aspects of social life as trivial, a rationale is created for the silencing of such experience; thereby creating gaps in knowledge. If aspects of domestic consumption have been silenced, any study that aids in filling the gaps should be welcomed. Such gap filling is not only useful for breaking through silences, but by addressing previously uncharted terrain or by examining specific terrains in new ways, the possibility is created to move theoretical debate on. A number of this volume's contributions do exactly that. For instance, in her analysis of the home as a sensory unit, Pink shows how sensual experiences, like smell, are an integral part of domestic aesthetics created through the ways in which women engage with the home's material culture. Pink thus broadens our views of how aesthetics are a salient aspect of everyday sociality, not only relating to the visual and the body, as evidenced for instance in Boden's chapter on the wedding experience, but also of the domestic's interior and working through different sensory media.

A second way of generating gender-informed theories of consumption is to bring perspectives from feminist or gender studies to bear upon empirical analyses of consumption. These may include the above and focus on topics close to women's everyday lived experiences or on men's experiences. In so doing, there may also be a merging with or engagement with theoretical perspectives that come out of consumption studies. In this collection, chapters that come close to developing gender-informed ways of thinking through the connections between gender and consumption include Silva, who makes a concerted effort to merge elements of Bourdieu's thinking on consumption as a practice of distinction connected with access to different kinds of capital and a feminist critique of Bourdieu that centres on the notion of emotional capital. The chapter by Boden does something similar, by merging theoretical ideas from consumer studies and feminist scholarship. Other chapters, like that of Davidson, draw more on perspectives derived from consumption theory, but focus on the female consumer because the cultural jarring caused by further shifts in the commodity frontier (Hochschild 2002) affects female users of commercialised introduction services in specific ways. Lastly, gender informed ways of thinking through the cultural consequences of consumption may be achieved by examining gender differences in the patterns of consumer behaviour, as evidenced for instance in Campbell's (1997; 2000) work on shopping. The analysis then needs to consider what can account for such differences or how to interpret the meaning of the differences found. In this volume, the chapter that comes closest to this way of connecting gender and domestic material culture is that of Cieraad, who engages in an active comparison of the ways in which boys and girls' bedrooms have been visualised in cultural texts on home decoration in the late modern period. It is clear, therefore, that the chapters in this volume contribute to its aim of developing gender informed understandings of consumer culture in diverse ways, and that even if 'woman' frequently stands central in the analysis, in many of the chapters this is an identity mediated by others in social settings like the family (e.g. Reid, Wilson-Kovacs, Pink and Silva), neighbourly networks and motherhood (Clarke and Casey) and friendship networks (Davidson). Before we introduce the reader in more detail

to the volume's organisation and its chapters, we will discuss our understanding of the notion of 'domestic consumption'.

This collection delves into a range of empirical studies focussing on women's domestic consumption. The chapters demonstrate the broad range of experiences that domestic consumption offers women, and reveal some of the complex meanings and motivations underpinning women's consumption practices. Drawing from anthropological, sociological and historical perspectives, they explore and reconsider the nature of public and private spaces, and the subsequent nature of domestic space, often by challenging traditional notions of what constitutes 'the domestic'. They further examine issues of pleasure and identity surrounding domestic spaces, and consider the agency and subjective experiences of domestic consumption. Given our claim to the centrality of this notion in the collection, what domestic consumption stands for is not immediately self evident. What do we mean by it and why is it salient for gender informed understandings of consumption? As shown by Jackson and Moores's (1996) *The Politics of Domestic Consumption*, a focus on domestic consumption informs our understanding of the politics of the private sphere, and it therefore has been an important facet in feminist work for some time.⁵ Most consumption is essentially about domestic consumption, as goods and some services are literally taken home after purchase for use, transformation and incorporation into domestic lives. One could speculate, too, whether consumers on average spend more of their time 'enjoying' the goods brought home from the marketplace, than they do spending time in the sphere of circulation. Clearly, the kinds of skills, activities and cultural meanings we find in these two spheres of consumption are quite distinct, and we certainly do not argue that spheres of circulation should be ignored, for here too, important lessons may be learned that further gender informed understandings of consumption. But a focus on domestic consumption draws attention to the ways in which the products of the market are incorporated into domestic practices and the cultural struggles and complexities that are apparent as the commodity frontier moves its borders (Hochschild 2002; Slater 1997; Warde 1997). The market thus maintains its salience, not least because it always and continuously merges with and penetrates the domestic sphere as goods and services are incorporated into private lives.

Another advantage of focussing on domestic consumption is that it puts up front that consumption is frequently a social activity conducive to and illustrative of the nature of social relations, including gender relations, rather than an activity engaged in by an individual solely for their own 'selves'. The dynamism between gender performativity as something that reflects the self and the position of the self in the social is also important. The collection thus offers a new analysis of what constitutes 'the domestic'. The chapters open up the possibility for further debates about the role and nature of the 'private' in domestic life. They examine the ways in which through their complex and careful patterns and routines of domestic consumption,

5 Incidentally, Jackson and Moores were the first to coin the term 'domestic consumption'.

the women guard against any real or imagined public critique of themselves as wasteful or irresponsible selves. As other recent research has also shown, women's everyday lives are often characterised by attempts to combine a range of conflicting pressures whilst providing high standards of care, and moreover of setting up their lives as 'normal' and as with the north London mothers in Alison Clarke's chapter, achieving 'sameness'. Consumer goods thus become the interface between public response, surveillance and opinion, and the achievement of domestic harmony.

The book is divided into three sections, each intended to explore and develop certain conceptual themes of domestic consumption. Part 1 considers the commercialisation of domestic life in historical perspective. Judy Giles' chapter 'Class, Gender and Domestic Consumption in Britain 1920-1950', offers an analysis of women and modernity which takes consumption and domesticity into account. She points to the shift to a consumer-oriented economy during this period as a key factor influencing changes to women's identities. In particular, Giles argues that the expansion of suburbia, the decline of domestic service and the concept of the ideal home emerged simultaneously to the development of the 'consumer housewife'. Joanne Hollows's chapter 'The Feminist and the Cook: Julia Child, Betty Friedan and Domestic Femininity' reconsiders the role of feminism in interpreting the 'domestic'. In particular, Hollows examines the traditionally uncomfortable relationship that feminist theory and the women's movement has had with women's domestic roles and she develops this through an analysis of texts that comment on cooking. In 'Gender and the Destalinisation of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union Under Khrushchev', Susan Reid reconsiders the ways in which literature on consumption has a tendency to focus on the West, and has traditionally avoided providing any account of the place of consumerism in a Soviet context. Reid suggests that in the Soviet Union of the 1950s and 1960s, individuals were encouraged to consume but only in certain ways. Interestingly, Reid shows that one such example of 'appropriate consumption' which was seen to be compatible with the communist, eastern bloc tendency to prioritise production over consumption was consumption for the home, and that this type of consumption was primarily aimed at women.

Part 2 of the book contains contributions which concern the private and public dynamics of gender and consumption. Alison Clarke's chapter 'Making Sameness: Motherhood, Commerce and the Culture of Children's Birthday Parties' considers children's birthday parties as a prominent example of contemporary domestic consumption. Clarke offers a gendered account of the emotional and financial expenditure invested by mothers in organising children's birthday parties and in participating in the party 'circuit'. Drawing from her own ethnographic research, Clarke juxtaposes the private realm of child/parent relations, with the public spectacle of the birthday party and relationships between mothers. Jacqueline Davidson in 'Perceptions of Commercialised Social Introduction Services Amongst Women' shows how usual understandings of heterosexual relationships rest on traditional ideological assumptions of romance. In particular, she demonstrates that forming relationships is considered to be a 'private' and 'natural' affair. With this in mind, Davidson debates our cultural understandings of introduction services by

arguing that by their very public nature, they stand opposed to our understandings of the romantic ideal. Sharon Boden's chapter 'Consuming Pleasure on the Wedding Day: The Lived Experience of Being a Bride' considers the balance between private notions of romantic intimacy and the public and commodified space of the wedding itself. By exploring notions of daydream, meaning, emotion and consumption as they are related to the wedding experience, Boden's work positions weddings as of significant cultural and social significance. In 'Gambling and Everyday Life: Working Class Mothers and Domestic Spaces of Consumption', Emma Casey offers empirical research into women and lottery play as one key, previously under-researched aspect of women's consumption. Pointing out that lottery consumption is, for women, frequently routine and mundane, she demonstrates how women who purchase lottery tickets challenge public discourses of lottery consumption as meaningless and wasteful spending, and re-configure it as a private space for safe and harmless family entertainment. Finally, Elizabeth Silva's chapter, 'Gender, Class, Emotional Capital and Consumption in Family Life' offers ethnographic insights into the development of the self and identity through consumption practices in the home. Focusing on gender and class, Silva shows how through a combination of economic, social, cultural and emotional capital, identity and family consumption are inextricably bound.

In Part 3 of the book, we go on to deal with gender and the material culture of the domestic sphere. In 'The Sensory Home as a Site of Consumption: Everyday Laundry Practices and the Production of Gender', Sarah Pink argues that gendered accounts of consumption could be strengthened by offering an understanding and exploration of the sensory experiences of consumption. Pink offers significant theoretical advancements for the study of home consumption by pointing to the operation of gender and the importance of the sensory in everyday laundry practices. Dana Wilson-Kovacs in 'Consumption and Sexual Intimacy: Towards an Understanding of Intimate Cultures in Everyday Life' identifies the consumption of sexually intimate goods as an important example of everyday material consumption. Wilson-Kovacs examines the operation and production of intimacy via the act of consumption. Irene Cieraad in 'Gender at Play: Décor Differences Between Boys' and Girls' Bedrooms', draws on the interconnected themes of history and commercialisation by examining the operation of gender in the design and consumption of children's bedrooms. Cieraad argues that gender differences in children's bedrooms have actually intensified rather than eased which is interesting given simultaneous policy developments promoting equal opportunities. In addition, the author considers how décor in bedrooms may impact upon gender formation from childhood through to adulthood.

The chapters presented in this collection offer a unique insight into the everyday operation of consumption as it is related to gender. The collection in no way intends to offer a definitive account of gender and consumption, since to do so would be to deny the richness and diversity of women's lives and to overlook the complex motivations and subjectivities which influence consumption. Instead, we offer a range of chapters which are intended to convey some of the many different ways in which women have used consumption as a means of dealing with the contradictions

of capitalism throughout the twentieth century. We hope that the collection will offer readers an insight into the everyday, gendered practice of consumption.

References

- Ang, I. (1991). *Desperately Seeking the Audience*. London, Routledge.
- Appadurai, A., ed. (1986). *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bowlby, R. (2000). *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Breazeale, K. (1994). 'In Spite of Women: Esquire (+i) Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer.' *Signs* **20**(1): 1-22.
- Bristol, J. and E. Fischer (1993). 'Feminist Thought: Implications for Consumer Research.' *Journal of Consumer Research* **19**: 518-536.
- Campbell, C. (1987). *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Campbell, C. (1997). 'Shopping, Pleasure and the Sex War.' In P. Falk and C. Campbell (eds) *The Shopping Experience*. London, Sage: 166-176.
- Campbell, C. (2000). 'Shopaholics, Spendaholics and the Question of Gender.' In A. L. Benson (ed.) *I Shop Therefore I Am: Compulsive Buying and the Search for Self*. Northvale, NJ, Jason Aronson Press: 31-47.
- Charles, N. and M. Kerr (1988). *Women, Food and Families*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- Cockburn, C. and S. Ormrod (1993). *Gender and Technology in the Making*. London, Sage.
- Cowan, R. S. (1976). 'The "Industrial Revolution" in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the Twentieth Century.' *Technology and Culture* **17**(1): 1-23.
- Cowan, R. S. (1983). *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. New York, Basic Books.
- Dant, T. (1999). *Material Culture in the Social World: Values, Activities, Lifestyles*. Buckingham, Open University Press.
- Dant, T. (2006). *Materiality and Society*. Buckingham, Open University Press.
- de Certeau, M., ed. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. London, University of Minnesota Press.
- de Grazia, V. and E. Furlough, eds (1996). *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- DeVault, M. (1991). *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. Chicago, CUP.
- Douglas, M. and B. Isherwood (1979). *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.

- Edwards, T. (1997). *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and the Consumer Society*. London, Cassell.
- Falk, P. and C. Campbell, eds (1997). *The Shopping Experience*. London, Sage.
- Featherstone, M. (1991). *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London, Sage.
- Gregon, N. and M. Lowe (1994). *Servicing the Middle Classes*. London, Routledge.
- Gronow, J. and A. Warde (2001). *Ordinary Consumption*. Reading, Harwood.
- Harvey, M., A. McMeekin, S. Randles, D. Southerton, B. Tether and A. Warde (2001). *Between Demand and Consumption. A Framework for Research*. CRIC Discussion Paper 40. Manchester, University of Manchester.
- Hochschild, A. (2002). *The Commodity Frontier: Essay in Honour of Neil Smelser*. Berkeley, Center for Working Families, University of California.
- Ilmonen, K. (2004). 'The Use of and Commitment to Goods.' *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4(1): 27-50.
- Jackson, S. and S. Moores, eds (1996). *The Politics of Domestic Consumption: Critical Readings*. London, Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Loeb, L. (2001). 'Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End (review).' *American Historical Review* 106(1): 258-259.
- Lovell, T. (1987). *Consuming Fiction*. London, Verso.
- Lury, C. (1996). *Consumer Culture*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Martens, L. (2001). *Don't Talk To Me About Consumption! A Comment on the Absence of Consumption in Feminist Research*. Annual BSA Conference, Manchester.
- McRobbie, A., ed. (1989). *Zoot Suits and Second-Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music*. London, Macmillan.
- McRobbie, A. (1991). *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'*. Basingstoke, MacMillan.
- Miller, D. (1987). *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Miller, D., ed. (1995). *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*. London, Routledge.
- Miller, D. (1998). *A Theory of Shopping*. Oxford, Polity Press.
- Miller, D. (1998). 'Why some things matter.' In D. Miller (ed.) *Material Culture: Why Some Things Matter*. London, UCL Press.
- Miller, D., ed. (2001). *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors*. Oxford and New York, Berg.
- Myrdal, A. and V. Klein (1966). *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Nixon, S. (1996). *Hard Looks: Masculinities, the Visual and Practices of Consumption*. London, UCL Press.
- Oakley, A. (1976). *Housewife*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Pahl, J. (1990). 'Household Spending, Personal Spending and the Control of Money in Marriage.' *Sociology* 24(1): 119-138.

- Parker, G. (1992) 'Making Ends Meet: Women, Credit and Debt.' In C. Glendinning and J. Millar (eds) *Women and Poverty in Britain: The 1990s*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Radway, J. (1984). *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*. London, Verso.
- Rand, E. (1995). *Barbie's Queer Accessories*. Durham, NC and London, Duke University Press.
- Rappaport, E.D. (2000). *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End*. Princeton, NJ and Chichester, Princeton University Press.
- Rubin, L.B. (1976). *Worlds of Pain/Life in the Working Class Family*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Scanlon, J. (1995). *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies' Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Schroeder, J.E. (2003). 'Guest Editor's Introduction: Consumption, Gender and Identity.' *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 6(1): 1-4.
- Silva, E.B. (2000). 'The Politics of Consumption @ Home: Practices and Dispositions in the Uses of Technologies.' *Pavis Papers in Social and Cultural Research*. Milton Keynes, Open University Press: 1-28.
- Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London, SAGE.
- Slater, D. (1997). *Consumer Culture and Modernity*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Smith, D. (1987). *The Everyday Life as Problematic*. Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
- Veblen, T. (1953). *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. London, George Allen and Unwin.
- Warde, A. (1990). 'Introduction to the Sociology of Consumption.' *Sociology* 24(1): 1-4.
- Warde, A. (1997). *Consumption, Food and Taste: Culinary Antinomies and Commodity Culture*. London, Sage.

This page intentionally left blank

PART 1

The Commercialisation of Domestic Life in Historical Perspective

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 1

Class, Gender and Domestic Consumption in Britain 1920-1950

Judy Giles

Introduction

So long as the main activities of the bread-winner and the main expenditure of his money was outside the home, his wife was primarily his housekeeper. If the home has now become his centre of activity, and if most of his earnings are spent on his home or in his home, his wife becomes the chooser and the spender, and gains a new status and control – her taste forms his life. (Abrams 1959: 915)

Mark Abrams was not alone in identifying what many, by the 1950s, perceived as an epochal shift towards an increasingly privatised everyday life, marked out by the spatial landscape of the individualised ‘home’, and the social relations and sexual politics of the nuclear family (de Grazia, V (with E. Furlough) (ed.) 1996). This shift to the privatized home was closely linked to the establishment of the modern consumer household, defined as ‘one dependent on market exchange for most of its supplies and services’ (de Grazia 1996: 152). This re-formulated version of domesticity was the product of multiple and overlapping phenomena that included the emergence of a social welfare agenda focused on a particular form of family; suburbanisation; the decline in residential domestic service; debates about what constituted masculinity and femininity; the move to a more child-oriented approach to childrearing; increased affluence for some; and a growing culture of consumption that included the cinema, magazines, books, housing, domestic commodities, furnishings, clothing and beauty items (Johnson and Lloyd 2004; Giles 2004; de Grazia 1996). This chapter is about the last of these and examines some of the ways in which the practices and understandings of domesticity were shaped by the dynamics of consumption in the first half of the twentieth century. The consumer transformations that took place required specific markets and these markets were constructed along gender lines. At the same time, the search for new markets and distinct consumer groups produced and offered particular forms of gender identity. This chapter examines the social lives and identities of women in the first half of the twentieth century through the lens of consumption with particular reference to retailing and women’s magazines.

Cultural theorists and social scientists, generally speaking, no longer see consumers as passive victims of capitalism (although the discourse of environmental politics continues to argue about the corrupting effects of excessive consumption by industrialised societies). Instead consumption has been treated as an activity in its own right with its own practices and its own symbolic and representational systems (Bourdieu 1984). Studies of the everyday use of consumer artefacts have explored 'the pleasures of consumption' and argue that in the appropriation of such products by marginalised groups, it is possible to discern, if not a radical or revolutionary politics, at least some resistance to traditional structures (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979). John Fiske's influential work centres on the creativity of consumption, arguing that this creativity has empowering and subversive possibilities (Fiske 1989a, 1989b). Whilst Fiske has been criticised for a naïve optimism regarding the political potential of consumer behaviours, his work, along with that of feminist scholars and subcultural theorists draws attention to the importance of everyday practices and popular culture as expressions of, often complex, social relationships (Wilson 1985; McRobbie 1989; McGuigan 1992; Nava 1992). In particular these studies have fostered approaches that address not only the gendered nature of consumption but also the relations between class and consumption.

The purpose of rehearsing these debates briefly is to identify three issues that arise from them. First, Frank Mort identifies a difficulty with the generalising narratives common to almost all of the perspectives and argues for an approach to consumption that is 'precise and grounded' (Mort 1996: 7). This is particularly important when dealing with women and historical change. Attempts to track the growth of modern consumerism or to define the meaning of consumer society can lead to a 'tendency to over-abstraction' (ibid.). What is required is an approach that recognises the differentiated nature of consumption practices: differentiated in terms of variables such as gender, class, locality, and age but also differentiated in terms of distinct groups targeted by advertisers and manufacturers. Moreover, as Mort points out, 'there is strong evidence to suggest that consumers themselves do not view their activities in the marketplace as wholly isolated' (ibid.: 8). I explore one particular aspect of consumer culture in the period – the creation of a distinct market aimed at married women with homes to run – and ask how this related to the everyday lives of such women.

Secondly the 'mass culture' perspective that saw consumption as a frivolous, passive, corrupting activity had gender implications. Passivity and frivolity are congruent with the qualities culturally attributed to femininity. As Rita Felski points out the conventional linking of femininity and consumption has led to certain narratives of modernity in which 'the idea of the modern becomes aligned with a pessimistic vision of an unpredictable yet curiously passive femininity seduced by the glittering phantasmagoria of an emerging consumer culture' (Felski 1995: 62). Recent work by the feminist scholars, cited above, is concerned to dismantle the gendered oppositions produced by a dichotomised understanding of production and consumption. As Erica Carter observes, women 'participate in the regulation and organization of market processes. The machine itself, if vast and apparently all-

embracing, is never intrinsically monstrous; it is both manipulative and manipulated... Passive manipulation or active appropriation, escapist delusion or Utopian fantasy, consumerism can be all or none of these' (Carter 1984/1993: 107). More recently, Victoria de Grazia argues that we should not only move on from this either/or formulation of the debates around the moral implications of consumer culture but our concerns, while remaining aware of these debates, should be differently focused (de Grazia 1996). Instead, de Grazia suggests, we need to concern ourselves with the historical construction of gender roles and the part that consumption, broadly defined, has played in this (de Grazia 1996: 7-8). In what follows, therefore, I am concerned to illuminate the interrelationships between consumption and women's everyday lives in the formation of identities, rather than to assess the extent to which women were or were not empowered or manipulated.

Finally, one of the consequences of thinking about consumption and production as distinct and separate systems has been to privilege the world of work over the home, seeing production as taking place in the workplace and consumption as an activity that takes place in or is linked to the home. The domestic arena has been largely ignored in narratives of modernity or been understood as either a refuge from the demands of modern life or a stifling, outdated, mundane place from which to escape into a freer, modern world. The paradigmatic spaces of modernity have been those of the public sphere – the workplace and the city (Giles 2004).¹ My starting point is that responses to 'the modern' are to be found not only in the public sphere such as the city but also in the private realm of the home. Such spaces are, of course, both material and imaginary, both actual and metaphoric, and it is, at least in part, through the activities of consumption that the real and the symbolic meet to give meaning to the experience of everyday life. In the first half of the twentieth century advertisers and manufacturers in a rapidly shifting industrial economy saw the home as an emergent market for new commodities. Married women were targeted as potential consumers and their job as housewives re-drawn. This chapter recognises, also, that consumption practices can embody class relations as surely as these are formed by the forces of production. As de Grazia observes, it is a fallacy to interpret consumer desires as solely individual choices made for the purposes of self-realisation or 'therapeutic uplift' (de Grazia 1996: 8). Choices may be shaped by the activities of the state in regulating spending or allocating resources, or by the norms and expectations of specific communities, and of course there will be those whose poverty prevents access to many forms of symbolic or cultural capital.

The material for this chapter draws on three distinct sources. First, I have used existing literature on the growth of suburbia, the decline of domestic service, the department store and shopping as well as a detailed research project on the Ideal Home Exhibition. This chapter is not intended to provide a detailed history of any one of these phenomena. Such stories can be found in the extensive literature to which I refer. Instead I use this literature to provide a context in which to explore the

1 See Giles 2004 for a full bibliography of sources and theorists on women, modernity and consumption.

impact these factors had on the everyday lives of women. Secondly, I have looked at women's magazines of the period and, while space prevents a full examination of all publications available at the time, I have drawn on a small, representative sample of what was being published.² I have used both content and textual analysis in order to explore the ways in which these magazines, and the advertising on which they depended financially, produced specific versions of the housewife. Finally, I have drawn on oral testimony as such testimony offers the only working to lower middle-class 'voices' available.³ Whilst the values and attitudes expressed in such accounts are often highly subjective, and not amenable to systematic checking, the fact that the same or similar views have been expressed in numerous accounts, assembled at different times by this and different interviewers, suggests that credence can be given to such views.⁴ Rather than creating a seamless narrative from these sources I proceed by juxtaposition and dialogue. In the conclusion I suggest some possibilities that arise from this method.

Gender and 'ideal homes'

The commodification of the home, not only in terms of furnishings and appliances but also in terms of style and taste, and its relation to gender positions in the family was well established by the beginning of the twentieth century. As Leora Auslander points out, 'by [1890-1914], a model of domesticity, with the woman/wife as consumer, was already becoming quite apparent in the developing genres of women's magazines, etiquette books, marriage manuals and furnishings' (1996: 84). The department stores that sprang up in all the major cities in North America and Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century were constructed as places that were welcoming and comfortable for, mainly, middle-class women. These 'palaces of consumption' re-defined the act of shopping as a worthwhile activity, and one that would be undertaken by women as part of the highly-skilled task of 'homemaking'. However, at the same time women were invited to see themselves as irrational consumers, easily prone to profligacy and extravagance when confronted with the spectacular displays of commodities for sale (Felski 1995). Department

2 All the magazines examined are accessible at the British Periodical Library at Colindale, London. I sampled a range of magazines across the period 1919-1939. These included *Woman's Weekly*, *Home Chat*, *Mother*, *Woman* and *Good Housekeeping*. I sampled whole runs at a time. For example I looked at *Home Chat* for three months in 1925 and three months in 1935 and I did the same for *Woman's Weekly* for 1922 and 1932. I also looked at *The Lady*, a magazine targeted at upper-middle class women. In addition I have a collection of magazines from the 1940s that include *Woman*, *Woman and Home* and *Good Needlework Magazine* and *Picture Post* (which is a general news magazine).

3 Interviews were conducted in 1987 to 1988 and again in 1999 (Giles 1989 and 2002). Peter Scott's Life History Database also provided valuable oral testimony (Scott 2004).

4 For debates about the uses and limitations of oral history see Perks and Thomson 1998.

stores offered, first, middle-class women, and later working and lower middle-class women opportunities to browse sumptuous displays of goods for the home and for self-fashioning. They also offered safe spaces on the city streets from which middle-class women had previously been excluded and where 'respectable' working-class women were fearful of being seen as prostitutes.

Mica Nava has insisted that department stores need to be 'recognised as one of the main contexts in which women developed a new consciousness of the possibilities and entitlements that modern life was able to offer' (Nava 1997: 64). While the experience they offered was undoubtedly orchestrated by men, as owners, managers and (in the early stages) shopwalkers, and while control over domestic expenditure was still in the hands of husbands, nevertheless the emergence of department and chain stores, first in large cities, but by the 1930s on the high streets of every town, enabled women of all classes to practise skills of financial management and aesthetic expertise as they compared prices, assessed quality, and made judgements about style. Store owners undoubtedly saw the potential for constructing a lucrative market by persuading women to spend lavishly on both their homes and their appearance. However, the impact on women of being able to 'just look' cannot be overestimated (Bowlby 1985). Conventionally the object of male (and sometimes middle-class) scrutiny and surveillance, 'just looking' enabled women to position themselves as both subject and object as they gazed upon displays of clothing and cosmetics that might enhance their femininity at the same time as weighing the cost of these against the cost of a labour-saving cleaner that could release time for such self-fashioning. These complex calculations were not simply financial: they involved active decisions about self-worth and identity. Equally, as Mica Nava has pointed out it was through their use of department stores that women acquired an ability to read the complex signifiers of social hierarchy and taste: a literacy that was later learned at the cinema (Nava 1997: 67; Stacey 1994). Shopping was not simply about realising dreams or an enjoyable leisure activity for the affluent. It involved work: the work of decoding and encoding new and complex signifiers that enabled women to acquire the cultural capital required to function as effective housewives. This information was in turn used to construct their own forms of knowing about complex social gradations. Signifiers such as houses and furnishings suggest hierarchical gradations within the class system but so do hairstyles and clothing. Such nuances were both read and produced by women in their roles as housewives and formed the basis of their everyday experience of complex social relations.

The expansion of retailing also produced new employment opportunities. Increasingly from the 1920s onwards, shop assistants were working-class women who chose retail work in preference to domestic service and who became 'experts' in helping women to make informed purchases. Deferential and astute, female shop assistants could, it was believed, 'understand so much more readily what other women want. They can fathom the agony of despair as to the arrangement of colours, the alternative trimmings, the duration of a fashion and the depth of a woman's purse' (quoted in Aldburgham 1979: 179). These new employment opportunities brought lower-middle and working-class women into more *public* contact with their

middle-class sisters. For most bourgeois women in the mid to late nineteenth century, contact with the 'lower' classes took place in the private home, carefully mediated by the rituals and forms of domestic service, or through the acceptable practice of philanthropy. Increasingly, as retailing was modernised, this contact also took place in a public, and less mediated, space. Shopping offered pleasures but it could also be a source of anxiety for middle-class women. It was arduous work that required careful budgeting and the newly-acquired fashion-sense and smartness of shop assistants could make it difficult to distinguish between the classes. Furthermore, shop assistants, who perhaps longed for the commodities they were employed to sell, might be rude or contemptuous, overtly deferential but covertly hostile. The relationship between shop assistant and consumer was less easily controlled than that between mistress and servant, and a sales assistant could strike terror in the heart of a middle-class woman, as she determinedly 'ferreted out' the private dreams of her customer and attempted to 'seduce' her into buying (quoted in Lury 1997: 131). Thus the class relations between women were, however slightly, beginning to be re-drawn. Retailing enabled working-class women to inhabit the same public spaces as their middle-class sisters and to do so as 'experts' in the complexities, both literal and symbolic, of consumption. By the 1950s this shift had been exacerbated by the war. June MacDonald, a middle-class housewife, recalls her awareness that, 'everybody during the war was more or less equal ... shop assistants were suddenly very powerful people because things were in short supply' (quoted in Hinton 1994: 139).

The proliferation of, and encouragement to buy, commodities that would make an 'ideal home' have to be seen in the context of other changes taking place with regard to domesticity. Prime amongst these was the increasing accessibility of suburban housing to working-class people. For many families after the First World War there was the very real possibility of moving to a suburban home in a semi-rural environment with piped water, indoor toilet, a labour-saving kitchen, and a bathroom.⁵ These changes in housing occurred alongside the long-term decline in residential domestic service. By 1950, as Alison Ravetz has pointed out, 'the middle-class woman had finally and irrevocably lost her servants and the working-class wife had gained, or was in the process of gaining, a whole house to look after' (Ravetz 1989: 189). Manufacturers, advertisers and media entrepreneurs were quick to spot the commercial possibilities of these shifts. Lord Northcliffe, proprietor of *The Daily Mail*, saw his female readership as one of the newspaper's main sources of advertising revenue. Concerned about competition from the rival *Daily Express*, Northcliffe instigated the idea of the annual Ideal Home Exhibition

5 Burnett estimates that between 1919 and 1939 no fewer than 3,998,000 new houses were built, 2,886,000 by private builders for sale, and 1,112,000 by local authorities for rent (Burnett 1986: 250-252). Scott estimates that 17 percent of non-agricultural households were buying their own homes in the interwar period and, while 80 percent of households continued to rent homes, a sizeable number of these were the new council houses provided by local authorities in suburban areas (Scott 2004b: 6-7).

in which the latest home furnishings, labour-saving devices, beauty products and house designs would be displayed. In particular the *Daily Mail* was concerned to woo the emerging lower middle-classes who offered a potentially lucrative market for advertisers, manufacturers and retailers.⁶ It was believed that the theme of the 'ideal home' would appeal to the aspirations of this section of society, anxious to construct a cultural identity for themselves that was distinct from both the middle and the working-classes (Ryan 1995: 69). The Daily Mail Home Exhibition, along with newspapers like *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Express* and, as we shall see in the next section, women's magazines, contributed to the formation of a commercial culture of home-making in which housework as a skilled activity aided by labour-saving technologies in the suburban home replaced the previous reliance on servants and back-breaking drudgery. Speaking of the Daily Mail Home Exhibition one commentator observed that 'nothing has done more to bring the perfect home nearer than woman's determination to be freed from the thralldom of domestic duties carried out in archaic and inefficient ways' (quoted in Ryan 1995: 35). Certainly one of the aims of this commercial culture was to educate the apparently bewildered housewife faced with an emerging consumer culture and to guide her through the plethora of commodities on offer.

Women's magazines and 'the housewife'

This commercial culture of homemaking in which the housewife came increasingly to use mass-produced commodities occurred simultaneously with what has been described as the emotionalisation, aestheticisation and professionalisation of housework (Game and Pringle 1984; Partington 1991). If department stores and the Daily Mail Home Exhibition contributed to the aestheticisation of the home through ideas about style and taste, women's magazines constructed homemaking as a labour of love and a professionally skilled occupation. Prior to the First World War women's magazines had fallen into two categories: those produced for society women with large servant-run establishments and those targeted at working-class women and consisting mostly of romantic fiction. In the early twentieth century the market for magazines continued to diversify along class lines: magazines like *Vogue*, aimed at an upper-class readership offered items on high society and fashion; those targeted at a middle and lower-middle-class readership such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Woman's Own* and *Woman* provided advice and information on all aspects of homemaking, while those for working-class women continued the emphasis on romantic fiction (White 1970; Winship 1987). However, some magazines like *Woman and Home* and *Good Needlework Magazine*,⁷ *Home Chat* and *Woman's Weekly*, targeted at lower

6 The average annual earnings of this class rose from £142 in 1911-1913 to £368 in 1935, and £1040 in 1960 (Benson 1994: 25-26).

7 This is not to be confused with the magazine *Woman and Home* which catered for a middle-class readership. *Woman and Home* and *Good Needlework Magazine* will be referred to hereafter as *Woman and Home*.

middle and upper working-class women, blurred these distinctions.⁸ Although they carried recipes, sewing and knitting patterns, advice on furnishings and appearance, the bulk of the magazine was taken up with romantic fiction. *Home Chat* and *Woman's Weekly* were two of the most popular magazines and in 1938 *Woman's Weekly* came second only in popularity to the new colour-gravure *Woman* with a circulation figure of 498,000 (White 1970: 311-313).

Despite the evidence gained from oral testimony that these magazines were read by working class women, the common visual representation of the housewife is of a young, neatly-dressed woman with softly permed hair, a frilly apron and, of course, a smile (no sign of a hairnet or large pinafore-type apron anywhere). This visual image is consistent across magazines as diverse in content as *Good Housekeeping* and *Woman's Weekly*. For example, *Woman and Home* for May 1929 carries an advertisement for Amazon Overalls in which the text accompanying the image of the housewife states 'modern woman laughs at the idea of wearing ugly aprons of the kind which her mother and grandmother wore' (*Woman and Home* 1929). The intended message is clear. The modern housewife is classless: she is neither the mistress of servants as she now wears the apron herself, nor is she the working-class 'drudge', signified by the ugly pinafores of the past. Women are addressed as basically the same, a skilled professional beset by the same problems of housewifery and sharing a common set of 'modern' values focused around the home and family.

However, this basic address was differentiated according to the social group for which the magazine catered. *Good Housekeeping* was the most expensive of the service and information magazines but it was not only price that differentiated it from cheaper products like *Woman and Home* and *Woman's Weekly*. *Good Housekeeping* offers a particular identity to the educated woman who once would have employed servants to carry out household tasks. *Good Housekeeping* offers such a woman advice on 'the best ways to lessen her burdens' so that 'there should be no drudgery in the house' but 'time to think, to read, to enjoy life' (Braithwaite et al. 1986: 11). The ideal reader, constructed in the pages of *Good Housekeeping*, cultivates modesty in appearance, is intelligent, interested in the world outside the home, cheerful and, above all, efficient. She recognises 'quality' whether in clothes, household furnishings or the arts. This reader is not only efficient, self-confident, an arbiter of middle-class taste, but also a woman who is aware of the mechanics of running a home. As Alison Light has observed, an awareness of the materiality of domesticity 'would have ill-befitted the Victorian or Edwardian lady' who would have been ignorant about, nor thought it appropriate to discuss, such matters as smoking chimneys, burst pipes, broken china, the most efficient way to produce a four-course dinner or the disintegration of net curtains in the wash (Light 1991: 137-138). The ability of the modern housewife to control the potentially wayward mechanics of the home is linked to the capacity for self-restraint in social and personal relations, and

8 Lower middle-class was defined as those with 'buying capacity limited but same buying habits and social outlook as the middle-class'. Working-class was here defined as 'steadier types of workers'.

a rational, balanced approach to art and politics. *Good Housekeeping* offered a new identity to its readers that involved their participation in a public forum for rational debate in tandem with their homemaking duties. Although the issues selected for discussion (rearmament, totalitarianism, the General Strike for example) are dealt with in very generalised terms, the fact that women like Virginia Woolf chose to write for a mass-produced publication destabilises the newly constructed dividing line between mass and 'high' culture (Huyssen 1986; Carey 1992). Equally and linked, *Good Housekeeping* questions the dividing line between 'housewives' and 'educated women'. The suburban housewife is not constructed as unintelligent, over-acquisitive, apathetic or 'neurotic' as in some accounts (Giles 2004: 39-47). On the contrary she is addressed as someone who is a quietly competent manager of her home, a professional worker, who is capable of reading and debating controversial issues. Linked to all this is her ability to select, buy, and use a range of beauty and domestic products: she is the discerning consumer whose competence in consumption and household management determines her social status. The social status of her household is no longer determined by the ability to employ residential servants but by her continuing and increasing role as the arbiter of taste and, what was often referred to as, 'gracious living'.

How then did magazines like *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman and Home* and *Woman's Sphere* construct identities for their targeted lower-middle to working-class readership? These magazines are made up of fiction, occasional sewing or knitting features, a few general articles, a problem page, and advertising. *Woman's Weekly* for 9 July 1932 comprises seventy-five pages, of which twenty are romantic fiction, eight are advertising, four are sewing and knitting, one is cooking, one on childcare and three on relationship advice. *Woman and Home* for May 1929 has one hundred and twenty pages of which thirty-five are romantic fiction and sixty-two advertising. The practice, used increasingly by magazines, of breaking up the page continuity of stories and articles, in order to ensure the reader moves backwards and forwards across the whole magazine, makes it difficult to distinguish between feature and advertisement. The mass of advertising and its organisation in these magazines suggest that the ideal reader is woman as housewife consumer. Moreover, the housewifely aspects of the magazine are almost entirely to be found in the advertising which promotes foodstuffs, furniture, household appliances, clothing, beauty items, home medicines and cleaning products. Both magazines imply a link between woman, sexual desire and consumerism that is nowhere explicitly stated but nevertheless links the pleasures of window-shopping through advertising with the reading of romantic fiction to provide an experience that avoids the more directly instructive mode that is characteristic of *Good Housekeeping*. The fiction offered in these magazines tends to inscribe the romantic dilemmas of their heroines in modern urban spaces such as the office, the department store, the city, or in exotic locations such as an eighteenth century country house in France or colonial Kenya. These spaces would have resonated with symbolic meaning for their female readerships, suggesting a modern and mobile femininity far removed from the conventions of respectable Victorian and Edwardian society. It is paradoxical that while the heroines of such stories invited

reader identification, narrated as they so often are through the consciousness of the female protagonist, magazines like *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman and Home* and *Woman's Sphere* were read, in the main, by married housewives living in the suburbs rather than by single women working in metropolitan London or overseas.⁹ This lack of fit between proffered identity and reader, which is considerably less characteristic of *Good Housekeeping*, produces a cultural space in which readers might rehearse, 'try on' and shop for identities other than that of professional housewife thus practising their skills as consumers of fiction as well as advertising.

Yet, in interviews, lower-middle and working-class women consistently insisted that they read magazines for the recipes, the knitting and sewing patterns, and the advice on health and homemaking. For these women the ostensible purpose of magazine consumption was to gain information and advice rather than to enter the worlds of fiction and advertising which were understood as 'silly' dreams. Such recall reflects the way in which these women see themselves and want to be seen. Gertie Harris and Hannah Arkwright both told stories about their lives prior to marriage in which they enjoyed dancing, dressing up and flirting. Both were insistent that such 'silliness' ended when they married, 'it was silly, it was a silly life, it was living in a cloud because you have to come down to earth and I did – with a bang!' and Hannah said of her return to North Yorkshire after her 'adventures' in London that 'I had stopped being flighty'. Both women recognised that their aspirations for a better life depended on making a 'sensible' marriage to a home-centred man with a steady income who did not drink or gamble. Certainly, the insistence by women that these magazines were consumed for instruction rather than pleasure asserts a subjectivity that prioritises hard work and emotional thrift over, what are seen as, the excesses of wasteful dreaming and romantic 'silliness'. However, it is possible to speculate that perhaps women found a secret outlet in the romantic stories for their unexpressed and suppressed longings; that the heroines were as unlike themselves as could be meant these stories could be read without anxiety.

I am arguing that women's magazines did not simply offer women advice and information on how to be professional homemakers. They contributed to the formation of modern femininities in a variety of ways that were classed as well as gendered, offering a range of reading positions. *Good Housekeeping* constructs a version of the educated, informed housewife that spoke to a desire on the part of middle-class women for the superiority, deference and service that had once attended their role as *mâîtresse de maison*. As the arbiters of taste and 'gracious living' they were offered an identity that continued to distinguish them from their lower-middle and working-class sisters at a historical moment when this distinction appeared under threat from the demise of domestic service and the employment of working-class women as retail 'experts' in shops and stores. Those magazines that catered for lower-middle and working-class women link pleasure and desire more overtly with the consumption of material objects. Nevertheless, many of the

9 The problem page of *Woman's Sphere*, December 1936, has letters from Hertfordshire, Staffordshire, Berkhamstead, Shropshire and Croydon.

women who used these magazines remained untouched at least at the conscious level by these messages, preferring to see themselves as skilled and shrewd housewives who could sensibly resist the blandishments of romantic fiction and advertising. This need on the part of working-class women to understand themselves as sensible, rational beings has to be analysed in the context of changes in working-class life that were linked to consumption but were not completely defined by it. In the next section I conclude this chapter by drawing on the life stories of these women in order to develop this point.

Working-Class Voices

Reading autobiographical accounts or listening to oral narratives of working-class childhood in the early twentieth century is to become aware of the hardship suffered, even when this is qualified with references to the 'the good old days'. All the women interviewed drew attention to the sheer drudgery of daily life and the constant presence of disease and death before greater affluence, medical science, the welfare state, improved housing, and modern technology alleviated the worst conditions. All the women aspired to a better life than their mothers' both for themselves and for any children they might have. Such aspirations focused on providing a decent home rather than on education, careers or class mobility. To dream of 'a home of your own' was to articulate profound longings for physical, financial and emotional safety in a world that offered little of these. When Doris Arthurs moved into her new council house in the mid-1930s she 'thought it was a palace' and this image is reiterated in many oral testimonies. 'A palace' suggests power, comfort and opulence and expresses the complex longings inscribed, at this specific historical moment, in the acquisition of a small semi-detached or council house. As Eileen Hutchings said 'you had to save so hard to get your home together and there was this trend to move from the background and life, not that it wasn't a good one, to something just that little bit better'. 'Better' was not simply about the acquisition of material goods. It was also about emotional and sexual 'betterment'. It articulated a desire to provide a safe space in which children could be brought up free from the harsh discipline, material deprivation or unhealthy environments of the past, and in which a good marriage was one free from physical or sexual abuse. Thus, Gertie and Hannah, referred to above, struggle to deny or forget 'silliness' in constructing themselves as prudent, rational beings. 'Silliness' can lead to all kinds of poverty and is best kept to the safe pages of magazines.

It is noticeable how often in oral accounts women use material objects or the language of commerce to talk about their aspirations. Mavis Kitching, born in 1916, grew up in inner city Birmingham and experienced the ill-health of both parents and consequent poverty. As a child she received clothes and shoes from a local charitable organisation. She recalls how she was tormented at school as 'different', and treated as an object of charity by those whose philanthropy provided the boots and clothes. Mavis vowed that 'I would work my fingers to the bone rather than [my children]

have [charity] clothes'. In 1948 Mavis and her husband were rehoused in a new council house in the suburbs of Birmingham and Mavis acquired a sewing machine. Her pleasure in the house and the sewing machine expresses a profound sense that she has found a place where she is safe from the vicissitudes of her childhood, a place in which charity clothes are replaced by clothes of her own making, and in which her children will not suffer the same injuries.

Doris Arthurs spent her childhood in rural Staffordshire, sharing a bedroom with five siblings. On leaving school she entered domestic service and, like many young migrants, gravitated to the city in search of work. Working as a servant in the house of the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Doris learned the aesthetic and symbolic nature of material objects. Later when she came to furnish her council house she was excited by the purchase of a second-hand suite:

It was beautiful, covered in green and pale pink, all pale green little like forget-me-nots all over, it was lovely, and it had one wing chair for the gentleman and another sort of tub chair and the corner of the settee was like a tub but the other was a bolster effort, and we thought it was lovely.

It cost more than they could afford but was significant for what it said about Doris' pride in the work carried out to make a comfortable home and as a symbol of her ownership of those commodities that had previously only been available to the affluent. Doris worked part-time as a cleaner for a middle-class woman called Jessie. Jessie gave Doris clothes for her daughter and cast off household items, Jessie left Doris a legacy in her will and paid for a holiday for Doris and her husband. Doris feels that 'I shall never be out of her debt'. In return Doris 'spent as much time with her as I could', nursing her when she was ill and looking after her after the death of her husband. This complex relationship, complicated by the hierarchies of domestic service and class, of which Doris' would have been fully aware, can only be expressed in the language of commercial exchange. Jessie provides some of the commodities Doris desired and Doris 'pays' for these with her domestic nurture and emotional commitment. This friendship allowed Doris to live, at least in part, through Jessie's affluence. A picture of Jessie's country cottage has pride of place on her sideboard: a mock thatched cottage, the cultural stereotype of pastoral bliss, and one that was adopted by speculative suburban house builders. It is precisely the kind of 'palace' young women like Doris and Mavis would have dreamed about as they shared beds, arduous chores, grinding poverty and exhausted parents with numerous siblings.

Aspirations for a home with a garden, piped water and attractive furnishings express, as I have argued, profound desires for comfort, safety and belonging. These desires were inscribed in material things and articulated in the detailed descriptions women were able to give of houses, furnishings, clothes, appliances. The women who dreamt of a better life running their own homes, with a companionable and caring husband, in a pleasant environment away from the dirt, drunkenness, crime and overcrowding of the inner city were as 'modern' in their way as the flapper or the Bloomsbury modernist. These women saw in the realisation of their material

aspirations a sense of self-worth and dignity. Moreover, the provision of improved housing for those previously relegated to overcrowded and insanitary living conditions could be understood as a long overdue recognition of their right to share in the benefits of progress. To be allocated a house by the agencies of the state or offered a mortgage by the financiers of capitalism or invited to consume the domestic commodities of industrial production could be understood as a statement of entry into full citizenship. As Lesley Johnson argues with regard to post-war Australia:

Children as the repositories of hope, for whom safe places – homes with particular characteristics – were needed, represented the focus of a set of gendered desires in the 1950s, not for the past, for tradition, but for a commitment to and an expectation that ‘as housewives’ women were part of the nation – citizens in the fullest sense – and part of its future. (Johnson 1996: 459)

The women interviewed were recalling events and feelings that occurred in a past that could only be remembered in fragments through the lens of the present. A common theme in these memories is the hardship endured, not only by themselves, but also by their mothers. Memories tended to focus on drudgery and poverty, rather than ill-health or disease even though the latter was as pervasive as the former in the lives of most respondents. Phyllis Willmott, growing up in the 1930s, tells her mother ‘when I’m grown I’ll buy you everything you want, even a fur coat for the winter’ to which her mother replies ‘when you’re grown up you’ll be doing the same as I am now – worrying where the next penny is coming from to feed *your* kids’ (Willmott 1979: 75). Equally, when women spoke of their aspirations for *their* children it was always in terms of material belongings and while there is a certain amount of resentment that people ‘get things on a plate so much to what we did and yet it is not appreciated’ there is also pride in their children’s material success. Lizzie Smith told me about her daughter’s home:

They have a garden at the front you know, a big, massive garden because you could get four cars down the drive, a beautiful house it is. ...She has got the kitchen done now and she has had the bedroom done and she is having the dining room done next, all emulsioned, and then she is going to do the lounge before her birthday.

The ‘better future’ women dreamed of for themselves and their children was one in which success could be symbolically marked by possessing a comfortable home, holidays, shoes and clothes. A prudential marriage, regular employment and ‘good housewifery’ were all means to this end. The women interviewed believed that being a ‘good’ housewife, providing clothes, food and comfort, working hard to build an ordered home, would ensure theirs and their children’s success. History has proved them both right and wrong. Their children do not suffer the hardships that dogged their lives and they, themselves, experienced a better quality of material life than their parents. This is, however, due to wider historical and economic forces rather than their housewifely efforts – in the end the present remains indifferent to their efforts. Yet, at a specific historical moment, the proliferation of consumer products,

the Ideal Home Exhibition, and the tantalising promises of women's magazines provided glimpses of the desired 'better' future. Such glimpses made it possible for working-class women to entertain realisable dreams rather than hopeless longings. That these dreams were articulated, then as now, in the language of material commodities testifies to a powerful desire to belong to and share in the promises of the consumer-oriented, home-based society, to be defined as integrated 'consumer citizens' rather than the invisible or marginalised 'poor'.

Conclusion

It is not my intention to conclude by seamlessly integrating the disparate sources discussed. Instead I want to suggest what happens when these sources are placed in juxtaposition and dialogue. Perhaps the most important thing to note is the diverse ways in which women were invited or chose to make sense of an emerging consumer culture. Equally significant, however, are the subtle shifts in relations between women of different classes that were engendered, in part, by new consumption practices. Middle-class women's anxieties about changing class relations were given a powerful charge as working-class women refused domestic service in favour of shop or office work. Young, working-class women became a source of considerable concern to middle-class observers as they adopted the glamorous styles of Hollywood stars, made possible by the dress patterns and beauty tips offered in women's magazines, and frequented the dream palaces of dance halls and cinemas. This concern, expressed as moral disapprobation, was generally unfounded: prudence, and the better future it might bring, self-censored any 'silliness'. In addition, as the voices discussed above suggest, there was an increasing sense amongst working-class women that they had a right to share in the benefits of a consumer society. Working-class women began to challenge the position of middle-class women as the arbiters of taste insofar as they adopted or created their own styles of home furnishing drawn from the variety of mass-produced commodities for sale or display. Doris Arthurs' pleasure in her green brocade suite disturbs a social system in which the conventional role, of women like her, is to admire and maintain the possessions of her 'superiors' rather than owning them herself. Moreover, women's magazines, in attempting to offer a classless version of the housewife, are encouraging all women to see themselves as equal in the task of homemaking even if the way this is played out is different. This democratisation of homemaking is evident in the stories working-class women tell of their aspirations for a better life and in the Ideal Home Exhibition that targeted socially mobile lower-middle and working-class families. Equally, the fact that the working-class women interviewed consistently used domestic commodities and material objects as metaphors to speak about dreams, losses and injuries is suggestive of the way in which an emerging consumer culture produced new forms of linguistic and symbolic expression that were not confined to or passed down from a bourgeois culture. These forms of expression circulated through the cinema, the department store, the women's magazine, and the daily conversations of women themselves.

Middle-class housewives, bereft of their servants, and their role as mistress of the house, were encouraged by magazines like *Good Housekeeping* to define themselves as rational, balanced professionals whose interests were not confined to the home. In an article written for *The Lancet*, Dr Stephen Taylor castigated the lower-middle-class housewife for making:

a fetish of the home. She is aiming at the kind of life successfully led by people to whom books, theatres, and things of the intellect matter. To them, the home is a necessary part of life, but only a part. To her, because she does not see the rest, the home looks like everything, and she wonders why it does not bring her the happiness it appears to bring them. (Taylor 1938: 760)

Such ideas became common in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s when working-class aspirations for material commodities were dismissed and condemned as a passive acquisitive materialism in which dangerous ideologies might breed. Denigration of such aspirations, and the language in which they were expressed, enabled middle-class housewives to carve out a new role for themselves as the voice of professional homemaking.¹⁰ In doing so they represented themselves as rational, balanced and self-restrained consumers in contrast to working-class women who were nearly always constructed in oppositional terms. The representation of working-class women as irrational consumers who make ‘fetishes’ of their homes has cast a long shadow over consumption studies, contributing to the gendered conception of consumption, that, until recently, has been understood as ‘feminine’ in contrast to the ‘masculinity’ of production. The gendering of consumption in the first half of the twentieth century was neither simple nor straightforward but linked to desires that were themselves gendered and classed. The commercial icon of the housewife, beloved of advertisers and manufacturers at the time, did not align itself with the specific needs of any particular class. Instead, it proved eminently flexible, being appropriated by middle and working-class women often, as we have seen, for very different purposes. An emerging consumer culture invited all women to invest their money and their energy in the dream of the ‘ideal home’ but the reasons for choosing to do so varied according to class. To conclude: the cultural transitions that took place in the first half of the twentieth century around women’s relation to consumption engendered new forms of feminine identities that, while classed and differentiated, assign women a crucial place in the history of modernity.

10 Space does not allow me to discuss in detail the British Housewives League which for a brief period in the immediate post-war years enabled many middle-class women to speak ‘as housewives and mothers’ and to argue that they had a crucial part to play in the reconstruction of British society (see Hinton 1994, Giles 2004: 162-163).

References

- Abrams, M. 1959, 'The Home-Centred Society', *The Listener*, 26 November, pp. 914-915.
- Aldburgham, A. 1979 *Shopping in Style: London From the Restoration to Edwardian Elegance*, London, Thames and Hudson.
- Auslander, L. 1996, 'The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth Century France', in V. de Grazia (with E. Furlough) (ed.), *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, Berkeley, University of California Press, pp. 79-112.
- Bowlby, R. 1985, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*, New York, Methuen.
- Carter, E. 1984/1993, 'Alice in the Consumer Wonderland', in A. Gray and J. McGuigan (eds), *Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader*, London, Edward Arnold.
- Braithwaite, B., Walsh, N. and Davies, G. 1986, *Ragtime to Wartime. The Best of Good Housekeeping 1922-1939*, London, Ebury Press.
- Carey, J. 1992, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, London, Faber and Faber.
- de Grazia, V. (with E. Furlough) (ed.) 1996, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Felski, R. 1995, *The Gender of Modernity*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Game, A. and Pringle, R. 1984, *Gender at Work*, London, Pluto Press.
- Giles, J. 2004, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*, Oxford, Berg.
- Giles, M.J. 1989, 'Something That Bit Better: Working-Class Women, Domesticity and Respectability, 1919-1939', Unpublished D.Phil, University of York.
- Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds), 1976, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, London, Hutchinson.
- Hebdige, D. 1979, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, London, Methuen.
- Hinton, J. 1994, 'Militant Housewives: The British Housewives' League and the Attlee Government', *History Workshop Journal*, 38, pp. 129-156.
- Huyssen, A. 1986, 'Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other', in T. Modleski (ed.), *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, pp. 188-207.
- Johnson, L. 1996, '"As Housewives We Are Worms": Women, Modernity and the Home Questions', *Cultural Studies*, 10, 3, pp. 449-463.
- Johnson, L. and Lloyd, J. 2004, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife*, Oxford, Berg.
- Light, A. 1991, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars*, London, Routledge.
- Lury, C. 1997, *Consumer Culture*, Cambridge, Polity.
- McGuigan, J. 1992, *Cultural Populism*, London, Routledge.

- McRobbie, A. (ed.) 1989, *Zoot Suits and Second Hand Dresses: An Anthology of Fashion and Music*, Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Mort, F. 1996, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth Century Britain*, London, Routledge.
- Nava, M. 1992, *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism*, London, Sage.
- Nava, M. 1997, 'Modernity's Disavowal: Women, the City and the Department Store', in C. Campbell and P. Falk (eds), *The Shopping Experience*, London, Sage.
- Partington, A. 1991, 'Melodrama's Gendered Audience', in S. Franklin, C. Lury and J. Stacey (eds), *Off-Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies*, London, Harper Collins, pp. 49-68.
- Perks, R. and Thomson, A. (eds) 1998, *The Oral History Reader*, London, Routledge.
- Ravetz, A. 1989, 'A View From the Interior', in J. Attfield and P. Kirkham (eds), *A View From the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, London, The Women's Press.
- Ryan, D. 1995, 'The Daily Mail Home Exhibition and Suburban Modernity, 1908-1951', unpublished Ph.D, University of East London.
- Scott, P. 2004a, 'Visible and Invisible Walls: Suburbanisation and the Social Filtering of Working-class Communities in Interwar Britain', University of Reading Centre for International Business History discussion paper.
- Scott, P. 2004b, 'Did Owner-occupation Lead to Smaller Families for Interwar Working-class Households?', University of Reading Centre for International Business History discussion paper.
- Stacey, J. 1994, *Stargazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, London, Routledge.
- Taylor, S. 1938, 'The Suburban Neurosis', *Lancet*, 26 March, pp. 759-761.
- White, C. 1970, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968*, London, Michael Joseph.
- Willmott, P. 1979, *Growing Up in a London Village: Family Life Between the Wars*, London, Peter Owen.
- Wilson, E. 1985, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, London, Virago.
- Winship, J. 1987, *Inside Women's Magazines*, London, Pandora.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 2

The Feminist and the Cook: Julia Child, Betty Friedan and Domestic Femininity

Joanne Hollows

In late 2004, self-identified feminist journalist and broadcaster Janet Street-Porter participated in ITV's *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here* and in early 2005, Germaine Greer briefly took part in Channel 4's *Celebrity Big Brother*. Despite Greer's later protestations that she didn't go on the show to end up 'being Jamie Oliver', what characterised both these women's forays into reality TV was not only their embrace of the role of cook for their fellow contestants but also their refusal to let anyone else near their 'kitchens' (in Street-Porter's case a camp fire). Far from distancing themselves from the domestic and seeking to distinguish themselves through demonstrating competence in masculine tasks, both women sought control and creativity through cooking. What was notable about these examples was the way they articulated the identities of 'the feminist' and 'the cook' in a way that was strikingly absent in most feminist theory. The audience was able to watch these women attempt to conjure up a sense of normality in an abnormal environment through everyday domestic routines. However, these aspects of ordinary domestic life are precisely those that are expelled from many constructions of feminist subjectivity.

While this may seem both a trivial and esoteric starting point, my surprise at images of 'cooking feminists' in reality television was a result of a seeming disjuncture between feminism and domestic consumption. Feminists clearly do cook and clean yet these activities seem to have been excluded from the identity of 'the feminist'. As Margaret Horsfield argues, 'cleaning house has become an activity for which no politically correct woman in her right mind would show much enthusiasm' yet 'there are a lot of clean – or at least clean-ish – homes out there, and a great deal of time and effort goes into keeping them that way' (1997: 5-6; see also Martens and Scott 2005). This chapter is an attempt to think through some of the reasons why domestic consumption was both criticised and marginalised within second-wave feminism and how 'the feminist' became out-of-place in domestic space. As the chapter progresses, I focus on a case study of cooking to examine how feminist critiques of domestic consumption that deal with the figure of the housewife, and the tasks of

housework, also frequently cohere around a rejection of the commercialisation of domestic space.

In response to Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd's observation that 'while one can stop doing housework, the identity of the housewife is harder to cast off' (2004: 112-113), the chapter explores how different figures of domestic femininity negotiate this relationship. Using the work of feminist Betty Friedan and cookery writer Julia Child from the early 1960s, the chapter examines how these figures negotiate different responses to housework and the housewife and how they construct domestic femininity. The chapter ends by questioning whether, in a post-feminist context, new forms of domestic femininity are possible that can articulate elements of the seemingly antagonistic figures of the feminist and the housewife.

Second-wave feminism and the 'escape' from domesticity

This section examines some key ways in which second-wave feminism was predicated on an escape from domesticity. First, it explores recent work on everyday life that highlights how narratives of becoming a feminist were frequently structured around the idea of 'leaving home' (Felski 2000; Giles 2004). Second, I draw on Charlotte Brunsdon (1997, 2000) and Johnson and Lloyd (2004) to examine how the opposition between 'the feminist' and 'the housewife' structured second-wave feminism to explain why domesticity was constructed as 'other' to feminism. I discuss how, in the process, consumption was also othered within second-wave feminism, assessing how these factors have impacted on feminist approaches to consumption and, more crucially, how domestic consumption has been marginalised.

Feminists have played a key role in questioning commonsense ideas about the home as a site of leisure and a 'haven' from the public sphere of work, demonstrating not only how the home is not only a site of labour for women but also how the freedom and autonomy that is frequently associated with the home needs to be understood within gendered power relations. However, this critique of domestic space frequently resulted in feminism abandoning home: as Judy Giles observes, in many feminist narratives, "'leaving home"... is a necessary condition of liberation' and necessary for women to become "'modern" emancipated subjects' (2004: 141-142). As Rita Felski has argued, feminism has frequently been structured by the same oppositions between public and private spheres that structure wider theories of modernity and celebrate 'mobility, movement, exile, boundary crossing' and associate home with 'familiarity, dullness, stasis' (2000: 86). As a result, feminists have frequently preferred to be 'culturally "one of the boys"' (Thornton 1995: 104), identifying with the urban adventurer in public space rather than what are seen as the mundane, repetitive lives of women in domestic space. Such images reproduce ideas about home, and its occupants, as traditional and (politically) conservative: feminist lives could be presented as heroic and extraordinary if they were disassociated from those 'other' women whom they represented as trapped in domestic space (Probyn 2005).

These images have consequences for the study of consumption and lead to the marginalisation of domestic consumption. Outside feminist debates about the consumption of media texts, the 'discovery' of consumption within cultural studies was largely about the 'discovery' of masculine consumption in the public sphere. If work on youth subcultures represented one trajectory of this research (see, for example, Hebdige 1979; Hall and Jefferson 1976), Frank Mort examined how masculine identities are formed through particular metropolitan public spaces of consumption which operate as a 'masculine playground' (1996: 82), and where the 'narcissistic' new man was constructed at the level of the 'spectacle' (see also, for example, Nixon 1996). This preoccupation with men's spectacular and public consumption practices as recent examples of modernist ideas of *flaneurie* lead to a corresponding neglect of the significance of domestic consumption (and the relationship between public and private) for both men and women (Hollows 2003a). Furthermore, these studies legitimated traditionally feminine consumption practices because they were being appropriated by men.

Such approaches have also been reproduced in feminist work on consumption because, it might be suggested, feminist scholars have identified with the urban flaneur rather than the domestic housewife. This can be seen, for example, on work on women's shopping practices in department stores in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries which demonstrates how department stores enabled women to participate in the public sphere (see, for example, Nava 1996). Likewise, studies of consumption practices associated with fashion and youth cultures, tended to be interested in girls' construction of spectacular urban styles that represented a break from 'mainstream' femininity (see, for example, Evans and Thornton 1989, 1991). By focusing on consumption practices as leisure practices, such work not only did little to understand consumption within the sexual division of labour (Miller 1998), but also marginalised domestic consumption from the study of consumption. There are clear counter-examples to this trend and, as I go on to discuss below, many of them are found in the study of cooking. Nonetheless, the analysis of cooking as a gendered activity has been frequently outside the established parameters of theories of consumption (although see, for example, Warde 1997) and in terms of debates about the sexual division of domestic labour (DeVault 1991, Charles and Kerr 1988 and Murcott 1995). It is also worth noting the relative absence of work on the ways in which feminist identities and lifestyles were themselves constructed through consumption (although Laurel Forster [2003] offers a way of beginning to think about this in her work on the representation of food in *Spare Rib* magazine).

The reasons for feminism's neglect of domestic consumption needs not only to be understood in relation to feminism's flight from the home, but also feminism's need to keep a distance from the woman who inhabits the home, the housewife. As Johnson and Lloyd suggest, 'the feminist resolves the tension between domesticity and public achievement by leaving the former at home for the latter' (2004: 17). Charlotte Brunsdon has argued that 'the opposition feminist/housewife was polemically and historically formative for second-wave feminism' (2000: 216) pointing to the ways in which 'disidentity' is at the heart of successive waves of feminism (2006).

Brunsdon's argument is neatly demonstrated in second-wave feminist writing on housework. For example, in her research into housework, Ann Oakley claims that 'An affirmation of contentment with the housewife role is actually a form of antifeminism, whatever the gender of the person who displays it. Declared contentment with a subordinate role – which the housewife role undoubtedly is – is a rationalization of inferior status' (1974a: 233). Yet, despite this, Oakley also acknowledges elsewhere that 'Most of the women interviewed for this study have the idea that feminists are not interested in housewives – that they "look down" on them, and consider the occupation inferior to a job or career outside the home' (1974b: 194). While popular representations of feminists in the 1970s frequently constructed them as 'anti-housewife' (Brunsdon 1987: 186), such conclusions are not difficult to draw from feminist scholarship (Hollows 2006).

However, it is Betty Friedan, in her foundational second-wave feminist text *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), who is not only well known for a condemnation of the housewife, but also makes consumption practices central to her critique. Drawing on the narrative form of the crime thriller (Bowlby 1992; Knight 1997), Friedan explained a decline in women's involvement in the public sphere in 1950s America in terms of 'the feminine mystique' promoted by women's magazines and advertising that constructed women as 'healthy, beautiful, educated [up to a point], concerned only with her husband, her children and her home' (1963: 13). Striving to fulfil their 'feminine potential', Friedan claimed, produced a range of symptoms, feelings of failure, of nothingness, of 'is that all there is?' She identifies these as symptoms of 'the problem with no name', a problem of epidemic proportions in US women. These symptoms are part of the wider psychological damage done in the pursuit of the feminine mystique: household drudgery produced fatigue and breakdown and women lost any sense of identity as they could only see themselves as wives and mothers (Hollows 2000). In the process, Friedan frequently conflates the identity of the housewife with nature of the housework, work she suggests might be best suited to the 'mentally-retarded' or an eight-year old child (1963: 244-245). As she articulates her distaste for the 'occupation: housewife' (1963: 35), Friedan presents the 'modern housewife as a subject rather than object of boredom' (Johnson and Lloyd 2004: 121).

Despite the fact that Friedan claims to speak as a housewife, she is clearly involved in processes of 'disidentity' noted by Brunsdon. Housework occupies a paradoxical role in *The Feminine Mystique*: it is labour (manifested in her countless references to housework as 'drudgery') but it is not the *real* labour associated with public sphere of professional occupations because housework is primarily about consumption. The role of the housewife and consumer become coterminous. 'The really important role that women serve as housewives is *to buy more things for the house*,' Friedan argues, identifying how 'I suddenly saw American women as *victims* of that ghastly gift, that power at the point of purchase' (1963: 197-199).

Friedan's work, therefore, articulates a critique of home, consumption, housework and the housewife and maintains a distance between all these things and the feminist

subject.¹ While different forms of feminism have approached these issues in different ways – for example, Marxist-feminist critiques of housework in terms of the sexual division of labour or a reclaiming of the values of feminine domestic tradition ‘outside’ patriarchy in some forms of cultural feminism – these terms have remained remarkably resistant to disarticulation. Furthermore, the opposition between ‘the feminist’ and ‘the housewife’ has made it difficult for feminism to imagine forms of domestic femininity other than the housewife. As Johnson and Lloyd argue, ‘the positioning of the housewife as a form of gendered identification, rather than a practice, further contributed to the need for women to distance themselves from it’ (2004: 90). In the next section, I explore how these problems are both reproduced and negotiated in feminist work on cooking as both a form of domestic labour and domestic consumption.

Cooking, feminism and domestic femininities

In this section, I want to focus in on cooking as one aspect of domestic labour and consumption. For feminism, cooking is often used as a key practice through which ‘the housewife’ is signified and identified. As a result, it is a practice that the feminist frequently needs to disidentify with and distance themselves from. This is neatly illustrated by Janet Ree’s recollections about her ‘inappropriate’ behaviour at a women’s group meeting:

One woman stormed out because she said I was always trying to make people feel at ease... She said she was fed up with people just sitting around, middle-class women not getting out and actually doing things. I was always smiling at people. It was awful. I was a hostess – can you imagine, I always made cakes. And tea and coffee. I’ve always loved making a kind of home. All the peripheral things like cooking and sewing, having a nice warm room, all that. It was really important. But I was mortified and recognised the justness of that description of myself. I might as well have been hosting the Women’s Institute. That was the subtext. (cited in Brunsdon 2000: 23)

In the process, cooking as a form of domestic practice (and as a means of representing ‘home’) becomes anchored around a singular mode of gendered identity, and singularizes domestic femininity, around the figure of the housewife. This section examines how this image is produced in second-wave feminism, using Betty Friedan, and reproduced in other feminist writing on cooking. It also examines how these debates secure this image by casting the housewife as cook in terms of mass consumption as opposed to domestic production. Through a brief case study of Julia Child, I hope to demonstrate how alternative figures of domestic femininity were emerging in the 1960s that were closer to second-wave feminism than might be imagined yet also imagined domesticity in ways that feminism could not.

1 There are numerous critiques of Friedan’s work. For examples, see Knight (1997), Bowlby (1992), Meyerowitz (1994), Giles (2004), Hollows (2000) and Johnson and Lloyd (2004).

As suggested above, Friedan's critique of 'the happy housewife heroine' is articulated with a critique of the power of consumer culture and, crucially, how it had transformed the lives of women. Rather than freeing women's time from domestic drudgery to do more fulfilling activities, new consumer goods, Friedan argues, both increase the extent of housework and render it less stimulating. She claims that:

The fact remains that more of the jobs that used to be performed in the home have been taken away: canning, baking bread, weaving cloth and making clothes, educating the young, nursing the sick, taking care of the aged. It is possible for women to reverse history – or kid themselves that they can reverse it – by baking their own bread. (1963: 231)

On the one hand, she seems to be suggesting that women are losing their autonomy, and alienated from domestic work in the home through the commercialisation of domestic life and yet, on the other, she seems to be suggesting a fetishisation of domestic crafts. While these two trends may not be inherently contradictory, I want to examine how, when applied to cooking, they can become so, and how some of these ideas are reproduced in later feminist writing on food.

Friedan argues that the commercialisation of domestic life 'imposes a new drudgery' (1963: 231). This drudgery is linked to both the work of consumption in the public sphere – in which women's roles are defined as happy shoppers – and domestic consumption, as housework is reduced to a series of acts of consuming new technologies and products. Friedan has no particular romantic attachment to any form of domestic labour yet the shift from housework as autonomous productive labour to consumption clearly signifies conditions of increased alienation. Furthermore, she argues, in order to make consuming appear attractive, commercial products are given a 'false' identity to encourage women to see their consumption as useful labour. For example, Friedan cites 'a survey' from industry that claims that the housewife 'has a great need for "doctoring up" the can and thus prove her personal participation and her concern with giving satisfaction to her family' (1963: 204).

These critiques of consumption are reproduced, and extended, in some recent feminist writing on cooking. For example, Mary Drake Mcfeeley (2001) sees the 1950s in the US as a nadir in terms of domestic cookery as housewives were transformed from producers to consumers by the increasing penetration of commerce into the domestic kitchen: 'the productive housewife... was replaced in the fifties by a woman pushing a supermarket cart, bending over a freezer, or peering into a refrigerator' (2001: 97). In the process, she argues, the domestic cook was deskilled – now her only skills were 'planning and shopping' (2001: 98) – and the only form of creativity came from superficial 'transformations and embellishments of processed goods' (2001: 99) which highlighted the visual aesthetics of food over all other considerations in the production of 'counterfeit' creations (2001: 92). (For more on decorative cooking in the 1950s, see Marling 1994.) In the process, like Friedan, she employs some well-established tropes of mass culture theory.

However, for Drake Mcfeeley, the commercialisation of domestic life that produces the housewife as consumer is compared unfavourably to an earlier form of domestic femininity, 'the productive housewife'. Fuelled by what Bourdieu has

called a 'populist nostalgia' (1984: 58), she uses a Missouri farming community of the 1920s to represent 'the world we have lost'. The commercialisation of the kitchen threatens the autonomy of a feminine domestic tradition. Not only are recipes now 'handed down, not from Great-grandmother, but from General Foods' (2001: 99) and foods 'formula-made' in 'laboratory kitchens' staffed by 'scientists' (2001: 92), but also industrialised, rationalised and scientific modes of food production have entered the domestic kitchen through new electric kitchen appliances.

Drake McFeeley is not alone in this feminist critique of a commercialised kitchen culture. French sociologist Luce Giard also employs a narrative of cultural and culinary decline. Women, she argues, are becoming de-skilled as more of everyday life becomes taken over by an industrial logic and a proliferation of new objects (blenders, coffee-machines, microwaves) and pre-packaged labelled foods (complete with nutritional information, sell-by date and so on). For Giard, the skilled and inventive female cook is in danger of being transformed into an '*unskilled spectator* who watches the machine function in her place' (1998: 212). While Giard is critical of 'archaistic nostalgia', and notes that there is still some space for 'micro-inventions... to resist with sweet obstinance the contagion of confusion' (1998: 213), her analysis rests on a distinction between an 'authentic' living feminine domestic culture and an 'inauthentic', mass-produced and industrialised culture produced for women but not by them (Bennett 1986 and Hall 1981).

Both feminist critics clearly imagine a version of domestic femininity that they attempt to reconcile with some aspects of feminism but they do so while maintaining a distance from the figure of the 'modern' housewife. While they demonstrate that domesticity and feminism aren't inherently antithetical, both critics share a nostalgia for a time before capitalist rationalisation and commerce destroyed a living tradition of feminine culinary culture. While Drake McFeeley finds positive developments in culinary culture in the 1960s onwards, both critics' arguments are underpinned by what Rachel Laudan (1999) has called 'culinary Luddism'. Furthermore, I share Elizabeth Silva's scepticism of 'notions of technological innovation in the home as expression of a conspiracy towards a devaluation of essentially womanly activities' (2000: 626). Giard and Drake McFeeley essentialise feminine domestic traditions as part of an 'authentic' women's culture which could presumably exist 'isolated like some deep-frozen essence in the freezer of male culture' (Parker and Pollock cited in Bennett 1986: xii). Cooking can only be reclaimed for feminism by casting it as a form of domestic production rather than domestic consumption. For these critics, the modern is presented as 'an alien, external force bearing down on an organic community of the disempowered' and, in the process, they tend to ignore the multiple ways 'the modern becomes real at the most intimate and mundane levels of experience and interaction' (Felski 2000: 66).²

However, if these critics share with Friedan a critique of the commercialisation of domestic life, Friedan herself is also critical of the resurgence of interest in domestic

2 My arguments about Drake McFeeley and Giard draw heavily on earlier work (Hollows 2003b and Ashley et al 2004).

cooking she identifies in the early 1960s. While for Drake McFeeley, this resurgence of interest in ‘fine cooking’ (2001: 124) signals a positive change, for Friedan it is not only about more unnecessary domestic labour and more drudgery, it is also tied into the construction of the housewife as consumer. For example, she claims that if a woman:

has an electric freezer or mixer, she spends more time cooking than a woman who doesn’t have these labour-saving appliances. The home freezer, simply by existing, takes up time: beans, raised in the garden, must be prepared for freezing. If you have an electric mixer, you have to use it: those elaborate recipes with the puréed chestnuts, water-cress and almonds take longer than broiling lamb chops. (Friedan 1963: 231)

While these pronouncements are evidently problematic for their technological determinism, Friedan also attempts to wed two simultaneous trends in American culinary history – an emphasis on convenience and the rise of gourmet cooking – into the same trend. Furthermore, the ‘elaborate recipes’ she describes signify an attack on a new wave of cooking writers who were emerging in the US in the period, among whom Julia Child was a central figure. Indeed, Friedan notes that the ‘mental vacuum’ produced by the drudgery of housework have laid the foundations for ‘an endless line of books on gourmet cooking’ (Friedan 1963: 245).

‘Buttery, feisty adventurous cooks’: Julia Child and domestic femininity

Julia was so impressive, so instructive, so exhilarating, because she was a woman, not a goddess. Julia didn’t create armies of drones, mindlessly equating her name with taste and muttering ‘It’s a Good Thing’ under their minty breath. Instead she created feisty, buttery adventurous cooks, always diving into the next possible disaster because, goddammit, if Julia did it, so could we. (Julie Powell)³

As Drake McFeeley (2001) observes, Friedan and Child share more than might be expected. Both women were graduates of the prestigious East Coast Smith College and their key works were published in the same period, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking Volume 1* in 1961 and *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 (the year in which Child first appeared on American public television with her series *The French Chef*).⁴ ‘Both argued for the empowerment of the individual’ argues Drake McFeeley, and ‘both refuted the idea that gender must govern occupation’ (2001: 124). Indeed,

3 This is taken from the August 13 2004 blog entry by Julie Powell, author of the Julie/Julia Project, on Julia Child’s death (<http://blogs.salon.com/0001399/>).

4 References for *Mastering the Art of French Cooking Volume 1* are from the British paperback edition published in 1969. This work is also referenced as Beck et al to acknowledge the joint authorship of this work. However, while the recipes are clearly a joint venture, it is commonly acknowledged that the ‘voice’ in *Mastering* is Julia Child’s as she tried ways to present French cooking to a US audience in ways that her French collaborators were unable to do.

Camille Paglia has called Child a 'great feminist' and she has also been described as 'a pivotal female role model who combined independence and self-reliance with the pleasures of the home' (Ramirez 1997: 1). While Friedan urged women to leave the kitchen and stop being housewives, Julia Child negotiated a mode of domestic femininity and a way of being in the kitchen that was also opposed to the role of housewife. In the process, she begins to reimagine the meanings of the domestic in a manner that feminism frequently cannot and has not.

Child's opening gambit in *Mastering* is: 'This is a book for the servantless cook who can be unconcerned on occasion with budgets, waistlines, timetables, children's meals, or anything else which might interfere with the enjoyment of producing something wonderful to eat' (Beck et al 1969: 13). In this way, she distinguishes her cooking from the cooking of the 'happy housewife heroine' in a number of key ways. Cooking is abstracted from the wider 'feeding work' such as scheduling, budgeting and catering for other people's tastes and preferences that characterises cooking as a form of domestic and feminine labour (DeVault 1991). For Charles and Kerr (1988), the pleasure gained from cooking is the pleasure of demonstrating 'care' for others and, DeVault's work, it is this relationship between cooking and caring (for others) that cements the relationship between cooking and femininity: caring work is the 'undefined, unacknowledged activity central to women's identity' (1991: 4). In this way, Child acknowledges cooking as a gendered activity while at the same time dis-identifying with this model of the domestic cook.

Likewise, Child's opening statement also challenges conventional relationships between femininity and eating. Sociological studies demonstrate that women are positioned as providers of food for others but maintain a difficult relationship to eating itself: women frequently use food to offer pleasure to family members yet have difficulty experiencing food as pleasurable themselves, particularly in a domestic context (Charles and Kerr 1988; Martens 1997). For example, the title of Anne Murcott's article, 'It's a Pleasure to Cook for Him', taken from a comment by one of her respondents, illustrates the extent to which the women she studied saw cooking, and the choice of *what* to cook and eat, as something done 'in the service of some other(s)' (1995: 94). Similar findings are reported by Charles and Kerr who show how this is exacerbated by women's fear of gaining weight. Women 'deny themselves pleasure whereas one of their aims in preparing food for others is to give pleasure; women fundamentally cook to please men in particular' (1988: 153). In popular accounts of Child's life, much has been made of her 'appetite' and how her desire to learn to cook was motivated by her pleasure in eating (Fitch 1997). By linking the pleasures of cooking with the pleasures of eating, Child produces a model of the domestic cook as someone who not only enjoys eating but also knows what they want to eat rather than simply deferring to the preferences of others. Indeed, she concludes, 'Above all have a good time' (Beck et al 1969: 17).

Therefore, while Friedan saw gourmet cooking as a means of masking, or diverting from, the drudgery of housework, Child saw it as an antidote. Indeed, she once speculated that her obituary should say that she 'encouraged home cooking, that she made it a respectable hobby, something fun and creative and not drudgery'

(Ramirez 1997: 1). For Friedan, cooking was not only a form of alienated labour but was also essentially without value. In opposition, Child saw no difference between the value of cooking as a form of labour whether it was performed in the public or private sphere and claimed that 'the most important ingredient you can bring to it is love of cooking for its own sake' (Beck et al 1969: 14). Such an approach was also shared by cookery writer Elizabeth David writing in the UK, who argued that 'Good food is always a trouble and its preparation should be a labour of love and this book is intended for those who actually and positively enjoy the labour involved' (cited in Jones and Taylor 2001: 178).

This emphasis on cooking as labour is significant. Some critics have claimed that representations of cooking in the 1950s had encouraged women to *hide* the labour involved in creating meals (McFeeley 2001) while others have observed how female domestic labour was only made visible through appropriately feminine work on the appearance of food (Marling 1994). In contrast to this, the physicality of Child's performances on television have frequently been noted: for example, Lipscomb comments on 'the "get down into it" physicality of her teaching' (2004: 2). This investment in the labour of cooking as a suitable activity for middle-class women also needs to be understood in terms of Child's address to 'servantless cooks'. Rather than maintaining a feminine middle-class gentility through distinguishing it from a working-class femininity associated with domestic labour, Child (like David in the UK) reconciles culinary labour with middle-class femininity (see Jones and Taylor 2001).

However, unlike critics such as Drake McFeeley and Giard, Julia Child does not try to create the kitchen as utopian haven cut-off from modern life but teaches the 'art' of French cooking in resolutely modern ways. The labour of cooking is not seen as separate from public life or the commercial production of food. Instead, Child encourages an interpenetration of what have been seen as separate spheres, offering what appears to be a means of resolving the 'tension' between public and private spheres which Johnson and Lloyd argue lies at the heart of feminism. Professional French restaurant cooking was the main influence on her culinary style, and, in particular she was influenced by Auguste Escoffier who had played a key role in modernising the professional kitchen (Mennell 1996). This represents one form of culinary modernity that Child sought to bring into domestic life. Furthermore, there was nothing romantic or traditionally 'feminine' about the way in which Child presented cooking. She wanted a cookbook that would 'work' and that meant testing and refining recipes so that the results were reliable and predictable.⁵ As she commented during the writing process, 'Getting recipes into scientific workability is very interesting' (cited in Fitch 1997: 191). This manifests itself in *Mastering* in comments like 'a soufflé will always perform as it should if' you followed her precise instructions (Beck et al 1969: 183). Interestingly, this could be read as a direct challenge to convenience foods: for example, General Mills' best-selling *Betty*

5 This was not a new move. For example, *Good Housekeeping* sold itself on 'tried and tested' recipes that could be reproducible in the reader's own domestic kitchen.

Crocker's Picture Cookbook emphasised the predictability and repeatability of the recipes (Marling 1994: 221). Indeed, the sheer length and detail of the recipes is testament to Child's desire to scientifically guarantee success. Nonetheless, this is tempered by an encouragement to adapt or use the imagination *where appropriate* and by humorous acknowledgements that human error need not get in the way of culinary success. As she puts it, 'Fish mousse: IN CASE OF DISASTER. If by any chance your quenelle paste turns out to be too soft to poach as quenelles, it will taste every bit as good if you declare it to be mousse' (Beck et al 1969: 209).

Child is critical of some aspects of domestic modernity and, unsurprisingly, this centres around convenience foods. For example, she advises that 'a good home-made soup in these days of the tin-opener is almost a unique and always a satisfying experience' (1969: 56). However, despite the time-consuming nature of her recipes, she made some concessions to balancing the importance of caring about food with the demands of convenience (see Warde 1997). For example, while she advocates making stocks from scratch, she concedes that tinned stocks could be used and that stock cubes might be used 'in an emergency' (Beck et al 1969: 86). However, she had no such qualms about the use of new kitchen technologies where they weren't detrimental to the final results. Indeed, Child was enthusiastic about incorporating ways of using newly-available blenders within cookery writing (Fitch 1997: 207). *Mastering* gives directions for making mayonnaise by hand or in a liquidiser and suggests that 'An excellent butter may be made in an electric liquidiser in a fraction of the time' (Beck et al 1969: 123). Therefore, while feminist critics writing about the influence of the 1950s on cooking condemn the cooking of the period through its association with a commercially-produced domestic culture, Julia Child's intervention is far more open to the entry of commerce and elements from the professional kitchen into the private sphere.

In this way, while second-wave feminism rested on an opposition between private and public spheres, Child imagines ways of negotiating oppositions between 'private/public, traditional/modern... feminine/masculine' (Giles 2004: 141). However, while Child offers new ways of imagining domestic femininity, like Friedan she does so by disidentifying with the housewife. When asked to reflect on her early audience, Child denied that she had been addressing what she called 'the stupid housewife', claiming that 'my audience is not la ménagère, but anyone interested in cooking, no matter the sex or age or profession' (cited in Fitch 1997: 293). Indeed, she also claimed on another occasion that 'our programme is for people who really like to cook... plain old housewives get plenty of encouragement and recipes from the daily newspapers' (cited in Drake Mcfeeley 2001: 122). This distance from the housewife is also produced through her style of cooking. If feminine cookery in the post-war period was characterised by an emphasis on visual aesthetics (Marling 1994), Child warned against 'surprise presentations' (Beck et al 1969: 14).⁶

6 Jones and Taylor (2001) find similar processes of disidentification in the work of Child's British contemporaries, Elizabeth David and Jane Grigson.

Nonetheless, Julia Child differs from second-wave feminist constructions of domesticity. While she presents a mode of femininity based on a refusal of the housewife, she does not refuse domestic femininity. Furthermore, through her conception of culinary practice, she blurs the distinction between public and private, and between labour and consumption, divorcing domestic practice from the singular gendered identity of the housewife. Betty Friedan was clearly an important figure in shaping assumptions about domestic consumption within second-wave feminism. However, if contemporary feminism is to find a means of thinking about domestic femininity and domestic consumption without continual recourse to the figure of the housewife, then we might have something to learn from Julia Child.

Conclusions: Popular feminism, consumption and domestic femininity

Recent debates about the housewife in the press would seem to suggest that some elements of feminist constructions of the housewife have become part of contemporary commonsense. For example, the publication of Nigella Lawson's *How to be a Domestic Goddess* provided some columnists in the British press with an opportunity to rehearse the difference between their feminist-identified selves and the housewife. This commentary frequently assumed a straightforward choice between feminism and domestic femininity in which feminism could be the only 'rational' response. The 'conservative' *Daily Mail* asked 'Could it be that the real reason women hate baking is because cake-baking epitomizes our status as domestic slaves? Most men secretly love the idea of a Stepford Wife, programmed to eager servitude, be it sex or baking' (Tyrer 2000: 47) while, in the pages of *The Sunday Herald*, Burnside sneered that 'For women who have given up career jobs to make packed lunches and sew Tweenie costumes', *Domestic Goddess* was 'affirming stuff' (2000: 16). This commentary reproduced a Friedan-inspired distinction between both productive paid labour and the insignificance of domestic consumption, and between the professional working woman and the housewife (see Hollows 2003b). In a similar vein, in the heavy-handed 2004 remake of *The Stepford Wives*, a kitchen full of homemade cakes operated as a sign of modern women being reprogrammed to become the irredeemable 1950s housewife. Likewise, *Desperate Housewives* has been praised for lifting the lid on the 'problem with no name' that is still endured by suburban housewives. Although considerably more complex than *The Stepford Wives*, an overinvestment in a form of Martha Stewart-living manifested in perfect gardens, domestic crafts and elaborate cooking is used as an easily understood shorthand for pathological femininity.

The idea that labour is 'the site of self-creation' and consumption is merely its passive 'other' has a long history in social theory (Miller 1994: 46). Furthermore, the opposition between production and consumption has been persistently gendered: the sphere of consumption has come to stand for 'destructiveness, waste, extravagance, triviality and insatiability – in fact, all the things that men traditionally hate or fear about women' (Pringle cited in Jackson 1993: 217). However, this opposition is

not only gendered but this image of consumption becomes embodied in the very specific feminine figure of the housewife. As Miller notes, the housewife has been portrayed as 'an intensely competitive, status-seeking emulator, as superficial as she is inauthentic' (1995: 38). Second-wave feminism may have challenged some of the dominant assumptions of social theory, but it left this portrait of domestic consumption remarkably intact. Furthermore, as my examples above demonstrate, such views of domestic consumption have become part of a popular feminist commonsense.

As Johnson and Lloyd argue, 'feminism has been marked by a wilful ignorance of the ordinary and mundane. The splitting of the identity housewife and the figure of the modern woman is one aspect of this absence' (2004: 112). While Marxist-feminists could revalue housework as socially-useful labour by considering it as labour, this involved a repudiation of the ways in which housework is also constituted through practices of domestic consumption, 'it is in essence about the maintenance, ordering and organization of domestic material culture' (Martens and Scott 2005). Nonetheless, older views of consumption remain in more recent versions of feminism such as eco-feminism where a critique of everyday consumption practices is implicit in the critique of consumer capitalism (see, for example, Mies and Shiva 1993).

However, by associating domestic production and consumption with the housewife, the logic of second-wave feminism frequently suggests that an investment in domestic life can be rejected through a rejection of the identity housewife. However, if, as DeVault (1991) suggests, forms of domestic activity such as feeding work are practices of caring *for* and *about* others that constitute one of the central ways of doing femininity, then this suggests that an investment in domesticity cannot be abandoned as easily as the identity housewife. As Beverley Skeggs argues, caring conflates 'doing and being: you cannot do caring without being caring... Caring involves the assimilation of actual practices that cannot be divorced from personal feelings' (1997: 68). Forms of domestic consumption cannot simply be equated with the logic of consumer culture nor seen as a form of false consciousness that involves meaningless labour because they are intimately connected with the 'experience' of both home and femininity.

The ease with which the figure of the housewife can be invoked and remobilised as a figure of pre- or anti-feminist femininity still constitutes a problem for feminism. Likewise, the ease with which the housewife is signified through cupcakes, flower arranging or immaculate interiors maintains a problematic relationship between feminism, the housewife and domestic consumption. Feminism not only needs to interrogate its use of the figure of the housewife but also needs to produce ways of conceptualising domestic femininity that are not simply reduced to a singular and fixed image of the housewife.

References

- Ashley, B., Hollows, J., Jones, S. and Taylor, B. (2004) *Food and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Beck, S., Bertholle, L. and Child, J. (1969) *Mastering the Art of French Cookery: Volume 1*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Bennett, T. (1986) 'Introduction: Popular Culture and "the Turn to Gramsci"', in T. Bennett, C. Mercer and J. Woollacott (eds), *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, pp. xi-xix. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice, London: Routledge.
- Bowlby, R. (1992) *Still Crazy after All These Years: Women, Writing and Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- Brunsdon, C. (1997) *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes*, pp. 41-56. London: Routledge.
- Brunsdon, C. (2000) *The Feminist, the Housewife and the Soap Opera*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brunsdon, C. (2006) 'Feminism, Postfeminism, Martha, Martha and Nigella', in J. Hollows and R. Moseley (eds), *Feminism in Popular Culture*. Oxford: Berg.
- Burnside, A. (2000) 'Lessons From a Goddess', *Sunday Herald*, September 3: 16.
- Charles, N. and Kerr, M. (1988) *Women, Food and Families: Power, Status, Love, Anger*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- DeVault, M. (1991) *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Evans, C. and Thornton, M. (1991) 'Fashion, Representation, Femininity', *Feminist Review*, 38: 48-66.
- Evans, C. and Thornton, M. (1989) *Women and Fashion: A New Look*. London: Quartet.
- Felski, R. (2000) *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Fitch, N. Riley (1997) *Appetite for Life: The Biography of Julia Child*. New York: Doubleday.
- Forster, L. (2003) 'Liberating the Recipe', in J. Floyd and L. Forster, *The Recipe Reader*, pp. 147-168. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Friedan, B. (1964) *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell.
- Giard, L. (1998) 'Doing Cooking', in M. de Certeau, L. Giard and P. Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life. Volume 2: Living and Cooking*, pp. 149-247. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Giles, J. (2004) *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*. Oxford: Berg.
- Hall, S. and Jefferson, T. (eds) (1976) *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*. London: Hutchinson.
- Hebdige, D. (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen.

- Hollows, J. (2006) 'Can I Go Home Yet? Feminism, Postfeminism and Domesticity', in J. Hollows and R. Moseley (eds), *Feminism in Popular Culture*, pp. 97-118. Oxford: Berg.
- Hollows, J. (2003a) 'Oliver's Twist: Leisure, Labour and Domestic Masculinity', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(2), June 2003: 229-248.
- Hollows, J. (2003b) 'Feeling Like a Domestic Goddess: Postfeminism and Cooking', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(2): 179-202.
- Hollows, J. (2000) *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Horsfield, Margaret (1997) *Biting the Dust: The Joys of Housework*. London: 4th Estate.
- Jackson, P. (1993) 'Towards a Cultural Politics of Consumption' in J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson and L. Tickner (eds) *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures and Global Change*, pp. 207-228. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, L. and Lloyd, J. (2004) *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife*. Oxford: Berg.
- Jones, S. and Taylor, B. (2001) 'Food Writing and Food Cultures: The Case of Elizabeth David and Jane Grigson', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4(2): 171-88.
- Knight, P. (1997) 'Naming the Problem: Feminism and the Figuration of Conspiracy', *Cultural Studies*, 11(1): 40-63.
- Laudan, R. (1999) 'A World of Inauthentic Cuisine'. Proceedings of the Conference, *Cultural and Historical Aspects of Food: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, Oregon State University, April 9-11, 146-165.
- Lipscomb, H. (2004) 'At Home with Julia Child', *Washington Post*, Weekend: T5, August 27.
- McFeeley, M. Drake (2001) *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie? American Women and the Kitchen in the Twentieth Century*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Marling, K.A. (1994) *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Martens, L. (1997) 'Gender and the Eating Out Experience'. *British Food Journal*, 99(1): 20-6.
- Martens, L. and Scott, S. (2005) 'The Unbearable Lightness of Cleaning: Representations of Domestic Practice and Products in *Good Housekeeping* (UK), 1951-2001', *Consumers, Markets and Culture*, 8(4): 379-401.
- Mennell, S. (1996) *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Meyerowitz, J. (ed.) 1994. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-60*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Mies, M. and Shiva, V. (1993) *Ecofeminism*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood.
- Miller, D. (1998) *A Theory of Shopping*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Miller, D. (1995) 'Consumption as the Vanguard of History: A Polemic by Way of an Introduction', in D. Miller (ed.) *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*, pp. 1-57. London: Routledge.
- Miller, D. (1994) *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mort, F. (1996), *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth-Century Britain*. London: Routledge.
- Murcott, A. (1995) "'It's a Pleasure to Cook for Him'": Food, Mealtimes and Gender in some South Wales Households', in S. Jackson and S. Moores (eds), *The Politics of Domestic Consumption*, pp. 89-99. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Nava, M. (1996) 'Modernity's Disavowal: Women, the City and the Department Store', in M. Nava and A. O'Shea (eds), *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, pp. 14-31. London: Routledge.
- Nixon, S. (1996), *Hard Looks: Masculinities, Spectatorship and Contemporary Consumption*. London: UCL Press.
- Oakley, A. (1974a) *Housewife*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Oakley, A. (1974b) *The Sociology of Housework*. London: Martin Robertson.
- Probyn, Elspeth (2005) 'Thinking Habits and the Ordering of Life', in D. Bell and J. Hollows (eds), *Ordinary Lifestyles: Popular Media, Consumption and Taste*, pp. 243-254. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Ramirez, O. (1997) 'Julia at 85', *The Press-Enterprise*, Riverside, CA: August 14th: Food: 1.
- Silva, E. (2000) 'The Cook, the Cooker and the Gendering of the Kitchen', *Sociological Review*, 48(4): 612-628.
- Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender*. London: Sage.
- Thornton, S. (1995) *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Tyrer, N. (2000) 'Who Wants to be a Domestic Goddess Anyway?', *Daily Mail*, October 19: 47.
- Warde, A. (1997) *Consumption, Food and Taste: Culinary Antimonies and Commodity Culture*. London: Sage.

Chapter 3

Gender and the Destalinisation of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union Under Khrushchev

Susan E. Reid

Introduction

It seems appropriate to begin a chapter on consumption with an artefact, the *avos'ka*. An essential item of Soviet women's equipment for survival, the *avos'ka* (from *avos'* – 'perhaps') was a string shopping bag, infinitely expandable 'just in case' one came across toilet rolls, bananas or some other scarce commodity. Such spontaneous purchasing was not the same as impulse buying in the western sense, a notorious aspect of consumer capitalism's invidious appeals to women's 'irrational' desires. Rather, it was a strategy for dealing with the specificity of Soviet shopping: shortages and poor distribution. Apart from its elasticity, the *avos'ka* is also distinguished by its transparency, its openness to inspection: it reveals, bulging out through its holes, the fruits of the woman's resourcefulness and persistence as procurer on behalf of her family. The *avos'ka*, empty, waiting to be filled, and monitored by others, is a useful synecdoche for the Soviet consumer as, I want to argue, she was constructed in the Thaw.

'Thoughts of shopping,' Alix Holt has observed, 'intrude(d) into every corner of a [Soviet] woman's existence', so all-consuming was the planning, ingenuity and scheming involved in procuring basic goods and services. Consumption has increasingly been recognised as an object of historical investigation in regard to identity formation and the experience of modernity in the West. It has also figured prominently in explanations of the collapse of Soviet-type systems since 1989, according to which the yawning gap between popular expectations for improved living standards and the Party-State's ability to fulfil them – represented by queues, Trabants, lack of bananas, and frumpy women – led to the collapse of popular support for the socialist project. Thereby, Western predictions dating from the first Cold War period were seen to have been fulfilled, capitalist strategy vindicated, and the Cold War won. Yet the management of consumption was as significant for the Soviet system's long survival as for its ultimate collapse. And the discourses of Soviet

consumption on both sides of the Iron Curtain attributed a particular importance – or even power – to women.

Consumption is clearly a central issue in the study of *post*-Soviet culture. However the tastes, desires and horizons of expectations of the new Russian consumer did not emerge on a *tabula rasa*. The issue of consumption, and living standards more generally, came to the forefront of Party rhetoric and state policy during the 1950s, under the conditions of ‘peaceful competition’ that marked a new, somewhat more relaxed phase of the Cold War. As this chapter contends, consumption was a central issue in the discourses and practices of the Khrushchev era, both international and domestic: it was at once a stick with which the West beat its Cold-war adversary, and an issue on which the Khrushchev regime staked its legitimacy at home and its credibility abroad. Soviet economic claims were taken seriously by Western scholars at the time. Many even assumed that if living standards continued to rise, the Soviet Union would follow the path already trodden by the United States and ‘enter a “mass-consumption” phase’. However, Soviet consumer culture in this period has yet to receive the retrospective, historical analysis it is due. This neglect may partly be explained by a tacit assumption that, being communist, Eastern bloc countries – and the Soviet Union, above all – could not, by definition, be consumer societies. Thus the regime’s ideological and economic emphasis on production determined the focus of Western as well as Soviet historians on production rather than consumption.

This chapter considers the symbiosis of gender and consumption under Khrushchev, and proposes that consumption, particularly by women, was a crucial concern in the Soviet response to the Cold War. The period is framed by two potentially regime-shattering popular revolts, both of which were triggered by issues of consumption: the uprising by workers in the German Democratic Republic in June 1953 against the leadership of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED); and a protest by workers in the southern Russian city of Novocherkassk in June 1962 over high prices and low wages, which, escalating into mass disorder, was brutally suppressed. In order to establish the significance of consumption issues in the context of destalinisation and Cold War, and their centrality to the way women and their relationship to the regime were constructed, it focuses on visual and textual representations of consumption and the ideal Soviet consumer, both indigenous and as viewed through the ‘Iron Curtain’. This preliminary investigation can only raise, without yet answering, important questions about the shopping experience of the Soviet consumer and her (for, as I shall argue, the consumer was predominantly constructed as female) actual desires and behaviour, whether rational or ‘irrational’. Much work has yet to be done to discover the historical Soviet consumer not only as a passive object of central planning, market research, representation, and of discipline, but as an actor who, through her consumption choices – or refusal to consume – may or may not have had an impact on the way policy and ideology were shaped, and who made her own meanings of government-issue consumables in the process of active appropriation and bricolage.

The present chapter analyses the representation of women and consumption in both the specialist and popular press, including domestic advice manuals and

Ogonek, a popular illustrated news magazine along the lines of the British *Picture Post* or *American Life* and *Look*. *Ogonek* is a particularly useful source for a study of this sort. Addressed to a mass audience of both men and women, it appears to have responded to Khrushchev's declared aim of drawing women more actively into public life, paradoxically, by introducing more coverage of conventionally feminine concerns thought to appeal to female members of its readership, who would, at the same time, also imbibe some of its current affairs reporting. This research also dusts off a somewhat despised form of contemporary document that is often dismissed as trivial, anecdotal and lacking academic interest in much the same way as the topic of consumption has been: eye witness accounts by Western visitors to the Soviet Union in the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as journalists and members of specialist delegations. Of course, such accounts must be read critically, often against the grain, as documents which are ideologically overdetermined, framed in the terms of the Cold War construction of the Soviet Union as the communist 'other', as well as being unapologetically patriarchal. Such accounts were *not* guilty, however, of neglecting Soviet society – the sin imputed to studies conducted under the almost ubiquitous sway of the cold-war totalitarian paradigm. They are particularly relevant to the study of consumer culture, because they present a rich source of contemporary observation of Soviet society, popular attitudes, living standards, material culture and everyday life.

The management of consumption

To refer to the 'consumer' or 'consumerism' in the Soviet context may seem incongruous. As Basile Kerblay has noted, the Soviet Union should not be confused with a consumer society if this implies 'a regime in which the dominant class manipulates the symbols of community life, with the intention of encouraging the population to consume or to amuse itself.' Indeed, the regime continued to privilege production over consumption, and despite increased attention to living standards in the 1950s, this remained a culture of shortages – requiring of the consumer strategies for procuring, hoarding and making do – rather than one of boundless and conspicuous consumption. I do want to argue, however, adapting Kerblay, that even as it continued to prioritize production, 'the dominant class manipulated the symbols of community life with the aim of encouraging the population to consume' *in particular ways*.

The important role played by the management of consumption in the maintenance of Soviet-type systems after Stalin's death and the repudiation of terror was recognized by Václav Havel. '[T]he post-totalitarian system,' he declared in 1978, 'has been built on foundations laid by the historical encounter between dictatorship and the consumer society.' Havel's essay 'The Power of the Powerless', referring to Czechoslovakia, alerts us to the importance of studying the micro-level of power if we are to reach a closer understanding of the ways post-Stalinist regimes exercised and maintained authority. We must not underestimate the Khrushchev regime's achievements,

including the renunciation of terror, relative liberalisation of public discourse, and commitment to broadening participation and improving the material conditions of ordinary people. But, for all its populism, it did not relinquish power. Rather than rely on coercion, it sought to maintain public compliance by different means, to mobilise and control through a dispersal of authority to a range of discourses, institutions and regimes of daily life and personal conduct. Highly paternalistic, the regime and its specialist agents intervened even in such seemingly mundane and intimate matters as form the subject of this chapter: dress, housekeeping, taste and consumption. The importance of this project was enshrined in the Third Party Program adopted in 1961, which made both the creation of abundance for all and the formation of the fully rounded, socially integrated and self-disciplined person essential preconditions for the imminent transition to communism. Having internalised 'communist morality', the future citizens of communism would voluntarily regulate themselves, at which point the state could wither away. Correct attitudes toward the aesthetics of daily life and consumption were one aspect of the new Soviet person's self-discipline.

Efforts to intervene in people's everyday habits and relations were nothing new, of course, although their relative importance increased as coercion declined. The radical attempts during the 1920s to bring about a revolution in the culture of daily life are well known. Even under Stalin, terror was not a sufficient instrument of power but coexisted with this kind of intervention. As Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov have put it, in the 1930s, 'the evolution of Soviet commercial culture was as much to do with the manipulation of desires as with their satisfaction.' Khrushchevist discourses, likewise, aimed to manipulate and regulate. The shape they tried to impose on popular desires differed radically, however, from that of the Stalin period. In accordance with the proclaimed 'return to Leninist norms', it revived the austere, modernist aesthetics of the 1920s but now on the basis of the Soviet Union's postwar industrial capacity. The new tone was already set a year after Stalin's death, in December 1954, when Khrushchev railed against the excesses and superfluous embellishment of recent architecture, signalled a partial rehabilitation of Constructivism, and demanded the rational use of modern materials and construction technologies. The new era was to be one of stripped down, functional forms, and sober, rational taste appropriate to a modern, industrial, workers' state.

Soviet attitudes were not formed in isolation from other countries in the Bloc. Indeed, an awareness that consumption issues, in conjunction with work norms, had triggered the uprising in Germany in June 1953 must have struck terror into the Soviet collective leadership lest such unrest spread to the Soviet Union. It may well have convinced Malenkov and Khrushchev of the urgency of improving living standards, especially in the knowledge that even in defeated Germany they were higher than in the victorious leading country of the socialist camp. Albeit with differing emphasis, the effort to define the nature and limits of socialist consumption was a shared concern among leaders and ideologues in the Bloc. A conference of Advertising Workers of Socialist Countries was convened in Prague in 1957 to define the purpose of advertising in a socialist economy. It was to inform about rational modes of consumption; to raise the culture of trade; and, most importantly,

to educate consumers' taste and shape their requirements. The role of domestic advertising in a command economy, then, was *not* to generate inauthentic and insatiable consumer demand, as in the capitalist West. On the contrary, it was to promote 'rational consumption' and to predict and manage popular desires.

To regulate and control demand required knowledge about the consumer. Sociology, relegitimated in the Soviet Union during the Thaw, provided that knowledge. Taking the place, to some extent, of the rather haphazard gathering of information through surveillance and denunciations, the analysis and categorization of the population rendered it visible to the regime and thereby – seemingly – manageable. Data began to be gathered about public opinion, consumer demands and household budgets. The Komsomol, charged with preventing the spread of disaffection and westernized youth culture among young people, took an active interest in such matters. An 'Institute of Public Opinion' set up under the auspices of its newspaper, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, conducted surveys of youth consumption preferences and attitudes towards relations between the sexes and family life in 1961. On a more informal level, it also undertook market research in department stores. Interest in family budgets was prompted by the Party's new emphasis on consumption needs and, specifically, by its attempts to introduce a minimum wage, adequate for a modest standard of living for a typical (that is, normative) urban family. This was not only a matter of reflecting existing consumption patterns, but of prescribing a 'normative consumption budget'. Continued through the 1960s, the normative consumption budget they set was very modest: it included allowances for certain consumer durables such as refrigerators and televisions, but no other electrical appliances, carpets or car. As one ideologue put it: 'Under Communism the attitude of people toward material things will change. They will acquire for personal use only enough to wear. No one will collect suits and dresses, boots and shoes, aimlessly accumulating them in his wardrobe. Reasonable needs for clothing and footwear are determined by climatic conditions, time of year, age and sex, type of occupation and social activities.' Rational needs were those which rendered the self-development of the individual compatible with the development of society as a whole. Rational consumption was an aspect of communist morality, which in general entailed self-discipline and voluntary submission of the individual to the collective will. Where individual desires came in conflict with the best interests of the collective, these were, by definition, irrational. Women and young people were deemed most prone to ostentatious consumption and irrational desires, which, if unchecked, would be detrimental to the common weal.

Disciplining discourses of daily life were addressed primarily to women. Consumption and household labour continued residually to be naturalised as female concerns. Despite the Party's commitment to sexual equality, a number of studies have shown that it or its agents maintained stereotypical notions of gender difference, assuming women to be most heavily imbricated in mundane matters of *byt* and to have a lower level of political consciousness and rationality. Khrushchevite discourses and policies continued to presume that women were less likely to be persuaded by abstract political reasoning than by appeals to emotion and by material benefits. The

party/state differentiated its claims to legitimacy along gendered lines. Offering to men the political promise of socialist democracy and self-government, it held out to women the prospect of better opportunities for consumption and comfort. Therein, while attributing to women an ideologically inferior role, it at the same time ascribed to them, in their capacity as consumers and retailers, a particular kind of power and expertise as the state's agents in reforming the material culture of everyday life.

Promises of increased consumption played a central part in the post-Stalinist regime's search to renew and maintain its popular legitimacy without surrendering its exclusive hold on power. Although Khrushchev's position in the collective leadership was too tenuous for him to abandon the Soviet economy's traditional emphasis on heavy industry and defence, he made a strong commitment to improving mass living standards: attempting to solve the problems of agriculture, pledging to conquer the housing problem, and repeatedly promising that *per capita* consumption would soon overtake that of the US. This was an ambitious target. Lard, rather than goulash, would be a more apt metonym for the new polity: Khrushchev declared, 'It is not bad if in improving the theory of Marxism one throws in also a piece of bacon and a piece of butter.' Soviet popular humour can help us access society's unspoken and unspeakable 'subconscious'. One Soviet joke envisaged the rotund leader bursting his breeches: 'Go ahead, Nikita, catch up with America, if you can, but for heaven's sake don't run ahead. If you do, people will see your bare backside.' Other jokes in the 1950s also encapsulated the causal link between promises of consumer goods and the Cold War, and revealed that the emperor had no clothes. 'One Russian brags to another: "The Soviet authorities have perfected an intricate atomic bomb that will fit into a suitcase, which will one day be delivered to a target like New York." "Impossible," his mate replies. "Where would anybody get a suitcase?"'

As early as 1951, American sociologist David Riesman imagined an alternative to the arms race, 'Operation Abundance', alias the 'Nylon War'. This was 'an idea of disarming simplicity: that if allowed to sample the riches of America, the Russian people would not long tolerate masters who gave them tanks and spies instead of vacuum cleaners and beauty parlours. The Russian rulers would thereupon be forced to turn out consumers' goods, or face mass discontent on an increasing scale.' By bombarding the USSR with Toni wave kits, nylon hose, stoves and refrigerators, the US would force Moscow to abandon weaponry for consumer goods. Significantly, amongst the most effective missiles in Riesman's scenario, items considered to appeal to the traditional concerns of women figured prominently. Both sides in the Cold War assumed the subjects of the socialist camp to share the same innate, gender-specific desires as those of the capitalist camp, and treated women's will to consume as a potent political force.

It was a commonplace of western journalism that the demand and discernment of Soviet consumers was growing and would eventually force the Kremlin to respond, which, given the continued ideological and economic investment in defence industries, would create intolerable tensions within the system and its leadership. The 'Nylon War' formed the conceptual framework with which American and West

European reporters, visiting the Soviet Union for the first time since the austerity of the war, approached the analysis of daily life under Khrushchev and beyond.

Western commentators paid particular attention to Russian women, seeking signs that behind their dour, workhorse facade, they hid a 'universal feminine' desire to adorn themselves. The changing spectacle of Soviet women – their dress, cosmetics, and hairstyles – served as an indicator that the Soviet Union had, willy-nilly, joined battle on the West's terms. Accounts of 'The Russians' consumption patterns also reflected western fascination with this newly rediscovered human species and rendered them less threatening. Assuming that *she*, in particular, was motivated by fundamentally the same needs and desires as Americans, reporters predicted that once Russian women's consumerist instincts were aroused their demands would spiral out of control. As Riesman hypothesised, the increasingly unbearable pressure this placed on the Soviet system would culminate in its implosion and the triumph of capitalism.

The 'kitchen debate': The American National Exhibition, 1959

Riesman's Nylon War scenario, conceived as satire, not only structured Western representations of contemporary Soviet life but became US strategy. One of the Cold War's pitched battles took place at the American National Exhibition held in Moscow in summer 1959. Conflating democracy with consumerism, the American authorities' declared aim for this display of US productivity and prosperity was to 'encourage the progressive evolution of Soviet society' by promoting demand for products available only to Western consumers. This would 'lower the possibility of production for either heavy industry or, and more particularly, for war purposes'.

The exhibition's main attractions included a fully automated 'miracle kitchen' with an electronic 'brain' operated by a domestic scientist; and a 'typical' American home, also featuring a modern, fitted kitchen. It was there, in the kitchen, that Khrushchev and Nixon jousted over the relative capacity of the socialist and capitalist systems to satisfy the needs of their citizens. The domestic and conventionally feminine setting for this confrontation between the superpowers was not as incongruous as it might appear; in the context of 'peaceful economic competition' the kitchen and consumption had become a site for power plays on a world scale. As Darra Goldstein has put it: 'How could Khrushchev be a major player in the world if he could not even provide his country's women with their own kitchens?'

The Cosmos would have been Khrushchev's preferred battle ground. There the superiority of socialist science was beyond dispute. The kitchen – and the conditions of women's work more generally – had, meanwhile, become the locus of the Soviet system's humiliation and the symbol of its backwardness. In his election address to the Supreme Soviet in March 1958, Khrushchev publicly admitted embarrassment that Western perceptions of Soviet life were dominated by the image of downtrodden women engaged in manual labour, and that visitors took home the impression of a backward and uncivilised country. Resentment of the West's historical superiority

was not solely a matter of bruised patriotic pride, especially in light of increased knowledge of life abroad including in other parts of the socialist bloc. It was an article of faith that central planning would guarantee the best possible conditions of life for the largest number of people. Khrushchev repeatedly indexed the transition to communism to the achievement of superabundance and unprecedented prosperity. At the same time, the Soviet Union's new global position required it to be a convincing model of the superiority of the socialist system over capitalism. Seeing the high living standards and bold, happy citizens of the Soviet Union, people abroad, not only in developing countries recently liberated from capitalism but even in capitalist countries, would voluntarily adopt socialism without any need for the Soviet Union to force it upon them.

Meanwhile, at the American Exhibition, the crowds were large and enthusiastic. This seemed to prove the success of the consumer goods offensive: 'There is evidence,' an American magazine crowed, 'that the curiosity about the American way of life as depicted at the fair is giving Soviet leaders concern that the Russian viewer will become discontented with their own lot.' Soviet published responses, in contrast, were churlish, representing it as a tacky display of excess and bourgeois trivia. They lamented the preponderance of consumer goods at the expense of science, technology, and space exploration. Clearly, the fully mechanised kitchen, being in the domestic and traditionally feminine domain, did not count as a display of advanced technology. 'You know, this exhibition is intended more for women's eyes than for men's!' the popular news magazine *Ogonek* quoted the complaint of a 'typical' Soviet (male) visitor. *Izvestiia* queried, was this the national exhibition of a great country or a branch department store?

The challenge of the American Exhibition had been preempted in the 1958-65 economic plan, which pledged to improve living standards including housing and consumer goods and catch up with the USA. However, Khrushchev tried to shift the discursive ground of 'peaceful competition' away from consumer goods towards the more auspicious territory of public services, education, creches, new flats, healthcare, and the right to work. Admitting that quality and choice of goods and services were not yet up to scratch, *Ogonek* invited readers to report on such matters under a new rubric 'Are You Served Well?' implying that it was the public's role and even duty to press for improvements.

In a cartoon from *Ogonek* in 1959, a woman abandons the struggle to cook in the Soviet kitchen and takes her family to the public canteen. Improved public services such as communal dining facilities were not only to raise living standards in general. They were intended, quite specifically, 'to alleviate women's domestic burden', as Khrushchev put it, to enable them to participate more fully in public and productive life. But until public services were sufficiently developed it was necessary to facilitate domestic labour while maintaining its base in the individual family household and women's unpaid second shift. A 1959 'housekeeper's manual', addressed to women, quoted Khrushchev: 'Our communal and housing construction is radically transforming the everyday life of many millions of people who receive in their new, beautiful, contemporary dwelling, central heating, a well-equipped kitchen, a gas

stove, garbage chute, and hot water supply, bathroom, fitted cupboards, ... and other conveniences.' As envisaged by Khrushchev, the 'mod cons' of the new Soviet home were, admittedly, more modest than modern, especially if compared to the fully mechanised kitchen presented at the American Exhibition the same year. Yet, to the majority of women bumping behinds in a communal kitchen this was undreamt-of luxury. Even a relatively comfortable household might have only a cold tap and kitchen equipment consisting only of an iron and an electric samovar.

But Khrushchev and his first deputy premier, Anastas Mikoian, were willing to learn from Western example. A 1955 American fitted kitchen was shipped to Moscow for study. On his visit to the US in 1958, Mikoian took a keen interest in domestic appliances, and declared (the American press reported), 'We have to free our housewives like you Americans! The Russian housewife needs help.'

For the Soviet housewife, struggling under her double burden, relief was at hand! As early as 1954, the magazine *Sovetskaia zhenshchina* (Soviet Woman) proclaimed the increasing range and availability of time-saving devices and machines to help with 'women's domestic labour' (although a 'compact and beautiful' washing machine it advertised looked more like a glorified tin pail). In public addresses of 1958 and 1959, Khrushchev promised women that mechanisation would come to their aid, not only in the work place but in the home, through increased production of domestic appliances. On Lenin's authority, women were to be freed from domestic slavery by means of the electrification of housework. If the miracle of space travel had been made possible by the EVM (computer), the 'UKM' or universal food processor (*universal'naia kukhonnaia mashina*) brought scientific-technological revolution into the kitchen. As presented in *Semia i shkola*, machines in the home would not only make housework more efficient, liberating the housewife for active participation in political and economic life; regular use of new technology would also modernise its users, transforming them into fit citizens of the modern age. Soviet magazines and domestic encyclopaedias offered guidance on how to use the new vacuum cleaners, washing machines and sewing machines. Their illustrations left no doubt that these were gendered objects of desire.

Selling synthetics to women

The Khrushchev regime recognised that it was not enough to improve services but it must also increase the quantity, quality and range of consumer goods. New shopping opportunities appeared in the 1950s. The old Tsarist arcades on the site of Moscow's former Central market, Red Square, had been used as an office building under Stalin but after his death they were re-opened as one of the biggest department stores in the world, GUM (State Universal Store). Improvements were perceptible even in the provinces, for instance in supplies of footwear – or so *Ogonek* claimed. Textual assertions concerning the successful 'struggle for quality' and variety in shoe production in L'viv since 1955 were seemingly corroborated by a photograph displaying a whole range of footwear from 'sensible' to elegant, all allegedly put



Figure 3.1 ‘Only the First Quality’, *Ogonek* No. 9, 22 February 1959

Photograph by M. Savin.

out by a single factory. Foreign commentators, measuring the achievements against a different benchmark, were somewhat underwhelmed by Soviet abundance, although British visitors, with their experience of austerity and rationing at home, were more readily impressed than Americans. Richard Edmonds, touring Russia in 1958 with a British town planning delegation, reported on shopping in Stalingrad: ‘the Government is clearly bent on raising standards, and has, indeed given a series of target dates for the complete elimination of some of the shortages ... The shoe shortage is probably not as obvious as once it was, but the foreign visitor is still likely to be accosted outside his hotel and offered a generous price for his shoes.’

Footwear was a barometer of urbanity and well-being. John Gunther found that the lack of stylish or good quality clothing made Russians:

acutely conscious of the clothes foreigners wear, particularly their shoes ... The whole country has a fixation on shoes. Moscow is the city where, if Anita Ekberg should walk down the street with nothing on but shoes, people would stare at her feet first.

Maurice Hindus, taking an excursion around the new Soviet woman’s body in 1958, lowered his eyes to observe that ‘women were better shod than at any time since the coming of the Soviets: round toes, heavy soles, thick flat heels, were visibly out of favor with the younger generation; even spiked heels had come to Leningrad.’

Western reporters brought with them the stereotype of Soviet women as drab, dowdy, and devoid of ‘femininity’. John Gunther grumbled in 1958: ‘Clothes have



Figure 3.2 ‘Shopping in Sverdlovsk’, *Ogonek* No. 11, 8 March 1959

Photograph by I. Tiufanov.

no shape; but then neither have most Russian women.’ He conceded that clothes had improved in recent years, ‘but they are still revolting. Their positive shabby manginess, as well as cheap quality and lack of colour, is beyond description.’

At last, however, Gunther noted with evident relief, ‘Women, within the circumscriptions of Soviet puritanism, are being encouraged to prettify themselves; a good many beauty shops exist in Moscow, and courses have even been set up to teach women how to use mild cosmetics, clean up their skin, and so forth. The quality and style of clothes are becoming more Western every year; high-heels and bouffant hair-dos are quite common.’ The Western journalist-flâneur, strolling the streets of Moscow, reinserted woman in her traditional role as passive object of the male gaze.

He was not alone, however; Soviet specialists and the popular press also called for women to recover their lost femininity and reconstructed women as a spectacle. A 1956 publication on the ‘Solution of the Woman Question in the USSR’ protested that labour and equality had *not* made Soviet women ‘grow ugly and lose their femininity. Having ceased to be the “weaker sex” they continue to belong to the fair sex.’ The press began to discuss fashionable dress and hairstyles, cosmetics, perfume, jewellery and other attributes of femininity, and to encourage women to ‘cultivate physical attractiveness’. It must be emphasised that this was not instead of, but in addition to the requirement for women to play an active role in production and public life. The issue of *Ogonek* for International Women’s Day, 1959, ran a photo feature celebrating women working in a range of jobs which elided any conflict

between the role of active worker and passive spectacle. It included a photograph captioned with a statement about the importance of a good dressmaker: 'a new, beautiful dress is always a joy for a woman (just as it is by the way for a man).' Another depicted women shoppers buying perfume in a Sverdlovsk department store, with the caption: 'Doesn't a shop assistant behind the counter remind you a bit of an actress on the stage? All the time before the eyes of the people, all the time displaying her art' (see Figure 3.2). Indeed, shop assistants were to be not merely purveyors of material goods but of communist values and behaviour norms, whereby the corrupting potential of consumption might be mitigated. In their public role as educators they had a responsibility to dress with exemplary taste.

It may seem contradictory that under a rather austere regime of rational consumption, what the exemplary shop assistant in *Ogonek's* feature was selling was perfume. Soviet perfume production had already become a matter for central state planning in the Stalinist 1930s, although output was not high. However, with the rationalisation of needs under Khrushchev, the status of this luxury attribute of bourgeois and aristocratic lifestyles of the past required some rhetorical investment to reconstruct it as a democratic luxury whose availability signified the achievement of gracious living and abundance for all. The 1960 Women's Day issue of *Ogonek* included an article on the history and production of perfume, occasioned by the New Dawn perfume factory's launch of a new range of fragrances. Where, in the past, perfume was a luxury available only to kings and queens, it had now become an everyday item of contemporary, socialist life, the magazine emphasised. Nevertheless, it was to be seen strictly as a gift, such as might be typically given to women on International Women's Day by men who thereby expressed, on behalf of the state, the gratitude and respect due to women for their continued contribution as both workers and mothers. The democratisation of this luxury was made possible by modern science and industry; it was chemistry that had freed the art of perfumery from reliance on precious oils and essences by synthesising natural aromas. A photograph illustrating the article represented the parfumeur silhouetted against rows of phials like a conductor or operator before complex space control panels, thus synthesising the magic of musical harmony and the alchemist's art with that of modern science. The moral was that Soviet women should accept modern, synthetic scents such as 'Sputnik' or 'Krasnaia Moskva' (Red Moscow); they might not be as potent or enduring as those of the past, but they were cheaper and available to the masses. Ridiculing Soviet women who craved French perfume, the press claimed that Soviet perfumes were at least as good: even foreigners bought 'Krasnaia Moskva'! This agenda would suggest that the promotion of Soviet perfumes was aimed at least in part at curbing black market trade in foreign perfumes.

The expansion of the Soviet chemicals industry, especially synthetics, was a central commitment of the Seven-Year Plan. The increase of perfume production was just one of the ways even investment in heavy industry could be promoted to women as a gift from the paternal (or, rather, uxorial) state that benefited them in their traditionally female roles. Here, too, there was an element of peaceful competition. As Nixon proudly explained in the 'Kitchen Debate', the American system was

designed to place the latest scientific inventions and techniques – often developed for defence purposes – at the benefit of the consumer. Indeed, the symbiosis of defence and consumer industries was fundamental to the American economy. While no such felicitous economic symbiosis could exist in the Soviet Union – on the contrary, competing for the same state resources, consumption and heavy industry were in contradiction – nevertheless, promotion of the spin-offs for the consumer could domesticate the scientific-technological revolution and legitimate continued investment in defence and space exploration.

Chemicals were the housewife's new friend, *Ogonek* sang, an aid in her domestic chores. On a trip to Siberia, where the chemicals industry was developing rapidly, Khrushchev advocated mass production of disposable paper diapers 'to save women's labour'. Synthetic fibres and leather substitutes also enabled increased production of furnishings, clothing and footwear, while plastics could be used for kitchenware and tableware. A feature on the Moscow Exhibition of Economic Achievements in *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 13 June 1959, was illustrated with a photograph of two women in the Chemicals Industry pavilion viewing a stand set out like a long shop window displaying synthetic fabrics, garments and simulated fur coats. Plastics could even be used to extend the benefits of modernity to nomadic herdsmen in the mountains of Kirghizia by the development of a synthetic yurt! However, just as it was necessary to convince Kirghiz nomads that plastics were better than felt, it was essential to persuade women that synthetic materials, like synthetic scents, were not a vulgar ersatz but practical, contemporary and even, in their own way, beautiful.

The management of fashion

One of the most visible innovations the chemicals industry offered Soviet women was the chemical perm. Like many consumer items, however, Soviet perms left much to be desired. Maurice Hindus was struck by changes in women's comportment during his 14-year absence, and by their newly fashionable dress and hairstyles. All along Nevskii Prospekt he encountered:

a parade of permanent waves such as I had never seen before in Leningrad or in any other city. But even to my uncritical masculine eyes, there was something wrong about these permanents: naturally lustrous tresses had been baked to a frizzled stiffness, demonstrating the ineptitude of the new beauty parlors that have mushroomed all over the Soviet Union. The home permanents that can be bought cheaply in any American drugstore have not yet crossed the Soviet frontier. What a happy day it will be for Russian women when they are put on the market, not in driblets but on a mass scale.

Whether the arrival of the home perm was to mark the advent of Communism or its end Hindus did not say.

As consumer goods became more readily available – including, alongside Soviet production, a trickle of imported clothes and cosmetics – *New York Times* reporter Harrison E. Salisbury also noted that women had begun to dress more fashionably,

even sexily, and that public attitudes had grown less prudish. Hindus, likewise, reported:

The most sensational thing I encountered on the Nevsky was a display in the window of a women's dress shop: two manikins draped in strapless evening dresses, one green, the other rose-colored. I almost gasped. In all the years I had been going to the theater ..., I had never known a Russian woman, however highly placed, to appear in such daring dress, with arms and shoulders bared and quite a bit of bust revealed.

If ideological objections had been moderated, the centrally controlled pricing system remained a major deterrent against excessive fashion-following. It constituted a form of rationing. Better clothing, footwear and consumer durables, if they could be found, were prohibitively expensive. Nor were such glamorous dresses widely available at any price; the display on the Nevskii was the only one Hindus came across. 'I could only assume that the state was making a promise that it was not yet in a position to fulfil.' Similarly, a 1961 *Sunday Times* album on Russia included a photograph of window shoppers gazing at the latest fashions shown by GUM, with the caption: 'Few can afford these clothes, but the increased availability of goods gives the Russian people a special incentive to continue striving.' According to Gunther, 'The government knows perfectly well that the rank and file of people are yearning not merely for ordinary consumer goods – pots and pans – but for luxuries like cameras, electric refrigerators, bicycles, sporting guns, and, a curious item, chandeliers. Because it will not, in the present phase, release enough productive power to manufacture such articles in quantity, the government deliberately prices them out of reach.' Khrushchev allegedly gave a somewhat different reason:

We are producing an ever-growing quantity of all kinds of consumer goods; all the same, we must not force the pace unreasonably as regards the lowering of prices. We don't want to lower prices to such an extent that there will be queues and a black market.

The Soviet, or at least Moscow, public was increasingly exposed to western fashions in the late 1950s. Foreign collections were shown in Moscow by official invitation, including, most spectacularly, Christian Dior in 1959. In accordance with the Nylon War scenario, Harrison Salisbury surmised that pressure from below, and specifically from women, had compelled the Soviet government to mollify its former unqualified condemnation of foreign fashion:

Dior was brought in because the government wants to take the Russian woman out of her flowered print and give her a chance to look like her Western sisters. Why? Because, I would guess, the Russian woman wants to look like her Western sisters and the present Russian government can see no reason of policy why she should not. Neither puritanism nor emphasis on heavy industry is going to divert the Russian woman much longer from the heritage of her sex, the right and opportunity to look just as pretty as she wants to.

Dior made no concessions to the potential conservatism of the Soviet public or its representatives, bringing the same extravagant collection as it had shown in Paris.

As the American journalist reported to his home readership, the Moscow audience received Dior fashions either with 'bulging eyes and dropped jaws', or with a hostility that, he assumed, only thinly masked envy. 'They're pretty but they're not for Moscow', he recorded the response of a young woman he describes sniffily as 'a saucy-looking blond in a cheap blue print dress and cheap red sandals'. But even as this Moscow floosy called the designs 'terrible' and 'too extreme', Salisbury could 'almost see her comparing her sleazy dress, probably her best, with the gorgeous creation on the model'. Their protestations aside, Salisbury found proof of their real desire for such fashion: 'Within a week or two you began to see girls on Gorky Street wearing imitations of the more simple Dior styles. Spike heels appeared, dreadfully expensive, in the new House of Shoe Styles. The demand for sheer Western nylons became greater than ever. On the bathing beaches Russian girls began to wear suits of good quality, form-fitting, rubberised silk.'

Other Western commentators, likewise, assumed that Soviet women yearned to wear Dior-type fashions and that the arrival of Dior connoted the long-awaited end of austerity and new possibilities of femininity just as it did in postwar Britain. Yet Dior was not universally embraced throughout Europe. In Germany, readers' letters to the women's magazine *Constanze* expressed revulsion at Dior's extravagant New Look: 'Do we have to dance to this tune, we in our poor, defeated country with its millions of unemployed and displaced people, must we try to imitate this monstrous extravagance, which is not based on any real need?' The possibility that Soviet women, too, might resent such displays of extravagance merits serious consideration, whether it is seen as false consciousness or as an 'authentic' expression of self-identity. British observer Wright Miller maintained that only an exhibitionist minority of Russian women would imitate the extremes of western fashion. Gunther, too, contradicted himself by admitting:

Russians may be jealous of the clothes western visitors wear, but seldom admit it. This is a thoroughly indoctrinated country. ... Some dedicated Russians are, I would say, actually proud of their plainness, even of their poverty. They *like* hardship. That mildewed suit is a badge of honour, because it proves virtue and sacrifice.

Dior had come to Moscow by official invitation. However, the Soviet government could not be seen to be licensing Soviet women and the clothing trade to conclude that Dior's exaggerated and extravagant styles were an appropriate model to adopt uncritically for Soviet fashion. Like the American Exhibition, the Dior show had to be mediated and positioned as an extreme to be avoided, and responses to it directed and contained. The effects of the Soviet public's new exposure even to less extreme Western styles, and of the cautious legitimization of the very idea of fashion, were tempered by advice on how to tame it.

Articles on fashion began to appear regularly in the press. This confirmed that fashion was not unconditionally a bourgeois perversion, but was a legitimate phenomenon of contemporary socialist life. At the same time, however, such articles set limits on its acceptable parameters. The newspaper of the predominantly female teaching profession, *Uchitel'skaia gazeta* (Teachers' Gazette), distinguished Soviet

fashion from the capitalist phenomenon; where in the West it was an elitist excess, dictated by profit hungry couture houses, here it was defined by democratic consensus. To be fashionable meant to be 'contemporary', that is: 'to have proportions and lines which are pleasing to the majority of people today'. The newspaper advised teachers on whether they should dress fashionably in school, an important issue because, like the shop assistant discussed above, she was constantly on display: 'Scores of children's eyes study the teacher's appearance every day', and this 'exercises an influence on their aesthetic education'. Therefore, the teacher had a professional obligation to dress tastefully in order to inculcate good taste. Yet her appearance need not lack feminine charm nor be unfashionable. On the contrary, taste demanded a measured use of fashion.

Fashion, simplicity, convenience, practicality, good taste, and moderation: the rules set out in *Uchitel'skaia gazeta* were reiterated in numerous publications, with only small variations of emphasis according to their readership. The imperatives of reason and moderation applied also to the use of cosmetics; *Uchitel'skaia gazeta* allowed that these might be used with restraint, but 'overly bright lipstick, bits of colour on the eyelids and red nail varnish make any woman look vulgar'. Women should also use perfumes with moderation, lest they smell like a hairdressing salon (men should only use a dab of cologne as after-shave).

The yawning Avos'ka

In the Soviet authorities' bad dream of consumption the *avos'ka* transformed itself into a yawning abyss that would swallow up whatever was thrown into its unfathomable depths and – like a parodic inversion of that ubiquitous Stalinist symbol, the cornucopia – would demand ever more. They feared Soviet citizens', and especially women's, potential for excessive, unwarranted consumerism. Once unleashed, women's 'natural' acquisitiveness and potentially insatiable desire for glamour and comfort might prove the Achilles' heel of socialism. Western eyewitnesses in the late 1950s confirmed the 'reckless mood' of shoppers in GUM. The organisers of the American Exhibition welcomed, even incited their Soviet visitors to disorderly behaviour and petty theft as an expression of their uncontrollable excitement and desire: 'Curiosity is getting the better of some of the spectators. American toys proved so fascinating that some disappeared in the crowds. One man cut a pillow open to see what was inside. Another opened and sampled a package of frozen pastry to find out how it tasted.' Such American reports of the demeaning spectacle of normally disciplined Soviet citizens, unable to contain their curiosity and desire, scrambling for American gewgaws, were inflected by a premature colonialist triumphalism and should be read with scepticism. Nevertheless, Soviet agitators at the exhibition also recorded with distaste 'a ridiculous commotion' near the fashion show and a pathetic eagerness to take home used Pepsi-Cola cups as souvenirs.

Had the agitators been as concerned about male consumers they might have noted with equal distaste the enthusiasm of the crowd admiring General Motors'

cars, consisting of both men and women. But Soviet anxieties focused on American plans to distribute free samples of consumer products specifically designed to appeal to, and inflate, the desires and expectations of Soviet women, in particular cosmetics and children's toys. The authorities vetoed the handout on the grounds that it would cause a life-threatening stampede on the pavilion.

A spectre haunted the regime: the nightmare vision of marauding women spilling into the streets armed with infinitely expanding *avos'ki*. Historical precedents corroborated such fears, warning that if provisions or property were under threat women could erupt in violent civil disorder with regime-threatening effect. It was the introduction of bread rationing and threat of shortages which had brought women textile workers out on the streets on International Women's Day 1917 and, with this, the February Revolution had begun. Most recently, the 1953 mass uprising in East Germany was precipitated by material concerns, and it was women, above all, who articulated such concerns.

Rationalising domesticity

The Khrushchev regime had promised abundance to secure its legitimacy. But it could not afford to leave 'abundance' undefined without radically reducing defence expenditure, and this, in the end, was out of the question. There was also continued *ideological* antipathy towards consumerism, which was still regarded as inherently bourgeois and potentially corrosive of the collectivist, activist spirit which Khrushchevist ideologues were concerned, above all, to mobilise. As Komsomol chief V.E. Semichastnyi worried at the Twenty-First Party Congress, 'We still instill in children the idea of "my toy" instead of "our toy".' The potentially corrupting effect of increased availability of consumer goods and housing – especially of the single-family flat which Khrushchev had promised for all – had to be counteracted through ideological work to forestall any tendency towards acquisitiveness or complacency.

The greatest positive effort was invested in inculcating correct (or 'rational') attitudes towards consumption in regard to the home. To provide homes for all was the most urgent improvement in living standards in the 1950s, and Khrushchev made this a priority. But if every family was to have its own apartment, as Khrushchev promised, the new flats had to be small and cheaply built, with no frills. The relative austerity of the new housing reflected not only economic constraints but continued ideological opposition to the nuclear family and domesticity. Since the material milieu of daily life was held to determine consciousness, a secluded domestic environment, encumbered with the trappings of a petit-bourgeois lifestyle would ensnare its occupants in petit-bourgeois values and fetishism, which would inhibit progress towards a fully collectivist, communist mindset. The one-family flat was a necessary interim measure until the new way of life could be fully implemented, by which time communal services would provide an irresistibly attractive alternative. As a 29-year-

old woman architect-engineer, wrote in response to one of *Komsomol'skaia pravda's* public opinion surveys:

A separate, isolated apartment which opens only onto a stair landing encourages an individualistic, bourgeois attitude in families – 'my house!' But soon it will be possible to walk out of an apartment straight into a pleasant thoroughway with flowers and paths leading to the house café, the library, the movie hall, the children's playrooms. This new kind of housing will have an effect on the family spirit. The women will no longer resist the idea of service installations and apartment house kitchens, saying: 'I can do it faster myself at home!'

Thus women were not to become overly attached to their new domestic realm: as in *Ogonek's* cartoon they were to lead the exodus from the home.

The housing programme gave many the privacy of their own, one-family apartments for the first time, affording fewer opportunities for surveillance than the old communal living. But it was counterbalanced by concerted efforts to intervene in the terms of domestic life, to counter the individualistic tendencies it might foster, to rationalise and discipline domesticity and propagate a new regime of austere 'contemporary' taste in home furnishing. 'It is necessary,' Khrushchev asserted, 'not only to provide people with good homes, but also to teach them ... to live correctly, and to observe the rules of socialist communality. This will not come about of its own accord, but must be achieved through protracted, stubborn struggle for the triumph of the new communist way of life.'

Like many aspects of Khrushchevism, the didactic efforts to promulgate austere, modern taste harked back to the utopian campaigns of the 1920s for the '*novyi byt*'. But while the aesthetic parameters of modernity embodied in the 'contemporary style' derived in part from Constructivism, this was less a matter of direct imitation (the actual production of the Constructivists was not yet widely known) but more of a reengagement with the international Modern Movement which the Russian movement had informed. The stripped-down, modernist Soviet design aesthetic of the early 1960s owed as much to contemporary Czech and Scandinavian design as to Russian antecedents. It also had much in common with the modernist conception of taste promoted in Britain by the Council of Industrial Design and by taste professionals such as Eric Newton.

Voluntary acceptance of new norms in domestic life was encouraged by a proliferation of articles and manuals on family and everyday life, taste and etiquette, which publishing houses began to produce in increasing numbers in the late 1950s. Construed as housewives and consumers, women were ascribed the leading role in the production of aesthetic value and social meaning in the home. Household advice was consistently addressed to the female '*khoziaika*' [housewife] and constituted an important rubric in manuals for adolescent girls. Such advice set about weaning Soviet women from acquisitiveness and desire for cosy domesticity. Throughout the Soviet period, these had been consistently stereotyped as female traits, although their valency had oscillated between 'philistine' and '*kul'turnyi*'. During the Cultural Revolution, women were regarded as the most deeply imbricated in the

old way of life, its material culture and the regressive ideology it reified, 'often derided as the preservers of coziness and collections of useless petit-bourgeois objects for the domestic hearth.' Beginning in the mid-thirties, and intensifying in the postwar period, as Vera Dunham has shown so persuasively, the feminine arts of cosy homemaking – symbolised by bright cologne bottles, orange lampshades and red, polka-dotted tea cups – acquired new respectability. In the Khrushchev era the concept of cosiness continued to be identified with 'the idea of an attentive female hand'. It was redefined, however, in austere, modern terms opposed to those of the bourgeois and Stalinist past: 'We have no right to mercantile luxury!' Women were now charged with responsibility for rationalising domestic labour, organising domestic space, and introducing into the home a stripped-down, modern aesthetic, the 'contemporary style', poles apart from the philistine penchant for padding and plush of the Stalin period.

Female-oriented features in periodicals and advice manuals prescribed a normative, conception of good taste in furnishing and home decorating, based, like those for dress, on modernist, rationalist imperatives of simplicity, functionality and 'no excesses!' A small, simply furnished room where everything went well together could more clearly manifest the housewife's contemporary good taste than any amount of expensive furniture, carpets, ornaments and chandeliers. Pretentious, dust-catching chandeliers should be replaced by simple, cup-shaped opaque glass shades reflecting the light off the ceiling. In the interest of convenience, hygiene, aesthetics, and contemporaneity, the new, small apartment must not be overloaded with ornate, cumbersome furniture. Instead, low, light, simple and multifunctional furniture were to be preferred. It is not coincidental that such furniture also lent itself to efficient, economical mass production.

Even if new furniture could not be bought, the domestic space should be rationalised and purged of such tasteless clutter. A 1959 manual for teenage girls, who lacked the means and authority in the parental home for more radical transformations, printed a make-over comparison with the recommendation to remove all superfluous embellishments; replace oil paintings in ornate, dust catching frames – once a sign of *kul'turnost* – by flat prints and reproductions; and strip away the embroideries and draperies which cover every surface in the 'before' image.

The presence or absence of embroidered cloths was a particularly charged symbol of the old and new domesticity. Draped over tables, domesticating and customising such modern, standardised equipment as radios or televisions, in the form of antimacassars or luxuriant bed covers, the profusion of embroidered draperies was deeply imbricated in traditional notions of comfort, homecraft and female worth. They had been an essential part of a girl's trousseau in old Russia. Under Stalin, as Victor Buchli has noted, given the dearth of consumer goods, embroidering and arranging such cloths, constituted one of the only ways an individual could exercise any control over her physical environment, a means to appropriate and individualise standard-issue domestic space. These artefacts represented the exercise of women's personal taste and skill in their design, production and deployment. The requirement to purge the home of these signs of female diligence and individualisation of the

standard living space created a tension between women's traditional homemaking competencies and the new conception of good housekeeping which required of them a rationalising, standardising role.

The Thaw, traditionally regarded as a period of liberalization, saw no liberalisation of attitudes towards consumption and the domestic realm. On the contrary, intervention in the forms and practices of daily life was an essential aspect of the way the Khrushchev regime sought to maintain its authority and bring about the transition to Communism. 'Everyday life' – as the title of a brochure for agitators proclaimed – 'is not a private matter'. The female domain of good housekeeping had become a public and even state affair, one requiring codification, education and even professionalisation. As the party-state's agents, delegated to introduce its modern, 'rational' norms of living into family life, women had an important public role to play in the transition to communist self-government. Yet, if this to some extent dismantled the gendered opposition of public and private, personal and political realms, it, at the same time, reproduced the traditional gender segregation of responsibilities. Men were conspicuously absent from this discourse on consumption and domesticity. As Victor Buchli has observed: 'It was the woman/housewife who was the pathologised object of reform.'

How successful was this pervasive effort to wean women from their 'natural' acquisitiveness, to reform the aesthetics of daily life, and 'modernise' women's conceptions of comfort, taste and good housekeeping? In spite of their investment in discovering the consumerist heart beating beneath Soviet women's drab exterior, even western commentators such as Gunther, as we saw, acknowledged that some Soviet people, at least, were ambivalent towards consumerism. The same female respondent to *Komsomol'skaia pravda's* survey cited above regarding the use of communal services envisaged a future unburdened by personal possessions: 'I know the time will come when a husband and wife moving into a new apartment will take along only a couple of suitcases of personal clothing, favourite books and toothbrushes.' Meanwhile, a thirty-year-old 'housewife' regretted having married for money: 'today I have everything – a TV set, a refrigerator, a radio, a vacuum cleaner, a washing machine, a Volga car – but not love; and all these material comforts about which so many other people dream merely weigh me down, throttle me, don't let me breathe.' Such statements may not be taken unconditionally as proof of a thoroughgoing internalisation of rational consumption norms and 'contemporary' aesthetics. They do, none the less, indicate a level of acquiescence insofar as the respondents consent to articulate themselves in terms of the values and persona expected of them. They also acquiesce in the effort to make homelife and shopping habits matters of public discourse – to lay the *avos'ka* open to inspection. On the other hand, the extent to which rational norms of living were resisted, and atavistic, 'petit-bourgeois' ideals of cosiness prevailed is suggested by contemporary observers' descriptions of Soviet homes around 1960, in which 'the *pièce de résistance* was the drapery, heavily and garishly embroidered'. Children, invited to draw pictures of their homes in 1962, even after regular instruction in aesthetics horrified their teachers by producing images that epitomised philistine taste, replete with little elephants, kittens and embroidered

napkins. As Svetlana Boym concludes from an analysis of 'Aunt Liuba's' commode, still cluttered with clashing ornaments at the end of the Soviet period:

The campaign against 'domestic trash' did not triumph in the majority of the communal apartments. Instead ... the so-called domestic trash rebelled against the ideological purges and remained as the secret residue of privacy that shielded people from imposed and internalised communality.

References

- Abramenko, L. and L. Tormozova, eds, (1959), *Besedy o domashnem khoziastve* (Moscow), p. 3.
- Aizenshtat, O. (1962) 'Neuvazhenie k plastmasse,' *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR* (henceforth *DI SSSR*), no. 1, pp. 46-7.
- Anatolii Rubinov, (1991) *Intimnaia zhizn' Moskvy* (Moscow), pp. 217-220.
- Ansorg, L. and R. Hürtgen, 'The Myth of Female Emancipation: Contradictions in Women's Lives', in K. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience*, pp. 163-176.
- Attwood, Lynne, (1999) *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53* (Basingstoke).
- Azhgikhina, N. and H. Goscilo, (1996) 'Getting Under their Skin: The Beauty Salon in Russian Women's Lives,' in H. Goscilo and B. Holmgren, *Russia. Women. Culture* (Bloomington), p. 101.
- Baiar, O. and R. N. Blashkevich, (1962) *Kvartira i ee ubranstvo* (Moscow).
- Baiar, Ol'ga, (1956) 'Sdelaem kvartiru udobnoi i uiutnoi,' *Sovetskaia zhenshchina*, no. 7, pp. 47-48.
- Bal'termants Dmitrii and V. Viktorov, (1959) 'Davaite razlozhim svoi "tovary",' *Ogonek*, no. 10 (1 March), pp. 4-7.
- Barker, Adele Marie, ed., (1999) *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex and Society since Gorbachev* (Durham).
- Barker, Adele Marie, (1999) 'The Culture Factory' in A. M. Barker, *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex and Society since Gorbachev* (Durham), pp. 29-31.
- Betts, Paul, (2000) 'The Twilight of the Idols; East German Memory and Material Culture,' *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 72, no. 3 (September), pp. 731-765.
- Bil'shai, Vera, (1956) *Reshenie zhenskogo voprosa v SSSR*, (Moscow) p. 208.
- Borushko, V., (1960) 'Khoroshie budut khoziaiki,' *Ogonek* no. 10 (March), p. 24.
- Boym, Svetlana, (1994) *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life* (Cambridge, MA).
- Breslauer, George W., (1980) 'Khrushchev Reconsidered,' in S. Cohen, A. Rabinowitch and R. Sharlet, eds., *The Soviet Union since Stalin* (Bloomington), p. 59.
- Briuno, A., (1960) 'Vasha kvartira,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 10, pp. 46-7.
- Brown, John, (1959) *Russia Explored* (New York) p. 126.
- Buchli, Victor, (1997) 'Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against Petit-Bourgeois Consciousness in the Soviet Home,' *Journal of Design History*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 161-176.

- Buchli, Victor, (1999) *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford), p. 138.
- Carter, Erica, (1984) 'Alice in the Consumer Wonderland' in A. McRobbie and M. Nava, *Gender and Generation* (London), pp. 185-214.
- Carter, Erica, (1997) *How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor).
- Chaikovskaia, R., (1954) 'Dlia domashnego khoziaistva,' *Sovetskaia zhenshchina*, no. 11, pp. 44-5.
- Chereiskaia, M., (1962) 'Zametki o khoroshem vkuse', *Podruga*, pp. 220-234.
- Ciesla B. and P. G. Poutrus, (1999) 'Food Supply in a Planned Economy. SED Nutrition Policy between Crisis Response and Popular Needs', in Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-cultural History of the GDR*, transl. Eve Duffy (Oxford), p. 157.
- Clunas, Craig, (1999) 'Modernity Global and Local: Consumption and the Rise of the West', *American Historical Review*, vol. 104, no. 5 (December), pp. 1497-1511.
- Condée, Nancy and Vladimir Padunov, (1995) 'The ABC of Russian Consumer Culture', in Nancy Condée, ed., *Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late Twentieth-Century Russia* (Bloomington), pp. 130-172.
- Confino, Alon and Rudy Koshar, (2001) 'Régimes of Consumer Culture: New Narratives in Twentieth-Century German History', in *German History*, vol. 19, no. 2, special issue on 'Régimes of Consumer Culture', guest edited by Alon Confino and Rudy Koshar, pp. 135-161.
- Crankshaw, Edward, (1956) *Russia without Stalin* (New York), pp. 242-243.
- Crowley, David, (2000) 'Warsaw's Shops, Stalinism and the Thaw', in S. Reid and D. Crowley, *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford), pp. 33-34.
- Davis, Belinda, (1996) 'Food Scarcity and the Empowerment of the Female Consumer in I World War 1 Berlin,' in V. de Grazia and E. Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley and Los Angeles), pp. 287-310.
- de Grazia, Victoria and Ellen Furlough, eds, (1996) *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley and Los Angeles).
- Demezer, A. A. and M. L. Dziuba, (1957) *Domovodstvo* (Moscow).
- Dodd, Marta, (1959) 'Pod pozolochennym kupolom,' *Ogonek*, no. 32 (2 August), p. 5.
- Dunham, Vera S., (1976) *In Stalin's Time; Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge).
- Edmonds, Richard, (1958) *Russian Vistas: The Record of a Springtime Journey* (London) p. 111.
- Edmondson, Linda, (1993) 'Women's Emancipation and Theories of Sexual Difference in Russia, 1850-1917,' in M. Liljeström, E. Mäntysaari, A. Rosenholm, eds, *Gender Restructuring in Russian Studies* (Tampere), pp. 39-52.
- Efremova, L., (1961) 'Moda, vkus, prostota,' *Uchitel'skaia gazeta*, 3 January.
- Efremova, L., (1959) 'Ob odezhde uchitel'nitsy,' *Uchitel'skaia gazeta*, 26 September.
- Fehér, Ferenc, Agnes Heller, György Márkus, (1983) *Dictatorship over Needs* (Oxford).

- Field, Deborah Ann, (1996) 'Communist Morality and Meanings of Private Life in Post-Stalinist Russia, 1953-1964,' Ph.D. diss. (University of Michigan).
- Fitzpatrick, Sheila, (1992) 'Becoming Cultured: Socialist Realism and the Representation of Privilege and Taste,' in S. Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press), pp. 216-237.
- Fitzpatrick, Sheila, (1999) *Everyday Stalinism* (New York).
- Foucault, Michel, (1979) 'Governmentality,' *Ideology and Consciousness* 6, pp. 5-21.
- Gerchuk, Iurii, (1962) 'Dekorativnaia grafika,' in *DI SSSR*, no. 3, pp. 31-33.
- Gerchuk, Iurii, (1991) 'S tochki zreniia shestidesiatnika,' *DI SSSR*, no. 7, p. 9.
- Gerchuk, Iurii, (2000) 'The Aesthetics of Everyday Life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the USSR (1954-64),' in S. Reid and D. Crowley, *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford), pp. 81-99.
- Gilson, Jerome M., (1975) *The Soviet Image of Utopia* (Baltimore), p. 176.
- Goldstein, Darra, (1996) 'Domestic Porkbarreling in Nineteenth-Century Russia, or Who Holds the Keys to the Larder?' in H. Goscilo and B. Holmgren, eds, *Russia. Women. Culture* (Bloomington), p. 147.
- Gömöri, G., (1963) '"Consumerism" in Hungary', *Problems of Communism*, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 64.
- Gorsuch, Anne E., (2000) *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington).
- Gronberg, Tag, (2001) 'Siting the Modern,' (review article) *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36, no. 4 (October), pp. 681-689.
- Gunther, John, (1964) *Inside Russia Today* (Harmondsworth, rev. ed. [first published 1958]).
- Hanson, Phillip, (1974) *Advertising and Socialism: the Nature and Extent of Consumer Advertising in the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia* (London and Basingstoke).
- Hauslohner, Peter, (1991) 'Politics before Gorbachev: De-Stalinization and the Roots of Reform,' in A. Dallin and G.W. Lapidus, eds, *The Soviet System in Crisis* (Boulder, CO), pp. 37-56.
- Havel, Václav, (1985) *The Power of the Powerless* (London).
- Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, (1990) *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism, 1914-1932*, exh. cat (New York).
- Hessler, Julie, (1998) 'A Postwar Perestroika? Towards a History of Private Enterprise in the USSR', *Slavic Review*, no. 3, pp. 516-542.
- Hessler, Julie, (1996) 'Culture of Shortages: A Social History of Soviet Trade, 1917-1953' (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago).
- Higgins, Marguerite, (1955) *Red Plush and Black Bread* (New York).
- Hixson, Walter L., (1997) *Parting the Curtain. Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (Basingstoke).
- Hodnett, Grey, ed., (1974) *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Volume 4: The Khrushchev Years 1953-1964* (Toronto), pp. 167-264.

- Holt, Alix, (1980) 'Domestic Labour and Soviet Society,' in J. Brine, M. Perrie and A. Sutton, eds., *Home, School and Leisure in the Soviet Union* (London), p. 33.
- Humphrey, Caroline, (1995) 'Creating a Culture of Disillusionment: Consumption in Moscow, A Chronicle of Changing Times,' in Daniel Miller, ed., *Worlds Apart. Modernity through the Prism of the Local* (London and New York), pp. 43-68.
- Inkeles, Alex, (1968) *Social Change in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.).
- Inness, Sherrie A., ed., (2000) *Kitchen Culture in America* (Philadelphia).
- Ishimov, Vl., (1958) 'Khimik – sil'nee prirody,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 3, pp. 38-40.
- Johnson, Terry, (1993) 'Expertise and the State', in M. Gane and T. Johnson, eds, *Foucault's New Domains* (London and New York), pp. 140-144.
- Kargopolov, A. (1958) 'Kolkhoznitsy obsuzhdaiut knigu "Domovodstvo",' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 1.
- Kartna-Alas, Mil'vi, (1960) 'Iskusstvo i byt,' *Ogonek*, no. 25 (19 June), pp. 20-22.
- Keep, John, (1995) *The Last of the Empires* (Oxford).
- Kelly, C. and V. Volkov, (1998) 'Directed Desires,' in C. Kelly and D. Shepherd, *Constructing Russian Culture* (Oxford), p. 293.
- Kelly, Catriona, (1998) 'Creating a Consumer: Advertising and Commercialization,' in C. Kelly and D. Shepherd, eds, *Russian Cultural Studies* (Oxford), pp. 223-246.
- Kerblay, Basile, (1983) *Modern Soviet Society*, transl. R. Swyer (New York).
- Kettering, Karen, (1997) "'Ever more Cosy and Comfortable": Stalinism and the Soviet Domestic Interior, 1928-1938,' *Journal of Design History*, 10, no. 2, pp. 119-136.
- Kharkhordin, O., (1996) 'Reveal and Dissimulate: A Genealogy of Private Life in Soviet Russia', in J. Weintraub and K. Kumar, eds, *Public and Private in Thought and Practice* (Chicago), pp. 333-363.
- Khrabrova, N., (1960) 'V poiskakh krasivovo, udobnogo,' *Ogonek*, no. 10, (March), pp. 15-16.
- Kolchinskaiia, N., (1959) 'Odevaisia prosto i krasivo,' in R. Saltanova and N. Kolchinskaiia, eds. *Podruga* (Moscow), pp. 335-351.
- Krasnova, Z. (1960) 'Khoroshii vkus v ubranstve zhil'ia,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 1, pp. 44-45.
- Krasnova, Z., (1959) 'Vasha kukhnia,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 11, pp. 46-47.
- Kulikovskaia, G., (1959) 'Pronikaiushchaia v zvezdy,' *Ogonek*, no. 11 (8 March), p. 11.
- Kuprin, O., (1959) *Byt – ne chastnoe delo* (Moscow).
- Kuvykin, S., (1959) 'Kachestvo, eshche raz kachestvo,' *Izvestiia* (23 October).
- Langenhan, D. and S. Roß, 'The Socialist Glass Ceiling: Limits to Female Careers,' in K. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience*, pp. 177-194.
- Lebina, Nataliia, (1999) *Povsednevnaia zhizn' sovetskogo goroda: normy i anomalii 1920/1930 gody* (St. Petersburg).
- Levine, Irving R., (1959) *The Real Russia* (London).
- Liubimova, G., (1964) 'Ratsional'noe oborudovanie kvartir,' *DI SSSR*, no. 6, pp. 15-18.

- Loehlin, Jennifer A., (1999) *From Rugs to Riches: Housework, Consumption and Modernity in Germany* (Oxford).
- Mace, David and Vera Mace, (1964) *The Soviet Family* (London), p. 162.
- Makarova, N., (1961) 'Iskusstvo riadom s modoi: Ne ia dlia mody, a moda dlia menia', *DI SSSR*, no. 1, pp. 39-42.
- Marling, Karal Ann, (1994) *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, Mass.).
- Matich, Olga, (1996) 'Remaking the Bed: Utopia in Daily Life,' in J. Bowlt and O. Matich, eds, *Laboratory of Dreams* (Stanford), pp. 59-78.
- Matthews, Mervyn, (1972) *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (London).
- Mehnert, Klaus, (1962) *Soviet Man and His World*, (New York).
- Merkel, Ina, (1998) 'Consumer Culture in the GDR, or How the Struggle for Antimodernity was Lost on the Battleground of Consumer Culture,' in S. Strasser, C. McGovern and M. Judt, eds, *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge), pp. 281-299.
- Miller, Wright, (1960) *Russians as People* (London).
- Naumov V., (2000) 'Repression and Rehabilitation,' in Taubman, *Nikita Khrushchev*, pp. 85-112.
- Nekrasov, V., (1962) 'Estamp v kvartire,' in *DI SSSR*, no. 3.
- Neuburger, Mary, (2000) 'Veils, Shalvari, and Matters of Dress: Unravelling the Fabric of Women's Lives in Communist Bulgaria,' in S. Reid and D. Crowley, *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford), pp. 169-188.
- Newton, Eric, (1959, 1962) *The Meaning of Beauty* (London).
- Nikol'skaia, E., (1958) 'Blagoustroistvo zhilishcha,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 1, p. 42.
- Nikol'skaia, E., (1958) 'Uiut i obstanovka v dome,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 11, pp. 46-47.
- Nikol'skaia, E., (1958) 'Umenie odevat'sia,' in *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 2, pp. 44-6.
- Nove, Alec (1962) 'Toward a Communist Welfare State?,' first published in *Problems of Communism*, Jan-Feb 1960. In Abraham Brumberg, ed., *Russia under Khrushchev. An Anthology from Problems of Communism* (London) pp. 571-590.
- Nove, Alec, (1982) *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.* (Harmondsworth, rev. ed.).
- Nove, Alec, (1975) *Stalinism and After* (London), pp. 124-128.
- Orlova, M., (1959) 'O skromnosti i devich'ei gordosti,' *Uchitel'skaia gazeta*, 16 June.
- Osokina, Elena, (2000) *Our Daily Bread; Socialist Distribution and the Art of Survival in Stalin's Russia, 1927-1941* (Armonk, N.J.).
- Osokina, Elena, (1993) *Ierarkhiia potrebleniia; O zhizni liudei v usloviakh stalinskogo snabzheniia, 1928-1935 gg.* (Moscow).
- Patito, Jennifer, (2001) 'Consumption and Logics of Social Difference in Post-Soviet Russia', Ph.D. diss., New York University.
- Pence, Katherine, (2001) "'You as a Woman Will Understand": Consumption, Gender and the Relationship between State and Citizenry in the GDR's Crisis of 17 June 1953,' *German History*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 218-252.

- Pilkington, Hilary, (1998) "'The Future is Ours': Youth Culture in Russia, 1953 to the Present', in C. Kelly and D. Shepherd, eds, *Russian Cultural Studies* (Oxford) pp. 369-371.
- Pilkington, Hilary, (1996) 'Young Women and Subcultural Lifestyles: A Case of "Irrational Needs"?', in R. Marsh, ed., *Women in Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge), pp. 173-174.
- Podol'nyi, R., (1959) 'Tekhnika nastupaet,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 12, p. 10.
- Poiger, Ute, (2000) *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley).
- Randall, Amy E., (2000) "'Revolutionary Bolshevik Work": Stakhanovism in Retail Trade,' *Russian Review*, 59 (July), pp. 425-441.
- Susan E. Reid, (1997) 'Destalinization and Taste,' *Journal of Design History*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 177-202.
- Reid, Susan E., (1999) 'Masters of the Earth: Gender and Destalinisation in Soviet Reformist Painting of the Khrushchev Thaw,' *Gender and History*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 276-312.
- Reid, Susan E. and David Crowley, eds, (2000) *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford).
- Riesman, David, (1964) *Abundance for What? And Other Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.), pp. 65-77.
- Ritvo, Herbert, (1960) 'Totalitarianism Without Coercion?,' *Problems of Communism*, 9, no. 6 (Nov-Dec), p. 26.
- Roberts, Mary Louise, (1998) 'Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture,' *American Historical Review*, vol. 103, no. 3 (June) pp. 817-844.
- Sakov, M. P., (1961) *Osnovnoi printsip kommunizma* (Moscow), p. 34.
- Salisbury, Harrison E., (1960) *To Moscow -- and Beyond*, (London).
- Saltykov, A., (1954) 'O khudozhestvennom kachestve promyshlennykh tovarov,' *Sovetskaiia torgovlia*, no. 9, pp. 22-31.
- Saltykov, Aleksandr, (1959) *O khudozhestvennom vkuse v byte* (Moscow).
- Scanlan, James, (1985) *Marxism in the USSR: A Critical Survey of Current Soviet Thought* (Ithaca).
- Scott, James C., (1998) *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven).
- Shakhnazarov, G., (1960) *Kommunizm i svoboda lichnosti* (Moscow).
- Smith, Hedrick, (1976) *The Russians* (New York).
- Sosnovy, Timothy, (1959) 'The Soviet Housing Situation Today,' *Soviet Studies*, vol. XI, no. 1 (July), pp. 6, 13.
- Steiner, André, (1998) 'Dissolution of the "Dictatorship over Needs"? Consumer Behavior and Economic Reform in East Germany in the 1960s,' in S. Strasser, C. McGovern and M. Judt, eds, *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge), pp. 167-185.
- Summers, Anne, (1997) 'On Begging to be a Bridesmaid in a Ballerina Dress: Some Meanings of British Fashion in the 1950s,' *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 44 (Autumn), pp. 227-232.

- Suny, Ronald and Arthur Adams, (1990) *The Russian Revolution and Bolshevik Victory* (Lexington, Mass., rev. ed. [Arthur Adams, 1960]).
- Taubman, W., S. Khrushchev, A. Gleason, eds, (2000) *Nikita Khrushchev* (New Haven and London).
- Thayer, Charles, (1961) *Russia* (London).
- Tompson, William J., (1995) *Khrushchev: A Political Life* (Houndmills).
- Trotskaia, T. (1960) 'Kompository aromatov', *Ogonek*, no. 10 (March), p. 25.
- Turpin, William N., (1960) 'The Outlook for the Soviet Consumer', *Problems of Communism*, vol. 9, no. 6 (Nov-Dec), pp. 30-37.
- Tyler May, Elaine, (1988) *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York).
- Veenis, Milena, (1999) 'Consumption in East Germany: The Seduction and Betrayal of Things', *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 79-112.
- Verdery, Katherine, (1996) *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton).
- Vikent'ev, L., (1960) 'Vystavka Chekhoslovakiia 1960,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 10.
- Viola, Lynne, (1992) 'Bab'i Bunty and Peasant Women's Protest during Collectivization', in B. Farnsworth and L. Viola, eds, *Russian Peasant Women* (Oxford), pp. 189-205.
- Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie stroitelei. *Sokrashchennyi stenograficheskii otchet* (1955) (Moscow).
- Vul'f, A., (1961) 'Protiv nedootsenki domovodstva,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 8, p. 47.
- Werth, Alexander, (1975) *Russia under Khrushchev*, (Westport, Conn. [first published New York, 1962]).
- Whitfield, Stephen J., (1991) *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore).
- Wicksteed, Alexander, (1928) *Life Under the Soviets* (London).
- Wilson, Elizabeth, (1977) *Women and the Welfare State* (London).
- Wood, Elizabeth, (1997) *The Baba and the Comrade*, (Bloomington).
- Zatlin, Jonathan R., (1997) 'The Vehicle of Desire: The Trabant, the Wartburg, and the End of the GDR', *German History*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 360-361.
- Zhukov, N., (1954) 'Vospitanie vkusa,' *Novyi mir*, no. 10, pp. 159-176; and readers' responses, (1955) 'O vospitanii vkusa,' *Novyi mir*, no. 2, pp. 247-254.
- Zimmerman G. and B. Lerner, (1959) 'What the Russians Will See,' *Look*, 21 July, pp. 52-54.
- Zubok, Vladislav, (2000) 'The Case of Divided Germany, 1953-1964,' in W. Taubman, S. Khrushchev, A. Gleason, eds, *Nikita Khrushchev* (New Haven and London), p. 280.

Editorials/unsigned

- "'Ivan' Takes a Look at American Life. Photo Report from Moscow', *U.S. News and World Report*, 10 August 1959, p. 42.
- 'Dobrotnye, krasivye veshchi - v nash byt!', *Izvestiia*, 16 October 1959, p. 1.
- 'Khorosho li vas obsluzhivaiut?' *Ogonek*, no. 11 (8 March 1959), p. 4.

- 'My za kul'turnuiu torgovliu! Obrashchenie rabotnikov Cheliabinskogo univermaga k rabotnikam torgovykh prepriatii Sovetskogo soiuza', *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 21 January 1959, p. 2.
- 'O ponimanii mody. Pis'mo s kommentarii,' *DI SSSR*, no. 1 (1961), pp. 40-42.
- 'Oblegchaet trud, sberegayet vremia,' *Ogonek*, no. 27 (1960).
- Ogonek*, no. 11 (8 March 1959), p. 7.
- 'Rech' tovarishcha N. S. Khrushcheva', *Pravda*, 15 March 1958.
- 'Summary of XXI (extraordinary) Party Congress,' *Soviet Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, (1959) p. 90.
- 'Umen'e odevat'sia,' *Entsiklopediia domashnego khoziastva*, pp. 262-263.
- 'Vengerskaia promyshlenniaia vystavka,' *Sem'ia i shkola*, no. 12 (1960).
- 'Vykhodnoi den,' *Ogonek*, no. 10 (4 March 1962), p. 31.
- 'Youth has Its Say on Love and Marriage', *Soviet Review*, vol. 3, no. 8 (August 1962), p. 32.
- 'Zhenshchiny, eto dlia vas!,' *Ogonek*, no. 24 (June 1960).
- About Town*, 2, no. 5 (May 1961), pp. 37, 28.
- Besedy o domashnem khoziastve*, p. 228.
- Kratkaia entsiklopediia domashnego khoziaistva*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1959), pp. 508-509.
- Moskovskii khudozhnik*, no. 10-11 (June 1959).
- Ogonek*, no. 27 (3 July 1960).
- Politcheskaia ekonomika*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1952), p. 373.

Archival

- RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 5 (Conference of TsK VLSKSM), d. 836a, ll. 51-3.
- RGALI, f. 2943, op. 1, ed. khr. 2979 (Discussion in MOSKh [Moscow Regional Artists' Union], 27 May 1959, 'Problemy formirovaniia sovremennogo stilia'), l. 54.
- RGALI (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art) f. 2329, op. 4, ed. khr. 1391 (visitors' book for exhibition *Art and Life*, Moscow, April-June 1961). Also TSALIM f. 21 op 1, dd. 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130 /check/.
- Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 26 January 1961. Responses to the questionnaire 'Your Ideas About the Young Family' were published in *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 19 December 1961, translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. 13, no. 15; and in *Soviet Review*, vol. 2, nos. 11-12 (November and December 1961), and vol. 3, no. 8 (August 1962), pp. 21-40.
- 'New Yurt for the Shepherd,' *CDSP*, vol. 13, no. 24 (1961), pp. 29-30 (*Pravda*, 12 June 1961).

PART 2

Private/Public Dynamics in Gender and Consumption

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 4

Making Sameness: Mothering, Commerce and the Culture of Children's Birthday Parties

Alison J. Clarke

There it was, in the middle of a table strewn with fresh rose petals; a home-made birthday cake in the shape of a Romany caravan. I mean, I'm not joking! It had coloured icing curtains and chocolate Flake wheels. The gift bags, napkins and plates and everything ...everything was co-ordinated with the 'folky Gypsy' theme. ...all for a bunch of three year olds who'd rather have been stuffing their faces at McDonalds anyway!

Jenny (38), mother in North London

Children's birthday parties, their organisation, design and orchestration might simply be viewed as the epitome of the 'invisible labour' of the gendered work of caring (DeVault 1991); for, as highly valorised spectacles, parties reveal the otherwise unseen consumptive and aesthetic skills of everyday nurturance. For the typical contemporary child's home-birthday party commonly involves the careful selection of a theme (Barbie, Harry Potter, wizards and dragons, fairies and queens, etc.); the making or buying of the ideal cake; the choice of miniature items for the guests' 'gift-bags'; the co-ordination of age-appropriate games and activities; the purchasing or making of party clothes or fancy dress outfits; the selection of party plates, cups, hats and tablecloths; the making or shopping for desirable party treats and snacks and, most importantly, the careful selection of just the right number and range of party guests.

Not only are children's parties becoming more elaborate, they are becoming more commercialised. Enterprises such as McDonalds fast-food outlets, Kid Zone play activity areas and Party Pieces catalogue (selling ephemeral wares exclusively for children's parties) are widely incorporated into children's party planning across Britain. Smaller scale enterprises, such as one-off 'bouncy castle' rentals, and the 'Paint Your Own Pottery' party shops that have sprung up in street corners of densely child-populated neighbourhoods, are also testament to the enormous economic and social significance of the birthday party. Given the enormous amount of work and social anxiety generated by the typical infant's birthday party in recent years, it is perhaps not surprising that such parties have become increasingly commercialised affairs incorporating the paid services or venues of external companies or 'specialists'. As

cultural geographers, sociologists and cultural economists (McKendrick, Bradford and Fielder 2000; Otnes Nelson, McGrath 1995; Zelizer 2002) have identified, the children's birthday, either commercial or home-based, is a social ritual that is gaining, rather than waning, in significance in contemporary consumer society.¹

Does the burgeoning culture of children's parties signal the vibrancy of neighbourly relations and friendships? Or is this commercialisation of an idealised facet of domestic work, the preparing for and shepherding of a child through the symbolically pertinent social ritual of the birthday, yet more evidence of the penetration of market forces into the sacrosanct non-economic worlds of children and motherly love?

Using excerpts from a broader ethnography of household consumption in north London,² this chapter explores the intersection of commerce and mothering and argues that birthday parties are rarely organised as singular expressions of parental/child relations but rather as part of a broader gendered sociality in which networks of gifts and children are circulated in rounds of reciprocity. The increasingly aestheticised and elaborated nature of children's parties and their intertwining of material culture, social relations and commerce is a form of consumption that is not merely an extension of women's domestic work, but is rather a testament to the ways in which mothering and consumption have become a mutually constitutive phenomenon (see Clarke 2004). It might be convenient to represent the careful preparation of the party event, and the sophisticated gift-giving culture negotiated between mother and child in the attendance of rounds of reciprocal birthday parties, as being redolent of a social anthropologist's classic model of 'authentic' feminised non-market sociality. On the contrary, however, this chapter suggests that it is through (rather than despite) the appropriation of the market, in the form of mass-produced food, decorations and material culture,

1 Much literature deservedly deals with the social isolation of women as mothers, but, as is made evident by the ethnographic descriptions above, 'mothering' in fact operates as a key form of sociality. Contrary to Allan's depiction of British social relations (Allan 1996: 103), which describes men as having a privileged access to the friendship ties and support networks of the public sphere while women remain isolated within the domestic sphere, in this ethnographic study men remain almost entirely absent from the social networks that define the prominent sociality of the locality. Their absence from the minutely detailed exchanges women make with, and around, other mothers and children in the course of social rituals such as children's birthday parties, impacts significantly on their role as potential care-givers (Jackson 1983; Radin 1988) by excluding them from the sensitively balanced culture of sameness their partners have sought to cultivate.

2 This carefully negotiated culture of sameness seen in the culture of birthday parties, and their increasing commercialisation, can allow women the opportunity for alternative modes of locally contested renditions of being a mother. However, this form of sociality could also be viewed as an overly prescriptive and inescapably oppressive form of solidarity, that does not just compromise those it excludes, to quote Komter (2005): 'Negative aspects and consequences are also connected to solidarity, in the sense that some people are excluded from the community whereas others are included, although sometimes at the cost of their own autonomy.'

commercially hired venues that women as mothers attempt to subvert the tyranny of idealised roles as carers and find alternative renditions of being a 'mother'.

Potlatch and lucky bags: Making the perfect party

On Jay Road, an ordinary street in North London, Julie, the mother of a six-year-old girl, laments that a mother 'unfortunate' enough to have their child's birthday fall in August (between school in-take years) might have attended over twenty parties since the previous September due to the number of friends her child has accumulated. The sheer financial and organisational labour led many mothers to be increasingly ambivalent about 'the snowball effect' of arranging and attending party after party, and buying a seemingly endless round of suitable birthday presents.

Belinda, a mother of three children living in a street adjacent to Jay Road, observes that the 'party circuit' seems to have expanded in size, and lavishness since she was a child brought up in the same neighbourhood. Her own children expect birthday parties at commercial venues (such as a paint-gun play centre or water-world theme park) at enormous cost, and Belinda wonders whether this signals a shift in her own class mobility or a general boom due to increased consumerism and the increasing 'pester power' of children:

It's just a different world to the one I was brought up in. I think they just make life so difficult for people these days – all this ... we never had birthday parties when I was younger we had family birthday parties – we had a few cousins come over and that was it – and it was much easier and it was much less harassment for my mother. I think it's a bit of 'keeping up with the Joneses'.

Although, in the past, Belinda keenly organised extravagant children's parties at home and expensive 'themed' activity-events in commercial venues, she describes more recent attempts to 'opt out' of an 'escalating party scene' by introducing a price-cap on her ten-year old son Jake's parties and suggesting simpler options – like football in the park with his best friends followed by burgers and chips at home.

While Julie and Belinda try to find ways to negotiate the sheer enormity of the commitment to children's parties with 'down-sizing' strategies, round the corner Camilla Knowles, mother of four young children, day-dreams about themes and novelties for her children's parties. In the summer her three-year-old daughter, Caitlin, had a 'gypsy' party and Camilla made a cake in the shape of a Romany caravan surrounded by fresh flowers (as described in the opening quotation). She made 'lucky-bags' (party gift bags) from hand-painted muslin filled with 'lucky charm' sweets and novelties that she had collected on numerous shopping trips for the fifteen child-guests to take away at the end of the party, along with a slice of birthday cake in monogrammed cake tins. Camilla is particularly proud of the unique party-bag gifts, small raffia donkeys and horses, which she bought whilst on holiday in a remote Italian village, as there is absolutely no equivalent in the local shops and they cost only 50 pence each.

Camilla is well known amongst mothers in and around Jay Road as she attends many National Childbirth Trust (NCT) mothers' meetings and events and is dubbed 'super-mum' by her peers due to her unflappable ability to deal with four excitable young children and run a 'homely' household. Her home, a terraced Victorian house on one of the leafy streets adjacent to Jay Road, is given over entirely to the children who are allowed to play unhindered in all areas of the house. Camilla is a full-time mother and the family live on the husband Jeremy's income as a trainee barrister. The 'romantic' chaos of the Knowles' home is often evoked by other mothers, familiar with Camilla and her style of liberal and creative mothering, as an idyllic scene of domesticity. Mothers on Jay Road marvel at Camilla's birthday parties and view them as the pinnacle of a mode of creative mothering in which attention to detail is manifest, not in scraping old, dried baby food from a high-chair, but in icing roses on a birthday cake.

Of course, much of the idealisation of Camilla's parties is a type of exaggerated consensual projection generated by other mothers, rather than a social reality. For they construct Camilla's efforts in opposition to their collectively experienced 'failure' in managing the perfect reciprocal event. It is in the form of chat and gossip, at coffee mornings and at other children's birthday parties, that such opinions are generated. And mothers in Camilla's social circle openly confide their dread at having Camilla's children attend their parties in case they showed them by trotting back home with comparably 'embarrassing, tacky gift-bags', the contents of which had not been sourced in a rustic Italian village but rather Woolworths on the local high street.

The social pressure, escalating expense and public display of contemporary children's parties is perhaps most easily analogous to that of the anthropological 'potlatch' famously described by (Mauss 1954) as a *prestation totale* whereby the exchange involved the total social personalities of the exchangers (Davis 1992: 7). The 'potlatch', a highly symbolic event of conspicuous consumption, in which those that have received goods and gifts strive to give more in order to preserve and increase their social power and standing, was understood by Mauss as the anti-thesis of the rational exchange which typified industrialised societies. Certainly, there can be no 'rational' explanation for the expenditure (in terms of time and money) incurred by households in the organising and funding of children's parties, the expense of which most often contrasted sharply with the budgetary constraints of householders on the street. But neither is this merely a model of economic instrumentalism, whereby household resources are implemented in the acquiring of social status and the expansion of its social resources (Anderson, Bechhofer, Gershuny 1994; Wallman 1984). Why, then, do women (as mothers) feel compelled to invest in this seemingly stressful, emotionally exhausting and resource-sapping round of parties that they simultaneously view with such ambivalence?

In an extensive, North American based study of children's birthday parties, sociologists Otnes, Nelson and McGrath (1995) argue that the event is principally used by mothers in the socialisation of their children through the use of 'ritual artefacts, scripts, performance roles and the ritual audience to teach children both

general knowledge and values, and specific behaviours necessary for the successful participation in this ritual' (Otnes, Nelson and McGrath 1995, 622). Many of the acts of socialisation identified in the Otnes et al. study revolve around the steering of infants away from unacceptable commercial party themes to less offensive versions. At the time of their research, *Ninja Turtles* (fighting cartoon characters) held much currency on popular children's TV and several of the mothers spent much time persuading their sons to opt for a 'less aggressive' party theme. Numerous mothers in the study also expressed anxiety over allowing competitive games at their parties and tried to engage the children in activities in which 'everyone wins'.

Gift-giving similarly provoked anxiety in the mothers. Whilst the excited unwrapping of gifts formed the focus of the party, mothers keenly sought to avoid expressions of wanton materialism by promoting their child's 'graciousness' in receiving presents (particularly unwanted gifts). The giving of 'lucky bags' at the end of the party was a means, like the preference for non-competitive games, of ensuring all children experienced recognition and reward.

The authors, then, consider every facet of the child's birthday party, from its planning through to the flavour of its cake and the unwrapping of gifts, as a series of opportunities for the mother's direct socialisation of the child. The acute attention to detail and the anxiety invoked by the children's parties is accounted for solely in the mothers' driving (and apparently innate) desire to appropriately educate their child in the appropriate manners and mores of contemporary social ritual.

The mothers from the Otnes et al. study are middle class, fully employed and the majority are Caucasian and married with two children. As they are taken from the same work based day-care centre (a state University in the Mid-West) they most likely also share some broader values or at the very least encounter each other in child-related social situations. In other words, these women belong to some rendering of localised mothering. What, then, if we were to invert the emphasis of the Otnes study and instead suggest that the objects of anxiety were not in fact the children, but rather were the mothers themselves? The birthday party is an opportunity to publicly display notions of 'good' or 'appropriate' mothering, and the appeal to children to show graciousness in opening presents, and restraint in eating chocolate cake is as much directed towards the 'other mothers' as it is to the child itself.

For Harriet Smith, on Jay Road in North London, birthday parties are also an enormous source of anxiety. As a comparatively shy person herself, Harriet is eager to encourage her three-year old daughter, Sara, to develop social confidence. Like Camilla, Harriet attends NCT 'get-togethers' but her childcare approach and household organisation differs greatly from the liberal chaos of the Knowles' home. Harriet, who has just one child, keeps an immaculate home with pristine décor and toys fastidiously stored away in labelled boxes in an under-stair toy cupboard.

A recent incident in which Sara refused to share her toys with a child of a visiting mother led Harriet to feel embarrassed, ashamed and annoyed by her daughter's behaviour which had 'shown her up'. Although Harriet and her husband Bob live in a larger than average Victorian house in a road adjacent to Jay Road, the family depends on Bob's fluctuating wage as an electrician and consequently the couple try

to budget conscientiously. Except for the local NCT gatherings, Harriet is socially isolated and has only recently started attending the round of children's birthday parties in the neighbourhood. This has meant the acquisition of an entirely new set of outfits for Sara: 'We've had a lot of birthday teas lately so I've noticed a lot of the girls wear dresses to that. But usually it's leggings and jumpers, dungarees, things like that, but I put her in a dress for the parties.'

At first glance, this ethnographic excerpt appears to substantiate the idea of children's parties as a key arena of socialisation, used didactically by mothers whose sole concern is the social betterment of their offspring. But Harriet's desire for her daughter to 'behave properly' and wear the right clothes at birthday teas (dresses as opposed to everyday androgynous clothing) is inextricably bound to her desire to 'fit-in' to the local modes of mothering. Harriet is exceptional in the level of her insecurity and self-consciousness regarding 'doing the right thing', but she is by no means exceptional in her tendency towards perpetual comparison and a heightened consciousness of 'other' mothers.

Penny, mother of a three-year-old daughter living on Jay Road, recalls one incident in which the addition of Smarties [branded multi-coloured chocolate sweets] to a party caused much consternation amongst the mothers:

We never give sweets, I mean sweets would be probably a kind of class thing but basically sweets are never on offer at our mothers' meetings ... In our group there is quite a good sense of tolerance for other people's, you know, there was that kind of incident a couple of weeks ago we went to the first [in a round of] 3rd birthday part[ies] ... it was done by one of the mothers who is, who probably has the same attitude as me; 'they love Smarties, it's a party, [so] give them Smarties.' I was sitting next to my friend whose child has not had sweets and [she] said, 'this is the end of my beautiful pure-bred.' I said, 'Yes it is, it is. You have to accept she's going to come to these birthdays.' And so we were laughing at the whole thing, and she agreed that that was the end really. And I said, 'look you've given her a good start. She'll just have to learn that there are limitations.'

As revealed in the interaction above, it is through such events and exchanges that consensus is made through the process of mothering; in this case in reaching accord over the cultural acceptability of branded sweets. The woman responsible for organising the first in a round of birthday parties for three-year olds clearly broke a sacred, but unwritten, rule regarding the exposure of infants to impurities, such as sugar. The act of offering inappropriate food-stuffs to infants within the group might have been deemed wholly unacceptable, thus placing the initiating mother in an uncomfortable position (exposing, as she is, the disjuncture of her values to those of the broader group of mothers). However, the exceptional nature of the context (children's birthday party) is deemed by at least one mother (who then goes on to persuade another mother) as a perfect justification for the challenging or breaking of previously established values within the group. In this way consensus is generated and negotiated amongst the women over 'mothering' through the provisioning of parties and the continued circulation of infants and children. Although the pretext of the parties is the children themselves, it is the mothers and their discourse of

mothering that predominates the proceedings; but it is not merely a discourse of how to be a better mother. On the contrary, interactions tentatively generate around the everyday ambivalences of being a mother (Parker 1996); from how much time one should have to oneself ('is TV okay as a baby sitter for just a few minutes?') to what is an acceptable level of engagement with the infant ('do you actually get on the ground and play with your child – I'm too busy?'). But these ambivalences tend to arise, not in the form of these direct conversational excerpts but rather through the common currency of commercial goods and the confluence of taste and mothering style as witnessed in the giving of birthday party gifts; should baby boys wear branded sportswear or romper suits; are plastic toys good or bad?

'Other mothers': Making a sociality of sameness

In their ethnographic study of the social contacts of women with pre-school children in South East England, Bell and Ribbens (1994) challenge the simple conflation of the terms 'isolated' and 'housewife' which typify sociological descriptions of mothers in industrial societies. While it is crucial to consider the change in women's domestic lives in the context of their work as child-rearers, they argue that the pre-occupation with the isolation of domesticity undermines the 'importance of [the] apparently insignificant or invisible networks' of women's lives (Bell and Ribbens 1994: 227). The ambiguity of women's roles as mothers poses (as either source of oppression or source of power) within feminist discourse is well documented (DeVault 1991; Everingham 1994; Segalen 1986; Stacey 1986) as is its ambiguity within the context divisions of 'formal' and 'domestic' economic activity (Ferber and Nelson 1993; Pahl 1984; Redclift and Migione 1985). For this reason, Bell and Ribbens suggest, social research has largely ignored, or at best under-estimated, the significance of women's social contacts as mothers.

Isolation, then, is certainly not the automatic result of motherhood in an urban setting. But the extent to which mother-to-mother relations offer emotional fulfilment to women raises further questions, as women's friendships have largely been assumed in social science as an extension of their roles as mother or wife rather than as a serious object of study within themselves (Allan 1996). Women's ability to establish social networks undisputedly relies upon access to broader resources that differ enormously according to locality, ethnicity and social class (Tivers 1985; Wallman 1984; Werbner 1988). Furthermore, the pursuit of sociality or 'community' should not automatically be considered as beneficial or sought after by mothers in preference to a perceived 'isolation' as women have frequently sought to affirm or undermine certain social class and ethnic identities through actively distancing themselves from specific forms of female sociality (McCannell 1988; Sharma 1986). But what is clear from the ethnographic insight offered by this study of children's birthday parties is that becoming a mother is as much a social and cultural as a biological process (Layne 1999) whereby commercial culture (in the form of gift-objects, clothing, services, foods, etc.) is paramount in transforming everyday

domesticity into the generation of specific types of meanings and social solidarities within mothering.

As highlighted by Bell and Ribbens (1994) it is during the early infancy of their children that mothers are most likely to seek solidarity with other mothers and in this sense the role of children's birthday parties evolves as children grow up. Sally, the mother of eight and ten year old sons, living in a maisonette on Jay Road, used to enjoy birthday parties when her children were toddlers as it was an 'excuse' to get together with other mothers and have a glass of wine and 'a laugh'. Now she dreads the time of year around which her children's birthdays fall; 'I used to enjoy spring but now, oh no! It's such a pressure because it's both of the boys' birthdays.'

In early infancy the child is almost entirely a construct of its mother but as this gives way to the increasing agency of the child, who demands everything from the style of their party outfit to the types of presents, the mother's ability to supervise and oversee the outcome of the social event becomes more limited. But also the woman's role as mother and her own identity and standing within these terms is less likely to need negotiation or reiteration as at the early stages of child-rearing. For some women the prospect of hosting birthday parties for their older children is filled with even more anxiety enjoyable only for those mothers with the least to risk, and the most to display, as expressed by Joanna:

Well – I don't know. I sound as if I'm being a bit 'classist' here, but I wonder if it's [children's party culture] more of a middle class thing. That is to say, what I was used to when I was a younger – we were much more ... I don't know whether it's access to money – having less money than we've got now but I can't remember being invited to birthday parties. So either I was a very unfriendly or unliked child or we just didn't do it. Some people seem to thrive on it as well – like my cousin's 'set', they seem to go to millions of parties and she looks on it, sort of all, very generously and thinks it's all great. And I just find throwing them traumatic. I'd do anything rather than give a party. I just don't like it.

The enormous pressure of children's parties, the increasing materialism and commercialisation identified by numerous informants, revealed an entirely contradictory relation between discourse and practice. On the one hand, like Joanna, mothers spoke nostalgically of the small scale, kin-based parties they experienced themselves as children and lamented the rise in commercial intervention. Yet on the other hand, the very same mothers regularly incorporated party services and mass-produced goods into their party provisioning.

A typical commercial enterprise aimed precisely at mothers like Joanna is *Party Pieces*, a catalogue and on-line service dedicated to the accessorisation of children's parties, offering goods such as fancy dress outfits, decorated paper cups, party games and prizes, banners and balloons. Mothers receiving the catalogue complete a form listing the dates of their children's birthdays and receive the catalogue in the post two months prior to the date of a specific child's birthday. As well as providing ideas for themed parties the catalogue appealed to mothers such as Philipa (despite awareness of paying over the odds for the merchandise) as an expedient way of shopping while creating innovative parties:

I've bought things from the *Party Pieces* catalogue but you can try be a little bit less extravagant really – I probably wouldn't tend to depend completely on it – I don't think they are that pricey but the whole thing always adds up in the end – you end up buying more, rather than if you had just gone out and bought a few white plain paper plates – if you get the whole thing co-ordinated and masks and that sort of stuff.

The expansion of formal businesses into the previously 'home-made' arena of 'dressing-up' and 'fancy dress' costumes and accessories seems further testament to some mothers of the commercialisation of children's worlds. As well as catalogues featuring festive wares, more recently a local woman in the neighbourhood had been organising 'children's fancy dress direct-sales parties', showing a range of costumes from Dracula to Fairy Queens. Gathering together in the house of a volunteer hostess, mothers sip wine and handle a range of children's fancy and dressing-up wear and choose from a stand-up cardboard model showing prices, descriptions and costume types. In general, the costumes were considered overly simple in relation to the prices charged for them. A pirate costume, for example, consists of a black patch and a pair of shorts resembling pyjama bottoms; an ensemble several mothers considered insultingly easy to have put together themselves.

However, Sally, despite being aware that the items must have been made with a large profit margin in mind, bought a 'beautifully made satin cloak' to dress her daughter as a vampire as she admitted she would never have 'got around' to making such an article herself. Other items, such as fairy dresses and ballet costumes merely consisting of a piece of white nylon netting hanging on a piece of elastic, were seen as unacceptable in terms of their value for money and 'too embarrassing' to purchase.

For some mothers the overt commodification of the catalogue undermines the entire project of the children's party and takes away the creativity of inventing games, costumes, decorations and prizes. Jane, for example, enjoys making homemade items, to create a co-ordinated theme. She used the closeness of Halloween to her daughter Rachel's birthday as a theme for her fifth birthday party, organised in conjunction with another mother, in the local church hall. As it was a fancy dress event, Jane had spent several evenings sewing a witch's outfit for her daughter from scraps of fabric from a local remnant store. She made jamboree bags filled with 'bits and bobs' from Woolworth's and had cut out paper decorations to string across the walls of the hall. Both mothers spent evenings carving out pumpkin lanterns and hand-made invitations with pop-up ghosts had been sent to around twenty children. A birthday cake in the shape of a 'scary monster' with the names of the two girls iced on top formed the centrepiece of the food. Working to a limited budget, Jane viewed the creative aspect of the party-making as a crucial element of its value and she encouraged Rachel and her small brother to make invitations and decorations at the kitchen table with her.

The night before the event Rachel insisted on abandoning her proposed witch's costume insisting instead on dressing as a 'good fairy'. As well as preparing the party food of pizza, cheese sticks, jelly and fruit, Jane set about constructing a fairy costume from white netting and tinsel, to pacify her distraught daughter:

I couldn't believe it! All that effort and then she goes and wants to be a fairy – it totally ruined the whole theme ... and she looked like a very ragged fairy. I felt like selling the witch outfit I'd made to another mother for a Halloween party!

The disappointment expressed by Jane in undermining her fully orchestrated event is not unusual. Despite the pressure, sheer labour and anxiety involved in dressing, transporting and equipping children for their attendance of birthday parties it is most often the children, rather than parents, who resist attending the events. On several occasions in the course of the ethnography there were heated 'scenes' between mothers and children when, often a short time before the commencement of a party, a child had firmly refused to leave their home or get out of the car at the venue. As Jenny comments in the case of smaller events, or those organised around a paid commercial venture, in which a child's absence will be noticed, mothers feel a sense of obligation and pending disgrace:

Sophie had been invited to one [birthday party] this weekend but she wouldn't go – and there was no contact number and I haven't seen that mum since so ... I must apologise.

As well as the resources required for the organisation of children's birthday parties a number of strategies are employed to deal with the sheer volume of gifts required in the attendance of the yearly 'rounds' of parties. Jenny, for example, uses a two-tier approach to birthday gifts for her children's friends (as also described in Sirota's (1992) study of children's birthday gift-giving in Paris). For general school friends' parties she uses a collection of Woolworth's items, amassed throughout the year in the course of everyday household shopping trips. For closer friends' and best friends' birthday parties she uses the Early Learning Centre catalogue and specific shopping trips to make selections. She also keeps a bulk of children's birthday cards in a drawer of the living room cupboard and uses the corner shop 'in emergencies' if she runs out of appropriate cards. For members of her own family Jenny uses trips abroad, for example, to try to find items a little more special. Although family gifts can be postponed, delivered at a later date, gifts for the children of other mothers are a more pressing concern and onerous task:

Most of the presents I buy are for the children to take to parties ... I owe my other cousin's little boy a present – he was four so I've got to get him something – I've got a huge family so it costs me a fortune in presents and also the kids have acres and acres of friends which is good, you want them to have friends, but sometimes the parties and the buying gifts can be a bit much.

Cultural economists (Levinson 2000; Zelizer 2002) have recently identified activities such as children's birthday parties, and their gift economies, as significant testament to children's economic activity. Unlike the gift relations between parent and off-spring (see Clarke forthcoming) the provisioning of birthday gifts does not involve overly complex mediations between child/adult. Rather choices of gifts (with the exception of 'best friends') relies on a heavily prescribed and general repertoire of material culture organised principally in accordance with gender/age appropriateness and

cost allowing the easy circulation of goods and children in the production of social solidarity. Although, as asserted by more recent theoretical approaches to the research of childhood (James 1993; Christensen 2000), children are not merely objects of socialisation or 'adults-in-the-making', their agency here is internalised by the mothers and integrated as a vital part of the cultural and aesthetic repertoire of the general birthday party; child, gift and party attendance become one and the same.

Anne, the mother of four children ranging from seven to eleven years sees herself as 'an old-hand' at the birthday party gift buying. Although her children are now old enough to assert their opinions and choices regarding appropriate presents Anne still uses a pragmatic 'bulk-buy' approach to children's gift purchase. During the sales she identifies the kind of coveted children's items that are still fashionable enough to be sort after but destined to be replaced by a newer fad or edition, thereby reduced in price but not fully redundant in meaning. In the course of this ethnography Power Rangers plastic action figures were popular, for example, and Anne, on one particular shopping trip, found several items at special sale prices in the local department stores. She took the opportunity to buy them up in the hope that they would suffice for a number of parties the children would be attending later that year. By choosing such fashionable and child-centred objects, Anne takes a risk that they be rendered completely undesirable by the time they are used as gifts thus placing her children in the embarrassing position of offering potentially 'out of date' presents. On the other hand she may manage to maximise contemporary appeal and price, thereby out-doing what she described as the 'rip-off kids merchandisers' into the bargain.

The type and extent of thought that went into gifts also revolved around the closeness a mother felt to understanding the gift repertoire of her 'group'; 'I just bought a jigsaw and it took all of one minute to chose – not because I didn't care but because it was just right. It's the kind of thing we buy for each other's kids.'

More anonymous or general types of presents (bubble bath, stickers, etc.) were often abandoned in favour of 'thoughtful' versions when mothers felt they knew the mother of the 'birthday' child more intimately. Celia, for example, used a two-tier price range directly correlating to the relationship she had with the mother of the child in question:

If I don't know the mother its less and if I know the mother and I'm good friends with her then it's more, so normally I tend to put my price range at £5, that is for or even less now that they can read I get them books, it's less than that sometimes it's about £3 something like that depending...

Books and jigsaws are often given to the children of mothers less integrated into a group, as they are considered thoughtfully appropriate and imminently practical as they can be easily exchanged at local shops if duplicated. As well as creating a rationale behind the selection of gifts, the price limit and gift typing helped prevent further escalation of a performative party culture that, as previously mentioned, many informants viewed as potentially punitive. In some cases, mothers identified birthdays as times when children were most likely to make direct comparisons

between themselves and individuals in their peer groups with the potential for revealing inequalities of wealth and creating ruptures with the group.

In her study of social solidarity and the gift economy, Komter (2005) observes how contemporary society has moved from an 'organic' Durkheimian model of solidarity, to one built upon non-committal, segmented solidarities; 'cities, villages, quarters, and neighbourhoods have become hybrid and fragmented. Families can do without a neighborhood if they like, and neighborhoods do not need families' (Komter 2005: 211). No longer tied to mutual dependency and necessity, solidarities are formed as autonomous entities that, argues Komter, may increasingly come to rely upon the model of the gift economy to generate any form of mutually moral obligation. As women have been, and remain, the principle agents of 'gift work' (Cheal 1988; SchriStrathern 1989; Wiener 1976, 1996), the perpetuation of such solidarities is 'clearly gendered' (Komter 2005: 192).

Just as the fragmented solidarities generated through the networks of children's parties, mothers, infants and goods generate inclusion they also generate forms of exclusion. Although ambivalence towards holding children's parties is not necessarily experienced in direct relation to the financial security or affluence of a given household, for certain mothers the obligations of children's parties presented an overt form of social tyranny. Jill, a young, single mother with two children (the eldest four years old) living in Sparrow Court council estate on welfare support, can barely cover the costs of her monthly bills yet she understands her ability to attend the birthday parties of her children's classmates as a basic requisite of sociality as a mother:

I've been to nearly six so far [this year], but it's dreadful because their birthday is coming and I haven't got the money to buy them anything to have a party or anything. Carrie [daughter] has been to quite a few [classmates' parties] and one of David's [son] friends had to go to McDonalds and it's really expensive especially when there's about twelve or fourteen children and I can't even afford to get David a birthday card, let alone a party or anything. I feel quite embarrassed when they have to keep going to parties and I haven't really got a present but I sort of manage to get something like a colouring book from over the road [the corner shop] to show I appreciate going.

Another mother, Irene, also living in Sparrow Court, with a younger son, categorically declares that she can no longer afford 'kids parties':

[There is] one that day, one the next day, so I've decided not to have birthday parties any more since they're too expensive by the time you've done party bags, drinks, games, food and all that. So none this year, but what can you do?

For Lola, a South American mother of two children recently moved to Jay Road, the choosing of birthday gifts for English children's parties is a fraught task in which she tries to reduce risk to a minimum. Lola is relatively unfamiliar with the local shopping area and depends on mail order catalogues almost exclusively for her non-food household provisioning. Although her two daughters are well versed in the gift

and party etiquette of Chilean culture, English birthday parties are a new form of sociality that have arisen through the girls recently formed friendships at the local school. Lola has little idea of how English children's parties operate and discovered, for example, through two embarrassing mistakes, that an invitation is confined to the named child and does not extend to a sibling. In contrast at Chilean parties it would be unthinkable to invite one sibling and not another and equally strange for the fathers not to attend: 'if it's a Chilean party all the family go and all the men – the family, all the whole family.'

Unlike many other children, Anita and Sofia play a significant role in choosing the gifts they take to their separate birthday parties as Lola relies almost exclusively on their experience and judgement. Together the mother and daughters read the *Argos* and *Index* store catalogues and the girls' select the presents, then Lola visits the shop to buy them. The most recent gift, for example, was a pink snow-storm globe and a sewing craft kit bought for Anita's closet school friend. Unlike other mothers on the street Lola, despite her low income, buys the gifts on an individual and full-price basis and with only the guidance of her children, rather than the interactions of other mothers, to help her.

Conclusion

Whereas Bell and Ribbens's study of mothers' social networks considers how places and spaces of mothering 'allow' women to meet 'women of like mind, like children and the same social class' (Bell and Ribbens 1994: 248), ethnographic detail reveals how women, in their exchanges of relations and material culture, do not merely reflect pre-existing modes of mothering and class disposition but rather generate and contest it. In the culture of the children's birthday parties mothers circulate their offspring, gifts and creativity in the generation of a sociality which exists in a constant tension between normative, competitive and expressive relations. Although children's parties exist across a spectrum of class and ethnic groups, this chapter reveals the processes by which certain types of mothering (in this case what evolves as a type of middle class mothering) might exist at the expense of the prominence of others. Mothers such as Jill, the single woman on the housing estate and Lola the South American mother, are not merely precluded from the children's 'party circuit' through lack of economic resources. They are excluded by the social and cultural domination of other solidarities of mothering at large in the locality; solidarities formed through endless rounds of children's parties and its ensuing gift economy. This domination may have real consequences, in for example, aiding access to certain types of schools though facilitation of local knowledge or other related resources.

While birthday parties might be understood as a crude series of escalating potlatches (in terms of the colloquial concept of competitive gifting that followed the popularisation of the term after Mauss), in actual fact the parties are far removed from this sense of direct competitive giving. Rather, they involve subtle and skilful positioning through a series of normative stages, each of which has its associated

strategies and potentials. While there is at once a desire to use goods and gifts to express relationships and their depth (honouring a particular mother or child, for example, with a more 'individually' chosen gift) the notion of the 'going rate' for the price of a children's party gift is crucial to the maintenance of 'sameness'. The expansion of the previously kin and home-based activity of the children's birthday party as a form of 'potlatch' (in which increasingly imaginative, commercialised or subtle variations of a theme are used to demonstrate the mother/child's worthiness and prestige) is testament to a contemporary British culture increasingly premised on the 'child' as a social object.

Despite the discourse regarding the unwanted intervention of the market into the 'authentic' relations of everyday domesticity, commercial services and goods are used by women to alleviate the pressures of potlatch party culture, and the potential for overly oppressive, idealised versions of competitive mothering. For venues such as Monkey Business soft-play venue, McDonalds fast food chain and the Party Pieces catalogue offer a less risky, neutralised default to the individually organised event. While Martha Stewart (or Camilla Knowles) type renditions of creative, expressive mothering might be popularly aspired to, in this ethnographic context they are regarded with the highest suspicion as they pose the greatest threat to a culture of negotiated 'sameness'. The woman most likely to garner admiration is the mother who 'gets away' with pulling off the most affective party with the minimal effort and expense, all within the bounds of the accepted aesthetic of the group.

The means by which women generate and perpetuate sociality in urban societies has been a crucial area of feminist scholarship, as has been the pressures of externally prescribed abstractions such as 'respectability' and normativity (Gullestad 1986, 1992; Oliker 1989; Skeggs 1995; 1997). But little work ties this sociality to broader issues of a 'feminist economics' (Still 1997; Zelizer 2002) and the ways in which the commercialisation of mothering may enable, as much as exploit, women's contribution to the making of the 'social texture' of society (Komter 2005).

References

- Allan, G. (1996) *Kinship and Friendship in Modern Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, M., Bechhofer, F. and Gershuny, J. eds (1994) *The Social and Political Economy of the Household*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bell, L. and Ribbens, J. (1994) 'Isolated Housewives and Complex Maternal Worlds: The Significance of Social Contacts between Women with Young Children in Industrial Societies', *Sociological Review*, 42 (2): 227-262.
- Cheal, D. (1988) *The Gift Economy*, London: Routledge.
- Christensen, P. and James, A. eds (2000) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*, London: Falmer Press.

- Clarke, A.J. (2000) 'Mother Swapping: The Trafficking of Nearly New Children's Wear', in P. Jackson, M. Lowe, D. Miller and F. Mort (eds) *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, Spaces*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 85-100.
- Clarke, A.J. (2004) 'Maternity and Materiality: Becoming a Mother in Consumer Culture', in J.S. Taylor, L. Layne, and D.F. Wozniak (eds) *Consuming Motherhood*, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, pp. 55-71.
- Clarke, A.J. (forthcoming) 'Coming of Age in Suburbia: Designing the Normative Child', in M. Gutman and N. Connick-Smith (eds) *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space and Material Culture of Children*, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press.
- DeVault, M. (1991) *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Di Leonardo, M. (1987) 'The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families and the Work of Kinship', *Signs*, 12: 440-58.
- Everingham, C. (1994) *Motherhood and Modernity an Investigation into the Rational Dimension of Mothering*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Ferber, M. and Nelson, J. eds (1993) *Beyond Economic Man: Feminist Theory and Economics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gullestad, M. (1986) *Kitchen Table Society: A Case Study of Family Life and Friendships of Young Working-class Mothers in Urban Norway*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Gullestad, M. (1992) *The Art of Social Relations: Essays on Culture, Social Action and Everyday Life in Modern Norway*, Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Handelman, L.S. and Handelman, D. (1991) 'Celebrations of Bureaucracy: Birthday Parties in Israeli Kindergartens', *Ethnology*, 30 (October): 293-312.
- James, A. (1993) *Childhood Identities, Self and Social Relationships: On the Experience of the Child*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Komter, A.E. (2005) *Social Solidarity and the Gift*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Layne, L. (1999) *Transformative Mothering: On Giving and Getting in Consumer Culture*, New York and London: New York University Press.
- Levinson, D. (2000) 'Children as Economic Agents', *Feminist Economics*, 6: 125-134.
- Mauss, M. (1954) *The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, London: Cohen and West.
- McCannell, K. (1988), 'Social Networks and the Transition to Motherhood', in Milardo, R.M. (ed.) *Families and Social Networks*, Newbury Park: Sage, pp. 83-106.
- McKendrick, J.H., Bradford, M.G. and Fielder, A.V. (2000) 'Time for a Party!: Making Sense of the Commercialisation of Leisure Space for Children', in Holloway, S. and Valentine, G. (eds) *Children's Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning*, London: Routledge, pp. 100-116.
- Miller, D. (1998b) *A Theory of Shopping*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Miller, D., Jackson, P., Thrift, N., Holbrook, B. and Rowlands, M. (eds) (1998) *Shopping, Place and Identity*, London: Routledge.
- Otnes, C., Nelson, M. and McGrath, M. (1995) 'The Children's Birthday Party: A Study of Mothers as Socialization Agents', *Advances in Consumer Research* (22): 622-627.
- Oliker, S.J. (1989) *Best Friends and Marriage: Exchange Among Women*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pahl, R. (1984) *Divisions of Labour*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Pahl, J. (1989) *Money and Marriage*, London: Macmillan.
- Parker, R. (1996) *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence*, London: Virago.
- Radin, N., (1988) 'Primary Care-giving Fathers of Long Duration', in Bronstein, P. and Cowan, C. (eds) *Fatherhood Today: Men's Changing Role in the Family*, New York: John Wiley.
- Redclift, N. and Mingione, E. (1985) *Beyond Employment: Household, Gender and Subsistence*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ribbens, J. (1994) *Mothers and their Children: A Feminist Sociology of Childrearing*, London: Sage.
- Segalen, M. (1986) *Historical Anthropology of the Family*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sharma, U. (1986) *Women's Work, Class and the Urban Household: A Study of Shimla, North India*, London: Tavistock.
- Sirota, R. (1998) 'Les copians d'abord. Les anniversaires de l'enfance, donner and recevoir', *Ethnologie Française*, 4: 457-472.
- Schrift, A. (1997) *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, London: Routledge.
- Skeggs, B. (1995) 'Theorising, Ethics and Representation in Feminist Ethnography', in Skeggs, B. (ed.) *Feminist Cultural Theory, Process and Production*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*, London: Sage.
- Stacey, J. (1986) 'Are Feminists Afraid to Leave Home? The Challenge of Conservative Pro-family Feminism', in Mitchell, J. and Oakley, A. (eds) *What is Feminism?*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 208-237.
- Still, J. (1997) *Feminine Economies: Thinking Against the Market in the Enlightenment and the Late 20th Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Strathern, M. (1998) *The Gender of the Gift*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Taylor, J., Layne, L. and Wozniak, D. (2004) *Consuming Motherhood*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Thurer, S (1994) *Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Tivers, J. (1985) *Women Attached: The Daily Lives of Women with Young Children*, London: Croom Helm.

- Wallman, S. (1984) *Eight London Households*, London: Tavistock.
- Weiner, A. (1976) *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Weiner, A. (1996) *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping While Giving*, California: UCLA Press.
- Werbner, P. (1990) *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis*, Oxford: Berg.
- Zelizer, V. (1994) *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, Princeton, NJ, Chichester: Princeton University Press.
- Zelizer, V. (2002) 'Intimate Transactions' in Guillén, M., Collins, R., England, P. and Meyer, M. (eds) *The New Economic Sociology: Developments in an Emerging Field*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 274-300.
- Zelizer, V. (2002) 'Kids and Commerce', *Childhood*, 9 (4): 375-396.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 5

Perceptions of Commercialised Social Introduction Services Amongst Women

Jacqueline Davidson

Introduction

‘Involuntary singleness’ constitutes a profound source of pain for many adults whose ‘most poignant of human needs’, ‘romance, love and companionship’ (Ahuvia and Adelman 1992: 460) remain unfulfilled. The growth of commercialised social introduction services in recent times can be considered symptomatic of theoretical claims for the move to a ‘consumer culture’; the increasing rise of the market mode of provision is leading to the ‘incorporation of new domains into the commodity market’, ‘reconstructing social life on a market basis’ (Fairclough 1995: 141) and creating a ‘new’ breed of consumer. It is argued that free from any external social forces, ‘enterprising selves’ have a responsibility to find meaning and existence by shaping specific lives through ‘autonomous’ acts of choice (Bauman 1988). This shaping and fulfilment of the life project of the self is greatly facilitated by the ‘self help’ services provided by the market (Rose 1992: 142). Involuntary singleness increasingly becomes a ‘personal’ problem and its solution a ‘matter for oneself’ that market intermediaries can alleviate. Or can they?

This chapter presents the findings of an exploratory qualitative study, conducted with women who considered themselves involuntarily single, and offers a socially embedded view of rational intermediary services provided by the market. The chapter illustrates that acts of consumption are tightly structured by social characteristics like gender, and that gender relations inherent in the romantic ideology surrounding ‘first meetings’ may hinder the full commodification of this sphere of social life.

Previous research has situated social intermediary services in the realms of consumer culture. However, researchers in the field have been content to analyse the content or text of dating advertisements, analysing gender (Bolin et al 1984; Steinfirst and Moran 1998) and age differences (Coupland 2000) in what is offered and sought by involuntary singles. In a post-modern commentary, Jagger (1998) concluded that although traditional gendered stereotypes may be changing as men and women deal with novel social conditions, compared to women, men seem to have recourse to multiple lifestyle identities (Jagger 2001). Essentially such research rests upon the assumption that rational market intermediaries for meeting others are ‘a permissible,

fashionable, healthy and innovative adaptation to social change' (Steinfurst and Moran 1988: 129; see also Bolig et al 1984; Coupland 1996, 2000; Jagger 1998, 2001).

However, this perspective is too narrow, ignoring any consequences for gendered social relations that may result from the market mode 'positioning the singles search as a consumer activity' (Ahuvia and Adelman 1991: 273). Contradicting broad assertions regarding their legitimacy, previous research has also illustrated that those who actually used such services did so 'unwillingly, nervously and secretly' (Hunt 1966: 107), and that 'advertising for love' was 'a moral issue' (Darden and Koski 1988: 398).

This research thus set out to explore the perceived legitimacy of social introduction services for involuntarily single women, and to consider the effects the use of such services might have on the social relations surrounding the 'introduction' itself – an issue neglected in research to date. As Warde (1992) argues, it is important to understand the sociological significance of substituting one mode of provision with another. Different modes of provision produce services differently. Not only are conditions of access different but the mode also has consequences for the 'enjoyment' of that service. Thus, any comprehensive account of an episode of consumption must consider not just production and access, but also the 'social circumstances' of delivery and the consumers' experience of that service. After providing a brief note on methodology, the chapter outlines the competing theories of romanticism and exchange that might be thought to inform meetings in the informal and formal modes of provision respectively. The findings illustrate that the rational and purposive approach that using such social introduction services entails, involves the involuntary single breaking the cultural rules inherent in playing 'the game of romantic love' (Steinfurst and Moran 1988: 129) and challenges the 'mythical' (Leonard 1980) notions surrounding the 'normal way' to meet a potential partner.

Methodology

The interpretative, qualitative study on which this chapter is based was designed to explore the perceptions and meanings held by involuntary single women to the market services of introduction agencies and personal advertisements in newspapers. Commercialised introduction services can facilitate either or all of the so-called 'searching, matching and interacting functions' for meeting others that would otherwise be done by the consumer themselves or their informal network (Ahuvia and Adelman 1991). This study considered perceptions of two of the most basic 'searching' services: dating agencies and personal advertisements in magazines and newspapers. Eight heterosexual women participated in the study and data was generated by in-depth interviews. Because of the small number of participants, and hence the undoubtedly biased sample in terms of class and ethnicity, the findings need to be interpreted with caution. Half of the participants stated that they had used one of the searching services described above whilst the other half stated that they had no intention of ever using them.

Love in late modernity

Romanticism and the ideology that underpins it, considers 'love' as the sole basis for long term relationships. Love, in turn, is seen as a magical and 'mysterious' force beyond the control of the individual (Ahuvia and Adelman 1991: 274). Associated cultural understandings stipulate that, provided you have the right personal qualities, 'love just happens to you' whilst engaged in some legitimate social activity: at work, out with friends or even 'at the supermarket'— you should not have to go and 'look for it'. The magical view of love thus involves a strong element of fatalism. If a relationship is 'meant to be' it will 'happen naturally' and no amount of effort can force it into existence. The narrative which romantic love introduces is thus the exclusive domain of self and other and has no particular reference to wider social processes (Giddens 1992: 39). 'Instantaneous attraction', the 'first glance' between self and significant other constitutes a communicative gesture – an intuitive grasp of the special qualities of the other (Giddens 1992: 4). The other, by being who he or she is answers a 'lack' which the individual does not even necessarily recognise until the love relation is initiated.

Whilst there are very few studies that explicitly, let alone systematically, explore the 'first meetings' of couples, they do suggest that such meetings may (retrospectively) become shrouded in romanticism. For example, in her study 'Sex and Generation', which briefly considered the circumstances in which couples had met, Leonard (1980) suggests that, over time, respondents may have developed a 'romantic myth' – incorporating an 'extraordinary coincidence' – of their first meeting. In practise however, the author found that couples had often started going out together after several meetings in different places and with the 'mediation of kin and friends' (Leonard 1980: 88). Similarly, Langford (1999: 25) found that the women in her study, in accordance with conventional narratives, attributed falling in love to some combination of meeting a 'special man' and the 'chemistry' or 'natural attraction' between them. One of her participants talked of falling in love with her husband: 'immediately [] the minute I saw him' (Langford 1999: 30). Other work on the production of gendered subjectivities suggests that it is an important feature of women's femininity to 'be attractive to a man' and to be able to 'attract a man' (Holloway 1984: 241).

In modern society it is argued that finding a partner is complicated by secularism, urbanism and increased social and geographical mobility, which have lead to a loss of personal contacts for identifying and locating significant others (Ahuvia and Adelman 1992). Commentators have thus argued that as society becomes more isolated and traditional mechanisms for partner selection break down, fail or drift away, men and women will turn to alternative channels for seeking and meeting others (Merskin and Huberlie 1996) like the mass media, dating agencies, and more latterly perhaps, the internet and 'speed dating'. 'Finding love' increasingly becomes 'big business' (Observer 14.2.1999).

Interestingly, despite, or indeed because of, the social trends and resultant 'rational reasons' for the growth in these services some writers have suggested

that the importance and meaning attached to romantic love, rather than abating, is actually undergoing a 'further, rapid, intensification' (Langford 1999: 4). This is attributed by writers such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) to an increasingly mobile and competitive labour market and secularism. The 'freedom' offered by, for example, secularism, essentially offers 'little compensation for a lonely and hollow life' (Langford 1999: 4) and romantic love thus offers 'a secular religion' – which quickly finds 'followers in a society of uprooted loners' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 173).

Essentially then, the shared cultural understandings of the 'normal way' to meet others outlined above and the mysticism of the romantic ideology which underpin them, might come into conflict with the 'concise rationality of exchange', which such marketised social introduction services embody (Ahuvia and Adelman 1991: 274). In contrast to fatalistically waiting for 'it to happen naturally' the single must aggressively and strategically promote themselves in the market and take a proactive stance. Further, they must be able to pre-profile themselves and the desired other rather than relying on the 'instantaneous click with the unknown other'.

'Love's lumpenproletariat'

This section illustrates that shared cultural understandings about the 'proper' or 'normal' ways to meet potential male partners were situated by female participants within the ideology of romantic love. Such understandings provided prescriptions for behaviour and could constrain the singles' use of market intermediaries because of their reluctance to break, what one participant referred to as, the 'secret hidden rules' informally prescribed for meeting others. Thus the women perceived that there should be nothing rational and purposive about finding love. 'It should just happen' to you. First meetings were supposed to be spontaneous and contain an element of 'surprise'. Whilst the single felt that 'it' could happen at any time and in any place and indeed may have ventured outdoors (covertly) wondering if 'it might happen tonight', love should not be explicitly sought out. Rather, single women perceived that they should wait for the 'instantaneous attraction' or the 'click', which is prevalent in the romantic ideology and happens because:

if you've got the (right) personal qualities they'll shine out and you'll meet the right one.
(Woman 1)

Access to significant others in the informal mode was perceived to be gained by way of your intrinsic personal qualities, which attract the other to you. Whilst the rational aspect of market services in modern society has been emphasised, a lack of opportunities for meeting others was not perceived as a socially legitimate reason for using them. Female participants in the study thus feared being labelled a 'desperate woman' – who either could not wait any longer for 'it' to happen or who were unable to 'attract a man' to them in the 'normal way'. Participants further stated

that (perceived) 'desperate women' would be easy pickings for what they termed as calculating 'con men' to take advantage of.

Primarily, the initial image of those who used commercialised introduction services was that they were 'forced' to use a market service in some last desperate attempt to 'find somebody'. One of Langford's (1999: 28) participants captures this perception succinctly. As the author argues, the association of being of value and being in a relationship can mean that being single can be equated with being in some way defective: 'if I was *really* a desirable person, you know, attractive or whatever, or nice, then there would be a man around.'

Users of such services thus can be perceived to have 'no choice' but to resort to using one of these intermediaries, where they must try to 'contrive' and 'set up' something that otherwise 'just happened' to people with the right personal qualities. Such images and perceptions contrast starkly with the majority of commercialised services where consumers are seen to be exercising freedom of choice in the marketplace.

However, in this sphere of social life, 'free choosing consumers' might be stigmatised, not because they are 'unable to make their choices in the marketplace' (Bauman 1988: 69) but because they are perceived to have 'no choice' but to use a market intermediary. Overwhelmingly, users of introductory services were seen by women in this study as 'loves lumpenproletariat'; those that:

You know, no one else wants. (Woman 2)

They are seen as the 'desperados'. If they can't find anybody in a bar, in a pub, in Tesco's, you know: 'what's wrong with them'. Maybe this is the last resort even – to use one of these. (Woman 3)

Users of commercialised services were further perceived as possessing the negative personal characteristics of being socially inept and thus friendless, 'sad and lonely':

the forgotten people, on their own. Nothing to do and all day to do it in. (Woman 4)

Warde's (1992) conditions of access to services in different modes is important for the analysis of this very prevalent perception. Implicitly, single women recognise – although the romantic ideology does not – that the context in which two people meet is usually social. In the narrative of self and other seeded by the romantic ideology, 'crowded rooms' which 'eyes meet across' usually contain known others. Access to others in the 'normal way' was thus largely seen to be gained via your personal qualities whilst in the company of friends or colleagues, which may serve as an implicit statement of 'look, I'm a nice, worthwhile person, I have friends'. Access to market intermediaries on the other hand requires 'only money' and it might be felt perhaps that if you 'have to go' through such channels to meet others that you have no friends and thus little access to meeting anyone the 'normal way'.

The user of a market intermediary then was often socially constructed by participants as the 'other'. Involuntary singles were keen to assert that they got lonely, 'but not that lonely'. Whilst some women who had never used a service

voiced that they might attempt to maximise opportunities for 'it' to happen, for example by joining a walking club in order to meet new people, users of social introduction services, having taken an illegitimate explicit route and transgressed the norm of 'waiting' were consequently imbued with negative personal characteristics. These norms are able to exert a powerful deterrent to the use of these services for involuntary singles with limited opportunities for meeting others by proscribing that the single should wait, and trust in fate, that:

it'll happen on it's own, it'll happen one day. I've been waiting a long time. But it will happen. (Woman 3)

This socially embedded view of these rational services illustrates that the reconstruction of social life on a market basis requires more than a felt need and an ability to pay.

'Personal failure'

The decision to use one of these services of 'last resort' could be perceived as and experienced by involuntary single women as an admission of 'personal failure' in a number of ways. Female participants often perceived themselves as being in a paradoxical situation. They felt that society had set them the goal of 'coupledom', yet that same society's shared cultural understandings of meeting someone the 'normal way' blocked the use of explicit market channels to achieve this goal. The decision to use an intermediary, for those who had done so, was therefore not taken lightly.

The fear of remaining single and of not completing their 'life project' acted as powerful incentives for some women. These fears were compounded by:

pressure from family and friends and general attitudes out there ... that you're not yet married ... and other people seem to think that there's something wrong with you, 'cos you're not, you can't make it, and 'how come it hasn't happened yet'? There seems to be almost like a sense of guilt put on you by others that you haven't done it yet. So 'what's wrong?' (Woman 2)

Those women who had used an intermediary often redefined their behaviour as 'taking control' of the situation that they were in, and felt that they were:

being very powerful and em, aware of your own feelings and emotions ... to realise that, yes, you want to meet somebody, and you're doing something about it. It's quite a powerful thing to do. (Woman 1)

However, having flouted the norm of 'waiting for it to happen' and instead exercising power, choice and control in:

a dating sort of situation, people see it as, that you're more desperate. I don't know why. (Woman 1)

The perception that they would be seen as a personal failure meant that participants who had used these services could not be described as unabashedly self interested and consequently their use was often shrouded in relative secrecy. Reticence to admit to using a service for the perceived 'desperate people' was further compounded by the fear that, having tried, they would not actually meet anyone that either they were attracted to, or was attracted to them:

because it would be like, the embarrassment of saying, 'oh, I had to go to a dating agency – and even then, out of all those desperate people' – if you can't get anybody through a dating agency it's like: 'my God there is not hope for you'. Do you know what I mean? (Woman 3)

'Anxious and overwhelmed'

Consumption of these services was thus constrained for female participants by a 'complex cocktail of habit and irrational emotional responses' (Baldock and Ungerson 1996: 27) and it might be concluded that involuntary singles, by following the prescriptions laid down by the romantic ideology for meeting someone the 'normal way' are constrained from using a service that might otherwise help them. Such presuppositions however are reached without considering the very real differences in the manner of provision of these services and their consequences for the 'enjoyment' of a first meeting.

This section highlights that whilst the single may be offered introductions to others through such market services, the mode also carries with it consequences for social relations. As well as the emotional work involved in constructing and choosing 'commodified selves' and the profiling of self and desired other, these channels can be seen to affect the social context of the first meeting.

Darden and Koski (1988: 388) quote Herbert Gold's 'True Love': 'The man (*sic*) who advertises must learn to conceive of himself in a new way.' In this respect, female participants perceived that competition to 'be picked', particularly from the long list of personal advertisers in newspapers or magazines, was great. Anxiety in constructing an advert comes from the resultant perception that they would have to sell their 'marketable qualities' in a way that would say:

wow, look at me ... I'm wonderful. You've got to really sort of jump out as being so different to the other three hundred on the list. (Woman 5)

Respondents found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to commodify their personhood and further feared rejection on the basis of their intrinsic personal attributes:

I got stuck at the bit of trying to describe myself. I just. I didn't really. I didn't want people to judge me on my physical assets. (Woman 1)

The fear of insult from being rejected by what others might perceive as an 'audience of social misfits' (Darden and Koski 1988:392) or of receiving no replies to an advert they might have placed was strong enough for women to decide not to:

put one in. I was terrified that no one would. It would be the ultimate disgrace that I put one in and no one, no one responded. I think I'd have given up complete hope. (Woman 1)

As well as trying to conceive of themselves in a new way, selecting an advertiser further entailed involuntary single women attempting to conceive of potential male partners in a new way. Making such 'choices' was fraught with anxiety for participants. Apart from the mistrust that advertisers would either lie or enhance their attributes in order to 'be picked', involuntary single women recognised that only having two or three written lines to 'judge' others on meant that as one respondent voiced 'you have to go on age and job and interests really'. Though this calculation is what exchange theory would predict, the research explicated that the romantic ideology also comes into play when choosing a potential date. It is not so much a question of either or, but both. When looking through adverts or profiles respondents stated that they often looked for one 'that just appealed to them in some way' – thus echoing the 'click' or instantaneous attraction inherent in the romantic ideology.

While content analysis of personal advertisements fails to reveal the anxiety inherent in using these services, much previous research has negated the consequences for social relations surrounding the first meeting. Warde's (1992) analysis of the 'final enjoyment of a service' in differing modes is helpful here. Meeting someone the 'normal way' is perceived to 'just happen' spontaneously and as was pointed out, usually happens in the company of known others. The major difference is that meetings in the informal mode do not have to be thought about by the single until they happen. However, 'setting yourself up' to meet somebody involves nerve-racking anticipation. There is hope that it 'might be something', and fear that it will be 'a disaster'. What if the conversation runs dry? There are no friends there to help smooth it out on a 'blind' one to one first meeting or to confirm the identity of self. These feelings can almost lead to an abandonment of the date after it has been arranged.

Such feelings were compounded for women by the realisation that they were about to meet a relative stranger and participants perceived this as a potentially dangerous and personally threatening situation. All of the women took care to meet their dates in public places, and let their close friends know what they were doing specifically for that reason.

I suddenly thought: this could be a very precarious situation. Here I am in a car, could be going anywhere, and I don't know him from Adam. There was just that, sort of fear. I just felt really a bit freaked, you know? (Woman 2)

There are further negative effects on the initial interaction, informed by the ideology of romanticism. Women commonly felt a pressure to decide by the end of the first date as to whether 'there was something there or not'. They felt compelled to 'choose

or lose' the prospective partner, again, perhaps, looking for the 'instant click' or immediate attraction stipulated by the romantic ideology.

Moreover, women who had used such services perceived that 'set ups' could potentially encourage a high degree of self-disclosure in an attempt to 'sell one-self' before the end of the date, or, perhaps because of the lack of known others to ease the conversation, there may be little else to talk about, except each other. Although Warde's (1992) analytical tool of 'modes of provision' is helpful for analysis of services in different spheres 'enjoyment' is not a word that first springs to mind when considering the experience of first meetings in the market mode of provision at all:

sometimes, you're forced into a situation of telling your life stories or whatever on a first meeting and, both tense, and both trying to work each other out. And it's kind of quite an artificial pressured situation. And then you have to decide, almost straight away again, whether you're going to carry on or not. Which wouldn't happen in normal life. (Woman 2)

When participants felt unsure as to whether 'there was something there or not', they frequently thought it better not to see the other person again. Many felt that, in retrospect, they 'didn't really give anybody a chance'.

This fraught context inherent in 'blind' first meetings for female participants could, moreover, potentially be repeated several times. Agencies send out several personal profiles and telephone voicelinks to personal adverts in newspapers and magazines inform you that 'there are five more adverts similar to the one you have called' and further invite you to listen to their 'browse lines'. However having to, as one respondent termed it, 'vet and wade through' such a lot of people in such a short space of time could be emotionally draining.

In line with Rose's (1992) contention that problems of the individual are increasingly seen as a matter for oneself, self-blame and feelings of humiliation for women often accompanied 'disastrous dates'. Such instances were often met with feelings of 'what have *I* done' and 'is this just *me*'. Many participants could not believe that they had allowed themselves to be, what they termed as, 'conned'.

These things taken together, the research found that those female participants who had used an intermediary, decided at some point to abandon 'all this kind of thing for now'. Indeed, whilst all of those who had used such a service defended the right of involuntary singles to use them, many stated that they themselves would never use one again.

Conclusion

Just as we can not conceive of the flow of a river without paying attention to, among other factors, its bed, it would be wrong to treat human action as if it were context free, unconstrained by particular 'natural' social forms. (Berscheid quoted in Ahuvia and Adelman 1991: 274)

Suppositions of consumers as 'rational and unabashedly self interested' ignore the 'social forms' that market services disrupt as well as the consequences and implications of this for the perceptions, and consumer, of commercialised introduction services.

The research on which this chapter is based illustrates that substitution between modes of provision involved more than the involuntary single female participants facing a re-ordered set of suppliers – clearly explicated when we present a socially embedded view of the market services of dating agencies and personal advertisements. Women in this study often constructed formal and rational modes of provision for meeting others as 'irrational' or 'abnormal' because of the shared cultural understandings – influenced by the romantic ideology – inherent in the informal mode of provision that such services disrupt. Meeting potential partners the 'normal way' was perceived to 'just happen' to those with the 'right' personal qualities, usually in the company of, or via, friends and colleagues. In contrast to the majority of market consumers, involuntary singles who used commercialised social introduction services to 'set up' or 'contrive' a potentially romantic encounter were perceived to 'have to' resort to using commercialised channels because of 'personal failure'.

While it is argued that participating in consumer culture can provide the necessary resources to help women challenge gender inequality (Nava 1992) other studies in the field of consumption have illustrated that the full commodification of certain areas of social life, for example 'feeding work' (Warde and Martens 2000) or 'care' (Baldock and Ungerson 1996: 27) can be hindered by 'shared cultural understandings' which will constrain consumer choices and thus impede the advancement of the market. Many of the women in this study voiced that they would 'never' use a social introduction service and those who had, had done so in relative secrecy. In line with Holloway's (1984: 241) assertion of the importance of 'attracting a man' to feminine subjectivity, participants in this study feared being labelled as a 'desperate woman' if they were to transgress the romantic norm of 'waiting' for first meetings to happen 'naturally'. Thus perhaps, notions of femininity as 'passive' in relation to romantic love, conflict with the 'proactivism' inherent in using commercialised introduction services. The full commodification of 'meeting others' may also be hampered by other areas of the market which promote the narratives of femininity and romantic love. In how many 'Mills and Boon' novels, or popular 'love songs', do couples meet through a social introduction agency for example?

Further, because potentially romantic encounters had to be rationally managed (see also Boden 2001) such channels took the single out of their usual social context for meeting others and initial introductions were fraught with pressure, anxiety, and often a sense of personal danger for involuntary single women. Such commercialised avenues then may have consequences for the 'enjoyment' of the first meeting, and may actually impede the formation of a relationship rather than facilitate it. That said it is recognised that, had the research participants been sampled from different age groups, socio-economic positions or geographical locations, the findings might have been otherwise – a point which further research might explore. Similarly, further research needs to consider the implications of not only on-line dating sites,

but the increasing 'interaction' services provided by commercialised introduction services – like arranging supper evenings, holidays and other 'social' events and large gatherings where there may be less pressure than on a 'one to one' blind first meeting.

As yet however, comparison of the meanings imbued to, and experiences of consuming in, informal and formal modes of provision suggests that they can not be considered interchangeable. The full commodification of meeting others may be hampered by both cultural understandings of the 'normal' way to meet others and the negative experience of using these 'rational' services.

References

- Ahuvia, A. and Adelman, M. (1991), 'Mediated Channels for Mate Seeking: A Solution to Involuntary Singlehood?', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 8, pp. 273-289.
- Ahuvia, A. and Adelman, M. (1992), 'Formal Intermediaries in the Marriage Market: A Typology and a Review', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 54, pp. 452-463.
- Baldock, J. and Ungerson, C. (1996), 'Becoming a Consumer of Care: Developing a Sociological Account of the "New Community Care"', in Edgell, S., Hetherington, K. and Warde, A. (eds) *Consumption Matters*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 11-35.
- Bauman, Z. (1988), *Freedom*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes.
- Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995), *The Normal Chaos of Love*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Boden, S. (2001), "'Superbrides': Wedding Consumer Culture and the Construction of Bridal Identity', *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 6, no. 1 <<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/6/1/boden.html>>.
- Bolig, R., Stein, P.J. and McKenry, P.C. (1984), 'The Self-Advertisement Approach to Dating: Male-Female Differences', *Family Relations*, Vol. 33, pp. 587-592.
- Coupland, J. (1996), 'Dating Advertisements: Discourses of the Commodified Self', *Discourse and Society*, Vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 187-207.
- Coupland, J. (2000), 'Past the "Perfect Kind of Age"? Styling Selves and Relationships in Over-50s Dating Advertisements', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 9-30.
- Darden, D. and Koski, P. (1988), 'Using the Personal Ads: A Deviant Activity?', *Deviant Behaviour*, Vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 383-400.
- Fairclough, N. (1995), 'Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketization of Public Discourse: The Universities', *Discourse and Society*, Vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 133-168.
- Giddens, A. (1992), *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Holloway, W. (1984), 'Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity', in Henriques, J., Holloway, W., Urwin, C., Venn, C. and Walkerdine, V. (eds) *Changing the Subject*, Routledge, London, pp. 227-263.
- Hunt, M. (1966), *The World of the Formerly Married*, Penguin, London.

- Jagger, E. (1998), 'Marketing the Self, Buying an Other: Dating in a Postmodern, Consumer Society', *Sociology*, Vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 795-814.
- Jagger, E. (2001), 'Marketing Molly and Melville: Dating in a Postmodern, Consumer Society', *Sociology*, Vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 39-57.
- Langford, W. (1999), *Revolutions of the Heart. Gender, Power and the Delusions of Love*, Routledge, London.
- Leonard, D. (1980), *Sex and Generation. A Study of Courtship and Weddings*, Tavistock Publications, London.
- Merskin, D.L. and Huberlie, M. (1996), 'Companionship in the Classifieds: The Adoption of Personal Advertisements by Daily Newspapers', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 219-229.
- Nava, M. (1992), *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism*, Sage, London.
- Rose, N. (1992), 'Governing the Enterprising Self', in Heelas, P. and Morris, P. (eds) *The Values of the Enterprise Culture*, Routledge, London, pp. 141-164.
- Steinfurst, S. and Moran, B. (1998), 'The New Mating Game: Matchmaking via the Personal Columns in the 1980s', *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 22, pp. 129-139.
- The Observer* (1999) 'Love Hurts Less as Millions Pepper Lonely Hearts Clubs', Doward, J., 14th February, 'Cash' supplement pp. 14-15.
- Warde, A. (1992), 'Notes on the Relationship Between Production and Consumption', in Burrows, R. and Marsh, C. (eds) *Consumption and Class: Divisions and Change*, Macmillan, London, pp. 15-31.
- Warde, A. and Martens, L. (2000), *Eating Out: Social Differentiation, Consumption and Pleasure*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Chapter 6

Consuming Pleasure on the Wedding Day: The Lived Experience of Being a Bride

Sharon Boden

This chapter looks at the ways in which brides consume their wedding fantasies. Whilst consuming for a wedding may not be as mundane and ordinary as much domestic consumption undertaken by women, for the bride-to-be it certainly exists as an all-encompassing, everyday activity that can last for months, if not years, as a continual factor requiring both emotional and economic investment.¹ In this sense, the wedding exists as a useful site for exploring how brides manage various consuming tensions – in particular, how they can achieve a balance between ‘private’ notions of romantic intimacy and their wedding being a ‘public’ commodified event? Faced with this task, this chapter goes on to show how pleasure can still inform women’s experiences of getting married. I begin by briefly sketching how weddings have changed in significance over recent years, primarily through their commercialization, and how this has impacted on the wedding’s relationship to the married life it signifies entry into.

Today’s world of weddings: How did we get here?

The changing social and cultural significance of the wedding does not just implicate commercialism and consumerism as important contributing factors, but also its relationship to wider family, kin and community structures and processes, including contemporary understandings of marriage, romantic love and gender. Rituals of courtship and marriage have of course developed over centuries. The British marriage

1 Material in this chapter has been developed from Boden, S. (2003) *Consumerism, Romance and the Wedding Experience*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. The interview data I refer to were gathered for my doctoral research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). 15 marrying couples were interviewed both before and after their wedding day. The average expenditure of my sample on their weddings was £8-9,000 with a range from £500 to £30,000, whilst the average active wedding planning and preparation time was 11 months, with a range between 6 weeks and 21 months.

practice, from the early Middle Ages onwards, was always a public ceremony – whether religious or secular – which not only united husband and wife but also involved the joining of families, peers and neighbours in a collective process (Gillis, 1985). Courtship, moreover, was characterised by a series of negotiations between the groom, and his family, and the bride's kinsmen to agree the formal transfer of the bride from one male to another. Common law arrangements until the nineteenth century in turn reflected the disparate status of men and women within marriage through incorporating the legal existence of the woman into that of her husband's, and by sanctioning that a woman's property (and the woman herself as property) be passed into the hands of the man she was to marry.

From the 1850s onwards, however, an increase in the number of wage-earning wives combined with a growing feminist consciousness among some women led to transformations in the legal status of women and the acknowledgement of married women's property rights (Pahl 1989). Pahl usefully makes links between these historical and legal changes in the relations (especially the economic relations) of husbands and wives and gender roles in contemporary marriage – the most significant development being the gradual erosion of the husband as 'breadwinner' and of the wife as 'dependant' and its replacement with a number of different systems of money allocation within marriage.²

These changes in turn feed into a broader set of developments pertaining to the reasons why people marry and in the roles and responsibilities men and women expect to have once married. Contemporary sociological accounts of changes in romantic love such as those of Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue that important transformations have taken place in the character of intimate relationships which have led to the wedding emerging as the legal beginning of the union of two individuals who *choose* to commit to each other.

According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 6), the processes of individualisation – that is, the freeing of men and women from the gender roles prescribed by industrial society for life in the nuclear family – have led to a situation where the family is no longer the central or exclusive referent for identity construction, but has been replaced by the labour market and its demand for a functional, committed, ambitious, mobile, and altogether independent workforce of 'individuals'. Intimate relationships may still involve 'sex, affection, marriage, parenthood' but they can no longer remain isolated from the influences of 'work, profession, inequality, politics and economics' (1995: 13). Issues of emancipation and equal rights, in particular, are now infused into the private sphere and consequently shape everyday relationships between men and women.

However, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that the growth of the (reflexive) individual has not necessarily signalled the demise of romantic love, intimate

2 The most prevalent of which (within more or less stable or happy couples) being the *pooling system* or *shared management system* of money whereby couples have a joint account into which both incomes are paid, have equal access to this account and have shared responsibility for expenditure (Pahl 1989: 71).

companionship, or, indeed, the family. The more individual we become, they argue, the more we need a 'significant other' with whom to share the hopes and fears, gains and losses experienced through release from traditional norms. Love therefore, in this context, becomes more important than ever – an antidote to modern living, representing 'a sort of refuge in the chilly environment of our affluent, impersonal, uncertain society, stripped of its traditions and scarred by all kinds of risk' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 2).

Given that 'love' and loving relationships, especially romantic and sexual ones, are argued to be the new centre around which our now detraditionalised lives revolve, different types of intimate unions therefore emerge – 'informal' marriage or co-habitation, 'contractual' or 'companionate' marriage, Giddens' democratic 'pure relationship' – permutations of which emphasise a relationship of sexual, emotional and economic equality between partners and in turn signify a marked transition from the idea of marriage as an *institution* to marriage as a *relationship* (Finch and Summerfield, 1991). Set in the context of these wider social and interpersonal transformations, then, the contemporary wedding has become increasingly significant as an occasion *chosen* by brides and grooms, prepared and performed by and for *each other*, and, increasingly, as a forum for decision-making and the negotiation of roles and responsibilities within the relationship, especially the thorny question of 'who pays for what?'

With the licensing of new approved premises for civil marriages in the 1994 Marriage Act and the anticipated licensing of celebrants, combined with the historical secularisation of society, it is true to say that contemporary weddings do not have a fixed, 'traditional' nature or meaning. Licensing more unconventional premises for civil marriages (e.g. castles, football clubs, stately homes) was indeed a significant step in bringing the wedding occasion into closer alignment with the issue of consumer choice alongside the aesthetisation and individualisation of the life-course.

Hand in hand with the wedding now being a commercial event goes its new status as a media spectacle. Media coverage of celebrity and more unconventional weddings plays a key role in developing a popular wedding culture, in part through identifying and celebrating the crucial elements of the successful wedding. One cannot fail to now notice the eagerness of the popular media in Britain to devote the space, time and opinion traditionally reserved for royal weddings to the weddings of the famous, celebrities, and, increasingly, to the more bizarre wedding preferences of the general public. This developing voyeurism, the interest in spectacular or unusual wedding imagery, has been paralleled by the marketing strategies of magazines like *Hello!* and *OK!* which negotiate exclusive deals to publish celebrity wedding photographs, both formal and more intimate in variety, ensuring their readers have a visual experience of the wedding in question that is unmatched by any other publications. So too, bridal magazines have helped to create the 'superbride' (Boden 2001) – an aspirational consumer identity which fuses together a rational 'project manager' with an emotional 'childish fantasiser'. The priority of such a bride is to negotiate and manage her experiences of reason and emotion, rationality and romance as they

interplay in wedding consumption. Weddings today, particularly when there are so many apparent reasons not to marry (e.g. the divorce rate, the widespread acceptance of co-habitation, wedlock no longer being seen as a precursor for raising children, women no longer having their identities constructed solely through marriage), are therefore cherished for the heady, romantic pleasures of the day itself, serving to disassociate the image of the wedding somewhat from that of the marriage and, especially, the married life it presages.

In light of these changes to the role of the wedding and, by implication, its leading lady, one might argue that current emphasis upon the wedding as a *cultural* event or performance which generates its meaning primarily through consumerism and romance (rather than say religion) counterbalances any wavering belief or confidence in the wedding as a necessary social rite of passage. The wedding may no longer always be a genuinely religious celebration (even if it takes place in a religious setting) but rather exists as a cultural performance which, ideally, should express and display the romantic commitment of two people. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, then, the romantic imaginary of the wedding seems to have utmost importance, along with the consumption practices that transform the wedding from a standardized life-course event into a new kind of cultural site that evolves around the style and taste of its organizers.

Of course, despite its evolution and apparent liberation from stuffy tradition, the wedding still signifies the desire of both women and men to adopt a married identity. Whilst speaking of marriage nowadays as ‘an institution’ may seem old-fashioned and far from ‘romantic’, years of feminist research need not be overshadowed by an unbalanced celebration of brides and married women as fully empowered consuming agents experiencing unbounded freedoms in the wedding marketplace.

Brook (2002), for example, reminds us how some feminists critique marriage as both a sexist institution and an institution of patriarchy. The former, it seems, concentrates on exposing how, through limited opportunities and choice, the consequences of marriage disadvantage women. These arguments imply that a radical reform of marriage is needed to address the unequal power relationship between husbands and wives. The latter cluster of critiques – those arguing marriage is a patriarchal institution – see marriage as structurally and necessarily oppressive to women. Brook goes on to list a catalogue of examples which illustrate the relations of economic and emotional dependency organised through marriage. These include the exploitation of women’s domestic labour, men’s (hetero) sexual rights, sexual domestic violence, and the household/family economics of dependency and subordination.

Feminist research has therefore long sought to expose heterosexual, romantic ideology (within which the ‘wedding’ is the ultimate fantasy conclusion) as a fabrication or type of fiction used strategically to subordinate and exploit women. As Hollway (1984: 228) puts it, ‘heterosexual relations are the primary site where gender difference is reproduced’. Needless to say, rites of passage, ceremonial occasions and consumables which seem to embody and reinforce this ideology, and in turn create and normalise particular gendered positions (via the taken-for-

grantedness of heterosexuality) have also been critiqued (Ingraham 1999; Langford 1999; Hollway 1984; Leonard 1980).

The conceptualisation and experience of romance by men and women are further complicated as gender roles and interpersonal relations continue to be redefined. For example, drawing on the work of Duncombe and Marsden (1993), Langford (1999) reinforces the point that gender differences in emotionality may be highlighted and intensified by the shift from marriage as an 'institution' to the ideal of fulfilment within personal relationships. It may also be the case that the advances of feminism alongside the recent popular emphasis on 'girl power' have meant that younger women in particular now express 'romantic' views of *independence* over and above *coupledom* – or at least argue that whilst they want weddings they are reluctant to become 'wives' (Spender 1994). Equally, though, it might now appear to be more 'romantic' to get married in an era of high divorce rates and co-habitation, striving against the odds to live happily ever after as husband and wife.

It certainly seems the case that the emphasis in contemporary society on weddings being flexible and fun can offer us an understanding of gender relations which is less fixed and less deterministic than has previously been assumed by feminist accounts of marriage. A clear example of this is the bride's exercising of choice and power during the wedding preparations which effectively makes her groom a mere 'silent partner' in the business of wedding consumption. Whatever one's personal viewpoint on the merits of marriage, the wedding is not floundering in its popularity, suggesting that there are enough of us prepared to 'give it a whirl' and see if the wedding lives up to its much touted reputation of being the happiest day of our lives.

The big day: An all-consuming affair

So how do brides emotionally consume their wedding fantasy? Central to our understanding is the process brides themselves describe going through during their wedding day – a transformatory process in which brides simultaneously experience their weddings as staged and socially constructed events yet nevertheless 'feel' them to be authentic and romantic.

Transformations first. Transforming into a fairytale bride requires extensive research, labour and discipline. You only need flick through one of the many wedding magazines available to understand how every aspect of the bridal identity comes under scrutiny: hair, make-up, skin quality, body-size, etiquette, demeanour not to mention choice of outfit and accessories. Evidence abounds in wedding magazines to support Winship's (1987) idea of the 'work' of consumption being a distinctly female activity (see Boden 2001). In my research, brides' accounts of their wedding morning rituals centred on the careful and co-ordinated transformation of the self in anticipation of living out their fantasy day.

The construction of bridal appearance through appropriate hairstyling and the application of make-up, along with wearing the dress and other accessories, was referred to as a type of work or production that depended in the final stages of

wedding preparation upon the skills and proficiencies of industry professionals. Whilst brides had earlier described to me the months of effort they themselves had put into pre-wedding dieting and beautification, control over the bridal appearance at this penultimate stage was willingly delegated to other, more experienced, parties (hairdressers, beauticians, make-up artists). Relinquishing a certain amount of control over the finished product of the bridal identity was strongly tied into the belief that after the majority of the work of consumption had been completed brides have to 'let go' somewhat in order to achieve and experience a fully embodied transformation. Such transformations, typically into a Cinderella-like princess (see also Tseñon 1995 and Schouten 1991), were thought to be both more achievable and more perfected if conducted by a qualified professional. However, as we shall see later, this process of objectifying or commodifying herself as 'the bride', which, in certain respects, intensified when the bride's own labour into this endeavour was replaced by that of an industry worker, came to play an important role in her sense of self as the day progressed.

Putting on the wedding dress was nearly always referred to as the start of the wedding day proper – it was, to all intents and purposes, the defining moment in the transformation of the bride. As one 20-year-old bride, who was marrying for the first time, said:

It only hit me ... I went upstairs to get dressed, came down the stairs and my brothers were both there, and my Dad, and that's when I burst into tears [...] No, nerves didn't hit me till I'd actually got the dress, the veil and everything on. (Fiona)

Fiona's dress brought with it unprecedented levels of emotion, experienced as an intense and sudden moment of realization of what she was and what she was about to do. Up until this definitive moment of getting into costume it seems that the bridal identity primarily centred around and limited itself to two closely connected roles, that of 'consumer' and 'worker'. The wedding dress, however, seemed to trigger in brides a fuller, and more full-bodied, emotional realization of what being a bride signified; the dress of course being a key wedding symbol long before the current commercial explosion of wedding consumption.

Perhaps not surprisingly, whilst the wedding dress was regarded as the most 'sacred' artefact in the bridal ensemble (Otnes and Lowrey, 1993), it equally holds the power to evoke considerable feelings of disappointment or unease in its wearer. The comments of another bride, Louise, serve to highlight the fragility of the fantasy she is trying to live out:

I came in here and sat watching Cinderella on video [...] As soon as I went to put the dress on I don't know where the time went and that's when I had problems. I started crying because my dress when I'd been trying it on, because my shoulders tend to be a bit slopey, if you know what I mean, and erm, with the dress, I kept saying 'The shoulders are too big for me' and the woman in the shop kept pulling it down and saying 'That's fine'. But then when I'd got it on obviously in the morning, yeah you'd pull it down and it was fine, but I was walking about and it was rising up and I think that's what got me in tears. My

brother gave me away. He was here ... bridesmaids and that just left me and it was my brother that helped me and I was all miserable going 'I may as well of just had you, not had a bridesmaid!' Because he actually helped me more than they did. (Louise)

The dissatisfaction felt by Louise during what should have been her full transformation into the bride prevented her feelings from being conceptualised beyond the discourse of consumption – that is to say, consumption is only perceived to be perfect when it is transcended. The wedding dress, in this case, remained a substandard commodity. The false assurances of the bridal shop salesperson along with the imperfections of the dress itself, which were at the same time ironically juxtaposed to the perfect fantasy of the Cinderella fairytale currently playing on video in the background, functioned to dispossess Louise's dress of its own magical, transformatory powers. We might also suppose that perfected wedding imagery in bridal magazines leads to a certain amount of disappointment in 'real-life' brides when used as a source of comparison. One bride commented to me that she considered bridal magazines to be 'idealistic', adding, 'they (the depicted brides) are ideals...and all the girls who are getting married are about a size eight' (Natalie).

The consumption-based construction of the bride as a fantasy 'object' for the wedding party, and also for herself, to admire, caused a continued self-consciousness of her position as the unequivocal centre of attention for the whole day. This self-consciousness was never felt more intensely than in the early stages of the wedding ceremony, an occasion which marked the first close public scrutiny of the bride. Whilst the wedding is, for most of us, a visually familiar ritual, for those actually marrying this familiarity seemed to contradict the strangeness of their own participation as the central actors in the proceedings:

You knew it was happening but it didn't feel like it was happening to you. Do you know what I mean? (Fiona)

Like I say, you go to that many weddings it just felt a bit funny because it was you up there this time. (Leon)

Three other brides expressed similar sentiments: 'You felt like you were watching somebody else's wedding' (Patricia); 'It did feel like we were playing a role. We dressed up and we were like King and Queen for the day weren't we?' (Tina); 'It didn't seem natural I don't think' (Harriet).

Brides, in particular, stressed the unreality of the whole experience, and the certain amount of unease they felt from being centre of attention. Hayley, a 25-year-old first-timer, explained to me how she felt:

Beforehand I was nervous. About two minutes beforehand because you're about to walk into a room full of people and they're all going to stare at you and take photos of you. I was a bit nervous about being looked at. (Hayley)

The lived experience of being a bride, then, involves positioning oneself as a spectacle upon which the public gaze can be directed. This concentration of viewing was often reinforced through the spatial organisation of the place of marriage:

The only thing that seemed really strange was when you go into Ernham church two of the ushers opened the doors in, and it was just the initial walking through and all these people turning around and I went (gasps) and then I felt a bit (gasps again) then as soon as I started walking I felt alright. Yeah, that was the only thing that was really nervous. (Natalie)

However, a few couples in my research managed to reconcile any feelings of estrangement or disconnection from their own wedding by conceptualising the day as a purposely extraordinary, spectacular and, hence, unfamiliar experience. The wedding day, typically spoken about using theatrical analogies – the ‘final curtain’ (Patricia), the ‘main event’ (James), a ‘big play’ (Harriet) – was a stage upon which the bride and groom took the starring roles in performing their new identities to a captive audience. Sarah’s description of arriving at her wedding, for instance, tellingly reveals her self-dramatisation as making a movie-star entrance:

We had the carriage arriving, twenty people sort of stood outside the front of the house taking photographs. The whole vision of it coming true ‘OK here we go, camera rolling, lights, action’. I’ll never forget that. (Sarah)

Robert, her groom, also commented on the photographer describing their wedding as being ‘like a film set’. This was taken as a compliment in both Robert and Sarah’s minds that it was not just themselves who felt the unreality and enchanted, elaborate spectacle of the occasion, and that the day was therefore not just in their own imaginations.

The unreality of the wedding was emphasised further through the seeming disjuncture between the bride and groom’s sense of time passing on the day and the ‘real time’ chronology of the event. On the one hand, brides, especially, often had little recollection of certain aspects of the day, snapping their fingers to relate in disbelief how their wedding had come and gone in a bewitching instant – ‘...and it just went like that’ (Fiona snaps her fingers). This is further evidence of the bride viewing her wedding as a magical, fantasy occasion – a spellbinding experience almost, or twenty-four hours in the land of make believe. Yet, at the same time, certain aspects of the wedding were experienced as if in cinematic slow motion:

Sarah: When I actually got out of the carriage at Marchand Hall and then started to walk down the stairs after that it was like I was in a dream sequence. I just ... we had approximately one hundred and eighty photographs took that day and I can’t remember being stood in half of them. I felt like it was a complete dream sequence and then you wake up at the end of the dream ten hours later.

Sharon: So it’s like a fairy tale?

Sarah: Absolutely, yes. Floating around on some unique drug or something, I don’t know.

We have encountered the notion of brides trying to 'let go' in order to experience their weddings in a more intense emotionally embodied manner before, in the context of allowing others to assist in perfecting the bridal identity for instance. For most brides in the research, the wedding facilitated a daylong re-enchantment of their selves, which was synonymous with experiencing their immediate surroundings in a kind of child-like wonder and bewilderment:

I just smiled all day. I woke up smiling and I was just ... it was like ... the only way I can describe it was like all my Christmases and birthdays as a child ... that excited feeling but multiplied ... and I was just like that all day long. It was just fantastic. I was worn out from adrenaline by the end of the day [...] You don't have it as an adult. Birthdays and Christmas have lost their sort of excitement haven't they by the time you've got to twenty or so [...] But I didn't realize the buzz I'd get from it. I thought I'd just be like oh yeah false smile 'thanks for coming' all that, but no it was just a complete adrenaline rush the whole day long. (Tina)

The emotions brides experienced on their wedding day, despite being portrayed as authentic and overwhelming, were equally regarded as an inevitable and expected part of the occasion – explained away as 'just the emotion of getting married' (Natalie). Whilst brides like Tina may not have predicted the intensity or depth of feeling they would experience, most assumed it would be themselves along with other female members of the wedding party who were most likely to 'get emotional' (Beverley). Crying, even under the gaze of the congregation, was seen as normal bridal and, by implication, female behaviour. This left some brides (unintentionally) coming close to caricaturing themselves as emotionally uncontrollable women in floods of tears even before the wedding ceremony had officially begun: 'I cried all the way down the aisle. I was crying at the bottom of the church. He daren't look at me because he could hear me sobbing' (Fiona). The emotionality of brides appeared to be at least partially separated from their feelings for the men that they were about to marry. Rather, emotion seemed to be triggered by a sensory, aesthetic experience of the wedding at a more symbolic, fantasy level. The way consumption and emotion become intertwined for brides in the wedding fantasy is also further related to if and how brides and grooms conceptualise the experience as 'romantic'. It is to this issue I now turn.

A chance for romance? The pleasures of wedding consumption

With several brides alluding to their wedding experiences as 'magical', 'fantastical', and 'fairytale', we have already begun to explore in what sense a traditional romantic narrative continues to structure the wedding and, in turn, how consumer culture functions to endorse such a wedding 'ideal'. In this sense, through the emphases of brides and grooms themselves, and of course through the wedding industry, romance becomes celebrated as a timeless essence between those who feel themselves to be in love. It is at once an ethereal and embodied emotion which resonates over and

above the specificities of any wedding occasion or of any material artefact. Yet, equally, we have become aware of a fragile balance on the wedding day between experiencing 'private' notions of romantic love, and being the leading lady in a 'public', commodified performance. This balance, tantamount to the fine-line between one's wedding feeling 'real' or not, determines how pleasure can inform women's experiences of getting married.

The romanticism surrounding the wedding day, then, is all important. It is my intention in this last section of the chapter to distinguish which specific elements of the wedding are regarded as 'romantic' by brides and grooms and how they interact with the reality of everyday life leading up to the event. Underpinning this analysis is the issue of where exactly 'romance' is located. Is it a quality couples feel to be already inherent in their relationships, which is celebrated and displayed openly in the wedding context? Or is it to be found in commodities with particular symbolic value, items like the dress or the ring that are marketed primarily as the material embodiments of romantic sentiment? The answers to such questions, to be sure, do not have to fall into one camp or the other, instead they further problematise any notion of authentic, unmediated, private emotion standing opposed to the emotions that are potentiated or enhanced through consumption in a public performance. In fact, in many ways, the evocation of authentic, spontaneous emotion which pre-exists consumption is itself the backbone of the romantic narrative which continues to structure the contemporary wedding occasion.

It became clear to me that wedding couples made an important categorisation when discussing the ways in which their wedding was experienced as 'romantic' and, especially to brides, as pleasure-giving. Examples of romance fell into two distinct categories – one category covering commodities or other tangible objects with obvious romantic connotations, the other documenting the intimate emotional interactions between the bride and groom.

Beginning with commodities, motifs and other material expressions of romance, the following responses were given: 'The champagne in the car' (Beverley); 'We had somebody playing the piano' (Harriet); 'He gave me a present [...] a white gold heart' (Kate); 'The church' (Mark); 'The photos' (Nick); 'The string quartet' (Sarah); 'The dress' (Sarah); 'The horse drawn carriage' (Sarah); 'He'd got me a massive bouquet of red roses' (Louise). Yet, as I have already stated, 'romance' was not only a guest at the wedding in these material forms. The word seemed, in many more instances, to capture the essence of emotional interactions between the bride and groom, whether those moments were to occur alone or under the gaze of the congregation: 'Little things like holding hands when we did our vows' (Tina); 'The emotions more so than anything else, what you are doing and saying' (Mark); 'Because I did not understand that I would be that emotional. You can't foresee how you are going to feel' (Fiona); 'We got choked up saying our vows' (Beverley); 'Things we did on our own' (Louise); 'Being close to Josh all day' (Jessica); 'Speaking our vows in front of everyone so everyone knows we are committing to each other' (Josh); 'Quite a lot of tears' (Sarah); 'When I walked up the aisle ... the little look he gave me' (Tina); 'The speech' (Kate); 'Little bits like your first dance' (John). In addition to these

responses, two interviewees directly associated the romantic nature of their wedding with their own authorial control over the event: 'Just because it was our decision' (James); 'Doing it the way we wanted to' (Jessica).

It seems the case then that the construction of, and participation in, scenarios conducive to romance, whether heavily reliant on consumption or not, cause couples to experience what they interpret as 'heart-felt' and 'authentic' pleasure. In other words, whilst marrying couples are likely to be 'in love', consumption has the capacity to potentiate or enhance the experiential indicators of their romantic union and assure them both (and their audience) that they have found the 'real thing'.

However, the key part of the argument above is that the wedding remains a *constructed* event – constructed both mentalistically and materially (Campbell, 1987) – primarily by the bride. As such, the bride's emotional investment in the wedding is inextricably connected to the careful managing, budgeting and planning of the event and the imagined fantasy of getting married which drives her day-to-day preparations. This may, on the one hand, suggest that womens' romantic fantasies are rooted in the reality of their everyday lives – phoning the caterers up, skipping meals to lose weight for the big day, negotiating who sits by whom at the wedding breakfast, overseeing any of the groom's responsibilities and so on. Yet, on the other, this emphasis on creating the perfect wedding and being a picture-perfect bride meshes well with, if not reaffirms, the wider assumption in popular culture of women's (and girls) child-like infatuation with the fairy tale, dressing up, dreaming, escape, and meeting 'Mr Right' (Russell and Tyler 2002; Messner 2000).

There appears therefore to be no simple or straightforward way to theorise the relationship between, in this case, 'romantic' emotion and consumption, partly because of its constructed nature and partly because of the mixed bag of possibilities which opens up when these two experiences interact. Yet the data presented in this chapter has no doubt highlighted how, in the wedding occasion at least, the role of romance is important to our understanding (as well as the understandings of brides and grooms) of the intimate, complex connections between consumption, gender and emotion.

As we have seen, the ways in which today's brides can consume their wedding fantasies seems varied, unbounded and often somewhat contradictory – an outcome, we might expect, of the ever-changing social and cultural significance of this particular rite of passage. Being a bride involves much more than the adoption of a shrewd consumer identity to guarantee a successfully staged performance. On the contrary, wedding preparations provide for the bride a trial run for the negotiation of roles and responsibilities between herself and her husband to be, they reinforce the bride's own exercising of power and choice not only in respect to her preference to enter into a married life but how she chooses to express and display her new partnership to others, they require the management of rationality and romance, the magical and the mundane, to ensure consumption can be both appreciated and transcended and, perhaps most importantly, they help to create and normalise the gendered position of the bride as the emotional orchestrator of the entire event.

We can conclude then that romance on one's wedding day can simultaneously be perceived as present in several ways which are not exclusive of each other nor ordered in any particular importance – in an *ethereal* sense, as a timeless essence, which pre-exists consumption, between those who feel themselves to be in love; in an (*dis*)*embodied* sense, as a 'heart-felt', spontaneous and overwhelming emotion with the capacity to be experienced by brides as somewhat 'unreal' and even 'unnerving'; and in a *material* sense as the symbolic or sign value of certain commodities or tangible objects. Romance and its associated emotions, it seems, have not been totally commodified or automated, yet neither do they remain wholly resistant to commodification and manipulation. Neither can we confine romance and its associated emotions to a particular location – whether in the hearts, minds, bodies, or purchases of wedding consumers. The identity of the bride, finely balanced between the social pressure of performance and the private pleasure of hedonism, is nevertheless marketed, constructed and experienced as thoroughly romantic in nature. The concept of romance therefore continues to structure the wedding narrative and, as such, provides a means for women to emotionally and materially consume their weddings as an 'authentic' pleasure.

References

- Beck, U. and Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995), *The Normal Chaos of Love*, (trans. by M. Ritter and J. Wiebel), Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Boden, S. (2001), "'Superbrides': Wedding Consumer Culture and the Construction of Bridal Identity', *Sociological Research Online*, 6 (1), <<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/6/1/boden.html>>.
- Boden, S. (2003), *Consumerism, Romance and the Wedding Experience*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke.
- Brook, H. (2002), 'Stalemate: Rethinking the Politics of Marriage', *Feminist Theory*, 3 (1), pp. 45-66.
- Campbell, C. (1987), *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Duncombe, J. and Marsden, D. (1998), "'Stepford Wives" and "Hollow Men"? Doing Emotion Work, Doing Gender and "Authenticity" in Intimate Heterosexual Relationships', in G. Bendelow and S. J. Williams (eds), *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues*, Routledge, London, pp. 211-227.
- Finch, J. and Summerfield, P. (1991), 'Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945-59', in D. Clark (ed.), *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change*, Routledge, London, pp. 7-32.
- Giddens, A. (1992), *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Gillis, J. R. (1985), *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

- Hollway, W. (1984), 'Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity', in J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn and V. Walkerdine, *Changing the Subject*, Routledge, London, pp. 227-263.
- Ingraham, C. (1999), *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*, Routledge, New York.
- Langford, W. (1999), *Revolutions of the Heart*, Routledge, London.
- Leonard, D. (1980), *Sex and Generation*, Tavistock, London.
- Messner, M. (2000), 'Barbie Girls Versus Sea Monsters – Children Constructing Gender', *Gender and Society*, 14, pp. 765-784.
- Otnes, C. and Lowrey, T. M. (1993), 'Till Debt Do Us Part: The Selection and Meaning of Artifacts in the American Wedding', *Advances in Consumer Research*, 20, pp. 325-329.
- Pahl, J. (1989), *Money and Marriage*, Macmillan, Hampshire.
- Russell, R. and Tyler, M. (2002), 'Thank Heaven for Little Girls', *Sociology*, 36, pp. 619-637.
- Schouten, J. (1991), 'Selves in Transition: Symbolic Consumption in Personal Rites of Passage and Identity Reconstruction', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17, pp. 412-425.
- Spender, D. (ed.) (1994), *Weddings and Wives*, Penguin Books, Victoria.
- Tseëlon, E. (1995), *The Masque of Femininity*, Sage, London.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 7

Gambling and Everyday Life: Working Class Mothers and Domestic Spaces of Consumption

Emma Casey

Introduction

The UK National Lottery was launched in November 1994 amid a flurry of unprecedented publicity and against a backdrop of moral and ethical objections to gambling and its deregulation. A record number of people purchase lottery tickets, 84 percent of men and 78 percent of women have played the lottery at some point since its launch, more than for any other form of gambling (Mintel, 1998: 19). The focus of this chapter is on National Lottery play as it is understood as an ordinary, everyday and, moreover, mundane consumer activity. By positioning the lottery in such a way, the chapter offers methodological advances in what currently stands for 'gambling studies', which has to date, focused predominantly on gambling as a dangerous form of addiction. In particular, much research has presented gambling as inconsistent, firstly with domestic family life, secondly with 'respectable' femininity and thirdly with the values of a society which seeks to protect its 'weak', 'poor' and 'vulnerable'. In this chapter, all three of these positions will be challenged, and a new theoretical understanding of the National Lottery as a contemporary form of consumer culture will be presented.

The chapter will make use of a range of data, namely fifteen in-depth interviews with working-class, low income women living in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and south east London, debates and social commentary on the National Lottery, drawing especially from the broadsheet and tabloid press, and other existing literature, taken from what currently stands for the sociology of gambling. The original research also included 100 questionnaires from which the interview sample was obtained. The questionnaires provided data on women and UK National Lottery play, which was previously unavailable. Other work has considered this data within the context of class, gender and consumption (Casey, 2003a), lottery play, daydream and the concept of metaphorical consumption (Casey, 2004), and the usefulness of the various methodological techniques adopted (Casey, 2003b). In contrast, the emphasis of this chapter is on the lottery, class and moral economies.

I argue throughout that lottery tickets are an excellent example of modernity in practice. Using Giddens' account of cultural late modernity (1991), I suggest that playing the lottery offers deep insights into the pains and pleasures of modernity. In addition, as the chapter delves further into the precise experiences of lottery play, it draws on postmodern accounts of consumerism, such as Featherstone's broadening of the concept of consumption so that it is more closely related to identity formation, (1991) to argue that the paper lottery tickets purchased by working class women have a life beyond their physicality. This clearly differentiates the lottery from most other leisure and cultural pursuits and activities that take place within clearly defined boundaries of space and place. I will show in this chapter how the experience of lottery purchase extends beyond the thing *itself* that is purchased. Indeed, the ticket itself is hardly important at all, rather, what is key to the lottery playing experience for women, is the range of pleasures, daydreams, images, morals and ideals that lottery ticket purchase provides access to.

It is fascinating that since its launch in November 1994, the majority of critiques levelled at the lottery have oscillated around class based discourses. Certainly, an examination of broadsheet newspaper responses to the National Lottery appears to hark back to an assumed by-gone era, where the poor are berated for their flawed household budgeting. In the case of National Lottery ticket purchase, the general consensus seems to be as follows; the poor are vulnerable and prone to desperate, irrational and irresponsible spending, and the National Lottery encourages meaningless and wasteful spending. As playwright Alan Bleasdale remarked in *The Guardian*:

My instinctive moral horror of the Lottery is re-lived every Saturday in newsagents throughout the land as the worn-out, the elderly, the shabby and the desperate queue up in the hope of their only escape. Is this really all there is on offer? (Bleasdale, November 1995)

Never, since the outspoken Conservative MP Edwina Curry's attack in the 1980s on the spending and diets of Britain's poor, have the spending habits of those of limited financial means been subject to such critique. Of course, it is often argued that these are not critiques at all, rather, they are attempts at 'protecting' the vulnerable poor. The Labour MP Roy Hattersley has been a particularly vocal proponent of this view. In a recent article in the right-leaning British newspaper, the *Daily Mail* (itself a forerunner in the UK anti-gambling lobby), Hattersley argues that government legitimised gambling – of which the National Lottery is the most highly publicised example – is counter to the original aims of the British socialist movement (Hattersley, cited in *Daily Mail*, 2005). The lottery, then, is popularly positioned in specific class terms, which are reminiscent of the critical school's earlier work which examined the lure of mass consumption to the vulnerable and unsuspecting masses (see for example, Adorno, 1991; Marcuse, 1968; Williams, 1987).

Thus, I argue that class plays an equally important role as gender in understanding late modernity. Women's consumption of cultural goods is part of the definition of class struggle. In arguing that feminism and class are not mutually exclusive,

I propose an approach to National Lottery ticket purchase which prioritises the gendered and classed experiences of those who play.

Gambling, domesticity and the family

As discussed above, popular middle class discourses of the National Lottery have tended to position lottery play and gambling more generally, as a harmful cultural activity. In particular, the recent *Daily Mail* campaign drew attention to research conducted by the psychologist Mark Griffiths, which concluded that gambling could harm the family:

Personal costs (of problem gambling) can include irritability, extreme moodiness, problems with personal relationships, absenteeism from work, neglect of family and bankruptcy. (Griffiths, cited in the *Daily Mail* 2005)

Bearing in mind such vehement criticism of gambling, how then, did the women of this research defend themselves against such critique? The women constantly prioritised their families and emphasised the importance of presenting a sense of 'domestic harmony' (Woodward and Green, 1988: 134) throughout the course of this research. They were very aware of real and imagined critiques of their lives, and were very keen to present an image of what I shall call 'respectable working class femininity'. This term is taken from Bev Skegg's (1997) influential work examining the interlacing of gender and class in young, working class women's caring lives, and is one which I feel best articulates the women's sense of defence against their choice of consumption. For the purposes of this chapter, I will split the concept of respectability into 3 main facets, namely *family time*, *money management*, and *irresponsible others*. I will discuss each of these in turn as a means of illuminating the women's decisions to gamble within the domestic context of the family.

Family time: Gambling at home

This section looks at how the consumption of National Lottery tickets became integrated into the everyday routines of the family. It thus proposes an alternative understanding to that which positions gambling and lottery play as counter to the norms and 'moral fibre' of the family.

By involving the family in National Lottery ticket purchase, the women were able to gamble without being accused of 'selfishly' pursuing their own choice of leisure activity. They also helped to provide evidence to support Woodward and Green's claim that women tend to participate in leisure activities with their family which reinforce romantic ideas of togetherness (Woodward and Green, 1988: 135). Importantly, this enabled the women to portray and protect an image of 'domestic harmony' (Woodward and Green, 1988: 134). Sandra for example, describes her children's involvement:

... the little un'll say 'Dad, I'll get the Lottery numbers' and he gets the paper ready and ticks them off. Or Saturday ... we went out on Saturday, so yesterday we checked (the winning numbers) on Teletext. (Sandra, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

It seems that for some of these women, watching the live draw can be a source of excitement and pleasure. The fact that it is not always possible to fit it into their usual routines of play, and that any routines of watching the live draw are frequently interrupted – as Sandra goes on to illustrate above – further supports my claim that the women's choice of leisure activities is constrained by a lack of *time* available.

The National Lottery offered a means of gambling at home, and with their husbands and family – thus satisfying prevailing norms of 'togetherness' (Mason, 1988: 84). It enabled the women to negotiate a leisure time within often very rigid and complicated time structures. For the older women, this often meant watching the live draw with their husbands and partners to see their numbers being drawn:

... we generally watch the programme so we know exactly when they (the numbers) come on. I write the numbers down as they come up. (Irene, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

For all of the women interviewed, purchasing National Lottery tickets seemed to fit in easily with their existing routines, and with the various demands of domesticity and childcare. Imperative to its popularity was the fact that it was possible for the women to take part without either buying tickets themselves or watching the live draw. It became clear that part of the National Lottery's popularity amongst the women interviewed was due to its status as an activity which requires little, or no participation. Traditional theories would not position the National Lottery in these women's lives as a 'leisure' activity; i.e. one which requires time away from the everyday. However, I identify the National Lottery as an important part of women's patterns of everyday consumption, despite appearing to require no 'time' to participate. Such a gendered account of leisure adds to existing feminist analyses of leisure, which argue that women frequently find leisure spaces, and participate in activities which are thoroughly blended into women's everyday, domestic routines, for example, Deem (1986), Woodward and Green (1988), and Smith (1987).

Furthermore, by drawing on themes of time and space, it is possible to make important connections to more recent research into consumer culture. Drawing on the themes of time and space it is possible to show how in modern, capitalist Britain, categories of time and space overlap, and how increasingly, there are few opportunities for individuals to separate their lives into neat modernist dualisms such as work/leisure, production/consumption, public/private, sacred/profane, etc. As Ritzer argues:

Do any time barriers to consumption remain? ... Suppose the ghost of a 19th-century farmer found itself in the contemporary world of consumption. Many things would be amazing and seem magical ... but one of those would certainly be the ability to consume at every minute, of every week of every year, virtually from birth to death. (2005, 134)

Whether as a form of monetary expenditure via Direct Debits and standing orders, or the material consumption of uses and services, consumption, one of the most fascinating insights into modern consumer culture, is its ability to transcend the notions of time and space, which have traditionally placed limits upon the individual's ability to consume. Ritzer's insight offers the opportunity to observe a range of new forms of consumption which are interlaced within the increasingly complex and detailed fabric of everyday life. National Lottery consumption offers one such example of the ways in which women have sought access to pleasurable spaces for consumption, which exceed time, and space.

Money management: 'I don't spend what I can't afford'

This section looks at how the women defended their ability to decide precisely how much and how frequently they could spend money on tickets.

The 'regular' nature of National Lottery play as highlighted above was reinforced in the women's own accounts of play, where they further emphasised the 'routine' nature of participation, which played an important role in enabling the women to present an image which they saw to be consistent with 'acceptable' playing habits. The women worked to define themselves as careful managers of National Lottery spendings and winnings, and subsequently as 'responsible' managers of the household budget. By spending time describing the routine nature of play, they also helped to ensure that their gambling habits were not perceived to be 'spontaneous' or 'spur of the moment', since to do so would be to admit to gambling in a way which has been criticised as irrational, irresponsible and potentially dangerous in traditional accounts of gambling. By establishing themselves as 'routine' gamblers, the women sought to distance themselves from stereotypes of spontaneous, 'irresponsible' gamblers.

The National Lottery was a 'systematic' gambling activity amongst the women interviewed. This is not a new concept. As early as 1911, Lady Florence Bell pointed to the plight of poor working class women when faced with the opportunity to gamble:

Systematic betting of the women ... is in many cases ... a quite deliberate effort to add to the income. A man comes to the door of a woman, who ... is hard pressed for money, and presents her with a shilling and winning £5. How should she not listen to him? (1911: 354)

Here Bell articulates the attraction when presented with the chance to be able to relieve some of the pressures of a tight household budget. However, for Bell, betting is seen as systematic and meaningful spending – this is important when contrasted to other accounts of gambling that have sought to demonise it as irrational and have associated it with wasteful money management. All of the women interviewed employed routines of play which they stuck to and which they believed to be important characteristics of gambling in a 'responsible' manner. The women adopted a number of different ways of spending and organising their National Lottery winnings and

spending. Irene's gambling routine was typical and, echoes Bell's findings by describing National Lottery consumption as systematic and unsponaneous:

It (National Lottery spending) comes out of the housekeeping ... then we put (our winnings) in a jar and it buys the rest for the next few weeks. We have a jar for our winnings. (Irene, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

Since National Lottery tickets tend to be purchased using housekeeping money, it became difficult for the women to break their spending routines by spending more on tickets in one particular week. However, those women who spent different amounts each week tended to be financially less well off than the women who bought the same number of tickets each week. Often these women and their husbands or partners were paid weekly rather than monthly, and tended to organise their finances at the beginning of each week. Sandra for example, says that although she gambles within a weekly routine of purchasing tickets, the amount that she spends fluctuates depending on how much spare cash she and her husband has. Thus, part of her routine is to organise at the start of the week how much she will spend on National Lottery tickets:

Emma: 'Do you put the same amount on (the National Lottery) every week?'

Sandra: 'It depends if we've got spare cash. That's probably why we don't bother with the Wednesday, cos there's not usually much money through the week till his wages come in on the weekend ...' (Sandra, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

By describing this carefully managed and considered method of playing the National Lottery, the women worked to distance themselves from traditional images of gamblers. Wendy, for example, insists that any money she spends on tickets is 'spare'. It is never money that she has taken from the bank that is intended for something else, such as food or rent:

I don't specifically go to the bank and draw money out just to get scratchcards or just to have a go on the lottery ... I've got it there, it's usually just that if the money's gone it's like ... 'I haven't got it here' so I must have used it to purchase lottery tickets.

The majority of the women who played the National Lottery had won money at some point. Most of the women had won £10 although some had matched four or five winning numbers and had won amounts ranging from £50 to £1400. The ways in which the women spent and organised their winnings, represented a central part of the routine nature of National Lottery play.

Irene, for example, points out that winning £10 is the only circumstance that would persuade her to consider purchasing more tickets than usual:

Emma: So you always stick to the same number of lines each week?

Irene: Yes. If we win any (money) we might be tempted to get more. (Irene, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

Some of the women saved any £10 lottery winnings for the next weekly lottery draw. Wendy remarked that it is only when her winnings were in excess of £10 that she would consider buying herself a 'treat'. For smaller amounts won, she, like Irene above, used the money for the next lot of tickets:

If it's a four number I get a treat. Apart from that, it's just ... well it all just goes back in.

Sandra also keeps the winnings aside for the next lot of tickets. This was particularly useful for Sandra, since this freed up money which she could spend elsewhere. It also gave her the opportunity to give her children some extra pocket money:

We normally, erm, if it's like a tenner, we normally keep that five for the next lot (of tickets) and half the other five on me kids. Two fifty each.

For other, more affluent women, the occasional £10 winnings did not represent a significant contribution to the household budget. Judith, for example, did not have any specific strategy for spending her £10 winnings:

Emma: 'How do you spend your winnings? Do you make a point of doing something special with them?'

Judith: 'No, not really. Just a bit extra isn't it? Just whatever.'

Diane also did not see £10 winnings as offering any particular alleviation from financial concerns:

Just put it in yer purse, I mean it's nothing really. It's hardly worth noticing is it?

For these women, medium sized prizes – those resulting from four or five matching balls – offered the most important contribution to the household budget. For some of these women, this involved providing occasional 'treats' for the family. The women took great pleasure in being able to buy for their families, especially when it was something that they would not normally be able to afford. Debbie, for example, describes the way she organises her £10 winnings and also how she manages the medium amounts of money that she has occasionally won:

We always ... well if we've won ten pounds we split it four ways ... my two little uns get £2.50 and we have £2.50 ... so if it was big money we all get treated, like we go out for a meal, something like that. (Debbie, South East London)

The women who had won 'medium' amounts of money carefully organised and managed their winnings. They stuck to routines, and by describing these routines to me, ensured that they could not be accused of in any way 'wasting' or badly managing their money. Sandra's portrayal of how she decided to spend her £75 win provides a useful illustration of these routines:

I bought a new carpet for the bedroom upstairs that was it. *Oh, I wouldn't waste it, there's no way I would waste it ...* aye I did, I bought a carpet. (Sandra, Newcastle-upon-Tyne; my emphasis)

The women discussed the ways in which they spent the money that they had won through participation in the National Lottery bi-weekly draw in order to stress further their careful money management. Following Lunt and Livingstone (1992) it is possible to speak of a 'conformity of living' within the women's system of consumption. The women never admitted to spending their winnings on themselves; they did not buy on impulse and above all were eager to be seen to be 'economical' (Lunt and Livingstone, 1992: 90). Daniel Miller (1998) calls this type of consumption 'thrift', and describes the often very complex strategies for saving adopted by working class women. He demonstrates also, how saving or investing might be re-interpreted as a pleasurable form of spending by bringing knowledge and skills to the everyday routines of consumption so that there is a surplus which may be invested for the increased financial security of the family (59). Such an analysis of thrift can be complemented by DeVault's study of gender and caring work which explores some of the economic contexts within which women's everyday lives are experienced (1991). DeVault argues that poorer women are forced to continuously struggle to calculate exact amounts of money needed in order to meet all of the family's expenses (172). In an attempt to hold the household budget at a constant level, poorer women often employ informal strategies in order to stick to a limited budget (171). This was certainly the case for the women of this research, as they attempted to justify their National Lottery purchases. Both Helen and Sandra bought 'things for the house', namely furniture and a carpet and Barbara said that she used her winnings to pay off debts and bills. In all of these women's cases, and particularly in Barbara's, winning medium amounts of money on the National Lottery is seen as a real means of alleviating some of their daily concerns which are the result of their relative poverty. For Barbara, matching five balls and winning £1400 came at just the right time – when she and her husband were experiencing significant financial difficulties:

... on that occasion (winning £1400), me husband was out of work, so I had to use it towards bills and everything. (Barbara, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

Barbara's disadvantaged economic situation meant that she necessarily spent a lot of time thinking about money and how best to manage on a small budget. It is interesting that whereas she felt so relieved at her medium win on the lottery, she sees her smaller (£10) winnings as far less significant:

I mean the ten pounds and that, you know ... well I just won one on Saturday ... I just spend that on cigarettes or anything really.

Certainly, many of the women were motivated by the medium sized prizes that they occasionally won, which helped to alleviate some of their financial concerns. As

Elsie, for example, pointed out, winning the occasional prize in part compensated for any concerns that she may have 'wasted money' on tickets that were not winners:

That's eight quid a week like ... I used to think what I could do with eight pound. But we've won, we keep our money up you know. We've won the odd tenners and things like that so really I don't think that we spend that much on it anyway. (Elsie, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

The idea that working class women purchase National Lottery tickets in order to enable them to buy essentials or to alleviate financial pressures that ordinarily their poverty would prevent them from doing, provides evidence to support claims made by Bell (1911) and Reith (1999) that gambling for women in low income households can be interpreted as a genuine attempt to make a difficult financial situation easier.

Irresponsible others: 'I know this woman...'

This section shows how one important strategy employed by the women to defend their right to the National Lottery was by setting up the concept of the 'irresponsible' (other) women who had failed as mothers and carers and had lost their right to be seen as respectable working class women.

The women were keen to be seen to be adhering to the norms of time and money management that they perceived to be appropriate for themselves as respectable working class women. Such an analysis offers an alternative view to the idea that individuals participate in leisure activities in order that they can temporarily 'dislocate' themselves from social reality, as proposed by, for example Sennett and Cobb (1972), and Cohen and Taylor (1992). If women can be seen to be participating in a leisure activity such as the National Lottery which is so deeply embedded into their ordinary domestic routines of time and money, then such a thesis is not applicable. This chapter has shown that the women of this research have little means of separating themselves (and their consumption) from the reality of their domestic constraints. The women's consumer and leisure activities – including their National Lottery play – were embedded in the social reality of their everyday, domestic routines. Nonetheless, the women were not passive victims of these routines, rather, they helped to produce, perform and negotiate the parameters of 'appropriate' behaviour themselves, in order that it incorporated pleasurable consumer experiences, including gambling. In this sense, the domestic routines described above were by no means fixed and unchanging. The women helped to refine the boundaries of domestic spaces, firstly, by re-positioning the National Lottery as a gambling game which never disrupted domestic routines and patterns, and secondly, by legitimating their own gambling by constructing a deviant, uncaring 'other' woman who failed to achieve what was necessary to adhere to the ethic of caring. This helped to legitimise their own participation in what the women recognised could easily be seen as an 'inappropriate' leisure activity.

The women tended to associate regular participation in other forms of gambling (i.e. not the National Lottery bi-weekly draw) as inconsistent with the constraints

of time and domestic space which were placed on their everyday lives. An example of this is provided by Barbara's response when asked if she ever plays on fruit machines:

No. No, no. I don't like them at all. I've seen too many people losing a lot of money on them. I mean me mother-in-law, she would work hard all week, she would get paid on a Friday and, God's honest truth, she would put her ... go to the bar cos it was at the bar ... and go and get maybe ten pounds worth of change and have a game. She got nothing and I've seen her lose her wages. *I don't agree with it ...* (Barbara, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: my emphasis)

Barbara acknowledged that her mother-in-law was hardworking, but identifies also her wastefulness. The fact that her mother-in-law worked so hard, in Barbara's eyes only seems to further illustrate the shame and wastefulness of her excessive gambling. Earning money and then losing it all is not only seen as a devastating consequence of gambling, but also as a needless waste – one which could be avoided through careful money management. As Barbara points out 'I don't agree with it', although she has no problem with what she sees as sensible and responsible gambling. The women helped to present their own lottery consumption as acceptable and respectable by gossiping about women who gambled in 'deviant' and 'inappropriate' ways. The women resisted claims that their National Lottery play was irresponsible by contrasting their own lottery consumption with stories of women whose gambling behaviour they defined as irresponsible.

Judith talked of an imaginary 'other' or 'they' who gambled erratically and demonstrated 'addictive' tendencies:

It's like any form of gambling isn't it? If you have an addictive personality it can be inviting for you. Scratchcards are more accessible. They can get their hands on them whenever they want. They're very addictive.

Judith thus carefully distinguished her own careful, organised gambling behaviour from the irresponsible and wasteful gambling of 'others'.

Sandra makes a similar point when she compares her own 'careful' management of her gambling budget with the reckless and potentially wasteful gambling behaviour of an 'other':

I don't know. I mean I'm careful with me money, but when it comes to things like that I'll say 'oh no'. We always put five pound a week on the lottery. I'm not into scratchcards. I know someone who buys them all the time, a friend of mine and she's dead lucky but, I still think no, cos she'll go and buy another one. She's the same with fruit machines.

By differentiating herself from these 'wasteful' others, Sandra is active in positioning herself as a responsible gambler. She thus defends herself against dominant discourses, as discussed earlier, which have positioned gambling as a meaningless and wasteful activity, by deflecting these critiques onto others.

The women cited above were particularly critical of scratchcards and fruit machines which they described in very critical terms. These discourses were in contrast to the positioning of their own subjectivities as gamblers. Elsie illustrates this point when she describes her disapproval of the women at bingo who play on fruit machines in the interval:

I've watched people at the bingo (on fruit machines) and they must put pounds in, honestly ... I mean they might win, but I mean when you win you can win, what, twenty, fifteen pound and you might get it again. It depends what sort of bandit, I suppose, you play on, and I've seen them get a little bit out, but they've stood and put the whole lot back in and they've stayed out there the whole interval and I think, well god they must be spending a fortune.

By setting up the concept of an 'irresponsible', deviant 'other', the women worked to further make 'acceptable' their own gambling behaviour. There was a sense in which, through their National Lottery participation, the women produced and enabled their own subjectivities and identities. The concept of the 'irresponsible other' was central to the ways in which the women produced themselves as subjects of a particular kind and which furnished them with a particular identity.

The representations of 'other' women were further reinforced by the women's illustrations of gambling behaviour which *is not* respectable and which stands in contrast to their own normative femininity. When talking about their opinions of the ethics of National Lottery play, the majority of women contrasted their own organised, structured and managed gambling behaviour with 'other' women who had failed to use the National Lottery to extend care to their families, and had instead displayed selfishness at the family's expense through their gambling behaviour. Many of the women made a direct correlation between 'excessive' gambling and failure to be a 'good' and 'caring' mother. June, who did not play the National Lottery, used the concept of irresponsible others in order to explain why she did not see purchasing tickets to be synonymous with 'responsible' feminine behaviour. Thus, June believes that the lure of scratchcards lead many women to neglect to care adequately for their children:

I'd gone along to the Post Office on the estate and they used to sell (scratchcards), and there was this young girl standing in front of me and ... she had all these children, she had two in a pushchair and these other two, and erm, they were all, you could tell they had no money to spare, no money to manage actually, not spare! And she was buying ten pounds of tickets. You know and she's frantically opening them, and I looked and I felt quite sick. (June, Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

The 'irresponsible woman' that the women interviewed talked about, represented not only a means of emphasising their own responsible gambling behaviour but also a means of establishing and negotiating their own norms of appropriate femininity by drawing attention to the terrible fates of those women who, through gambling and a mis-management of the household budget, had lost their status as 'respectable' women. Many of the stories stressed the negative impact that 'irresponsible'

gambling had on the women's ability to 'care properly' for their families. This was an additional means for the women of strengthening their claims that they were able to gamble without *ever* jeopardising their ability to provide and care for their families via respectable household and money management.

Despite these remarks about mothers who fail to gain respectability via caring on a limited budget, the women always felt empathy for these women who they believed had failed as carers. They recognised the anxieties and frustrations of attempting to provide appropriate levels of care on a limited budget. In this sense, the women worked to define the boundaries of 'appropriate' gambling, which would not conflict with the norms, and values of the caring self. The women, then, sought to resist traditional critiques of National Lottery play by stressing their own methods of gambling within the norms of money management and caring consistent with normative working class femininity. They also helped to shape and negotiate these norms of femininity themselves, by establishing the concept of a deviant, irresponsible other. They thus worked to negotiate the parameters of normative femininity by seeking to establish a suitable gambling space within a broader culture which has traditionally been unable to position gambling alongside normative femininity.

Escaping the system? Theoretical discussion

It could be argued that the lottery offered a possible 'way out'; an escape from the women's dissatisfying everyday lives. Perhaps the most illuminating part of the interviews with respect to this followed the women's responses to my questions about their dreams of the National Lottery jackpot, and our discussions about how their lives would be if they were to become 'wealthy'. It is important to stress that the women's lives were undoubtedly hard. They worked anti-social, long hours, most frequently for the minimum wage. Most dealt with responsibilities of caring for children, grandchildren and elderly relatives in addition to their paid work, often doing so without the support of a husband or partner. In addition, the women dealt with the daily struggle of 'being respectable', of 'looking right', making the children look right, keeping the house looking clean and tidy, cooking the right foods, and moreover ensuring that there was always enough time to be a 'proper' wife and mother. Bearing in mind the women's often gruelling work schedules, it is perhaps of little surprise that they rarely felt that they had sufficiently attained all of these objectives. The interviews were peppered with accounts of guilt, anxiety and a general feeling that they were never quite doing 'enough'. This was evidenced most clearly when the women began to talk about their dreams of winning money.

All of the women expressed some form of dissatisfaction with their current financial situations. The most common expressions of this dissatisfaction were a 'nagging anxiety' about debt and financial security (see also Rubin, 1976), and feelings of guilt and concern that they were not providing their children with the same life chances that they could if they had the money to do so. One way in which this dissatisfaction was revealed in the questionnaire data was in response to the

open-ended question 'If you won the jackpot, how do you imagine you would spend the money?' The absence of luxury goods such as cars, clothes and holidays in the women's responses was notable. Rather, the most common responses were to 'pay off debts', to 'pay bills', to 'buy property' and to 'invest in children's and grandchildren's futures', through for example, private schools and savings accounts.

This type of financial concern was also visible in the qualitative data. Debbie, for example, talked about her concerns that the estate in south east London that she and her children lived on was 'rough' and run-down. Debbie had grown up there, and her adult daughter and grandson lived on a similar estate nearby. She dreamed of winning enough money to privately educate her children, and to enable her daughter and grandson to leave the estate:

Debbie: ... put them through private education ... that would be an answer to a lot of prayers at the moment.

Emma: So is this how you would spend the jackpot?

Debbie: Yes, and I'd buy my daughter a house 'cos she lives in a really poor, rundown estate, so that would be my dream. Cos we own our house outright so it's not like... erm I mean I'd like a big house but if we had more money it would be for that. To invest in their future.

In discussing her ideas about how she would spend the National Lottery jackpot, Debbie prioritises her children's future. For Debbie, the National Lottery seemed to offer the only possibility of offering her children an alternative lifestyle. Achieving this any other way seemed impossible:

I suppose it's the hype and the chance that you could win. I suppose that's what everybody's in it for, it's just that ... somebody's got to win it haven't they? At the end of the day (LAUGHS). And you've got to be in it.

Other women dreamed of winning the lottery jackpot, but did not have the same everyday financial worries as described by Debbie. Judith described to me how she had 'worked her way up' in the caring profession so that she and her husband could afford what she described as her 'dream home'. This was a three bed-roomed, modern semi-detached house on an estate of identical-looking houses. It was also the type of home that Debbie dreamed of being able to afford. Both Debbie and Judith associated status with moving away from council estates. They both believed that moving to a different (less 'rough') area would provide their children with better opportunities in life. The difference was that Judith had achieved this, whilst Debbie had not. Although Judith was pleased that she could afford a house 'in a nice area' and did not seem to have any everyday struggles with money, this was not to say that money was not an issue for her. On the contrary, Judith expressed guilt that she had to 'neglect' her son and go out to work full-time, and regret that she could not find the time to have another child. Judith's discussion of how she would spend the jackpot illustrates the conflict between paid work and motherhood:

... I think that I would just love to pay the mortgage off so I wouldn't have to go to work, and be a proper mum, and I'd be quite happy.

Judith demonstrates the anxiety of attempting to achieve material status, and easing the everyday struggles to get by, whilst at the same time conforming to certain ideals of motherhood. For Judith, one such ideal is to be at home all day with the children.

For the women cited above, I argue that 'caring' was one important way in which they gained status and respectability. This is supported by other research such as Skeggs (1997) and DeVault (1991), which has demonstrated the classed nature of caring. For the women of this research, there was no easy 'escape' from caring, since it was so closely bound up with the women's notions of value and respectability. In her study of income support claimants, Ruth Cohen found that:

(w)omen were more likely than men to associate their own sense of self-worth with how they provided for and brought up the children. (Cohen, 1992: 73)

Like the women of Cohen's research, many of the women whom I interviewed had little disposable income, and surviving the week was often a struggle. Although most of the women were in paid employment, this tended to be low paid. Most of the women received the minimum wage and some had husbands or partners who were also in low paid employment. However, some of the women were the only paid workers in the family, and others said that their partners were often 'in and out of work' or unemployed and claiming income support. Occasionally, the women also financially supported their adult children. Money was always an 'issue' for the women, even, as in the case of Judith discussed above, when spare money was not always so scarce.

Participating in the National Lottery offered the women a terrain upon which to imagine an alternative and 'better' future for their families. Mica Nava suggests that throughout the twentieth century, department stores offered women a 'visual and fantasy experience', the pleasures of which lay in soothing the 'injuries and wants' of everyday life (1996: 53). I argue that here too, dreaming of the National Lottery jackpot helped to resolve some of the struggles and dilemmas of the women's everyday lives. In particular, these struggles and frustrations were exacerbated by a desire to care for their children in a certain way. Being denied the pleasure of providing 'proper' levels of care for their children was frequently a source of frustration and concern amongst the women.

So it became very clear that the women felt very strongly the limitations and struggles of their class, and wanted these to ease. They seemed to desire less to become middle class, and more to become respectably working class. As Skeggs found in her study of working class young women:

What the women desire is to be valued, not pathologized [as working class women]. (1997: 94)

Furthermore, Annette Kuhn believes that for working class women, 'loving' is synonymous with 'good' caring; with having 'enough to eat and decent clothes to wear', and with being a 'good' mother (1995: 45).

This chapter, then, critiques the work of earlier authors who have sought to split the pursuit of pleasurable, cultural activities, from the ordinary, everyday, mundane experience of life, such as the understandings of popular culture described by Sennett and Cobb (date) and later by Cohen and Taylor (date). This chapter couples this critique with the adaptation of Bourdieu's cultural capital arguments discussed above. I argue that these advancements offer exciting developments for the study of the self, identity and consumer society. Lottery consumption is not so much an escape from the everyday, rather it is actually embedded into the women's everyday performances of working class femininity. In addition, although it was the case that lottery play represented a longing and an expression of dissatisfaction, the dreams and pleasures it stimulated offered a means of being working class and a woman more successfully.

Concluding remarks

Bourdieu's work on cultural distinction offers very exciting developments to the study of gambling and consumption (Bourdieu, 1979). As a form of capitalist, government endorsed gambling, the National Lottery can be seen as a tax on the poor, a particularly exploitative means of extracting money from the vulnerable poor who can ill-afford to waste their cash. On the other hand, by delving deeper into the subjective choices and decision making capacities of the working class women who play, the lottery can be re-framed as an attempt by working class women to take control and to make use of the lottery as a space to dream and imagine. It is not so much *economic* capital that is of importance here, but *cultural* capital. That is, access to sufficient funds to enhance the caring self. It is very important not to simply dismiss the women's dreams and longings off-hand. If women do play the lottery to 'win money', we need to explore the precise nature of their daydreams. Why would they want to win? How much is 'too' much? What effect do they imagine that winning money will have on their everyday lives?

In particular, the chapter offers an account of the National Lottery that perceives and understands lottery ticket purchase beyond a simple documentation of the 'compulsive' and 'irrational' behaviours of those who buy tickets. On the contrary, it seeks to imbue lottery tickets with a deeper meaning. As social and cultural products, they are at once symbolic of the capitalist profit making system that produced them, *and* representative of the complex application of agency and choice that those who purchase lottery tickets inhabit.

References

- Bell, F. (1911) *At The Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons.
- Bleasdale, A. (1995) *The Guardian*, 12 November.

- Bourdieu, P. (1979) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London: Routledge.
- Casey, E. (2003a) 'Gambling and Consumption: Working Class Women and UK National Lottery Play', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 3:1, pp. 109-127.
- Casey, E. (2003b) "'How Do You Get a PhD in That?!' Using Feminist Epistemologies to Research the Lives of Working Class Women', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 23: 1, pp. 107-123.
- Casey, E. (2004) 'Metaphorical and Physical Leisure Spaces: Women, Pleasure and the UK National Lottery', in C. Aitchison and H. Pussard (eds) *Space, Leisure and Visual Culture*, pp. 175-193, Eastbourne: LSA.
- Casey, E. (2006) 'Domesticating Gambling: Gender, Caring and the UK National Lottery', *Leisure Studies*, 25, pp. 3-16.
- Charles, N. and Kerr, M. (1988) *Women, Food and Families*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Cohen, R. (1992) *Hardship Britain: Being Poor in the 1990s*, London: CPAG.
- Cohen, S. and Taylor, L. (1992) *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*, London: Routledge.
- DeVault, M. L. (1991) *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Deem, R. (1986) *All Work and No Play? A Study of Women and Leisure*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Featherstone, M. (1991) *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, London: Sage.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hattersley, R. (2004) 'Betraying the Values My Party Stood For', *Daily Mail* 15/10/04.
- Kuhn, A. (1995) *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, London: Verso.
- Lunt, P. and Livingstone, S. (1992) *Mass Consumption and Personal Identity*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Mason, J. (1988) 'No Peace for the Wicked: Older Married Women and Leisure', in E. Wimbush and M. Talbot (eds) *Relative Freedoms: Women and Leisure*, pp. 75-86, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Miller, D. (1998) *A Theory of Shopping*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mintel (1998) 'The National Lottery', *Leisure Intelligence*, January, pp. 1-14.
- Nava, M. (1992) *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism*, London: Sage.
- Pahl, J. (1989) *Money and Marriage*, London: Macmillan.
- Parker, G. (1992) 'Making Ends Meet: Women, Credit and Debt', in C. Glendinning and J. Millar (eds) *Women and Poverty in Britain: The 1990s*, pp. 225-237, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Reith, G. (1999) *The Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture*, London: Routledge.
- Ritzer, G. (2005) *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*, London: Pine Forge Press.

- Rubin, L.B. (1976) *Worlds of Pain/Life in the Working Class Family*, New York: Basic Books.
- Sennett, R. and Cobb, J. (1972) *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, London: Cambridge University Press.
- Shaw, J. (1998) 'Feeling a List Coming On: Gender and the Pace of Life', *Time and Society*, 7:2, pp. 383-396.
- Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender*, London: Sage.
- Smith, J. (1987) 'Men and Women at Play: Gender, Life-Cycle and Leisure', in J. Horne, D. Jary and A. Tomlinson (eds) *Sport, Leisure and Social Relations*, pp. 51-87, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Woodward, D. and Green, E. (1988) 'Not Tonight Dear! The Social Control of Women's Leisure', in E. Wimbush and M. Talbot (eds) *Relative Freedoms: Women and Leisure*, pp. 131-146, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 8

Gender, Class, Emotional Capital and Consumption in Family Life

Elizabeth B. Silva

Introduction

This chapter explores how gender and class are significant for the family as a unit of consumption. It merges empirical insight with theoretical conjecture to demonstrate how identity and consumption are inextricably bound, and how these inform women's strategies of emotional investment. It explores the idea of the use and exchange value of emotional capital, expanding Pierre Bourdieu's (1999) three fold characterisation of capital – economic, social and cultural – to interrogate the significance of gender and boundaries of class for family practices. The discussion is based on an in-depth family case study from a wider ethnographic investigation of home life in contemporary Britain.¹ It makes secondary reference to other case studies and to some more general data. The case-study choice is relevant for the preservation of the ethnographic richness of the investigation which helps to clarify the close links between the work of care and the maintenance and meaning given to it in the context of a particular family – exemplifying more broadly family practices and connections – which clearly involves emotional labour in a central manner, and emotional capital as an asset for social positioning.

Gender has not been a prominent theme in perspectives of consumption even though consumer culture has currently come to envelop the domestic more extensively than ever because close attention to the routine and ordinary elements of consumption – mostly concentrated in the home – are central to an understanding of contemporary consumer culture (Slater 1997, Gronow and Warde 2000). If consumer culture impacts on domestic practices, gender practices within the domestic setting should be regarded as most significant for the transformation of consumer culture. Yet, the significance of home in consumption and the concern about the articulation of gender in the home with consumption practices have been relatively new subjects in the field of consumption studies, as notes Feona Attwood (2005) in her recent

1 Project partially funded within the UK ESRC 'Virtual Society?' Research Programme (award no. L132251048), complemented by grants from the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds and The Open University's National Everyday Cultures Programme.

study of contemporary practices of masculinity linked to DIY media programmes and consumption practices. Homes have basically been regarded as locations, and people living in homes as subjects of consumption practices.² Conversely, studies of domestic consumption, like other important studies of household technologies which make use of feminist perspectives have critically addressed broader theories of consumption. For instance, Cynthia Cockburn and Ruza Furst-Dilic (1994) refer to the process by which retailers have positioned brown and white goods differently according to their respective male and female-family connections, attributing to the former some technological superiority and inducing consumers to pay more for them. Ruth Schwartz Cowan classical study of 400 years of technological development affecting homes (Cowan 1983) has a base on the concept of the 'consumption junction' (Cowan 1989) involving the place and time at which the consumer – as embodied self defined by a set of socio-economic variables, instead of a universal being – makes choices between competing technologies.

Class, unlike gender, has been a prominent concern in consumption studies. Influenced by Bourdieu's thinking the sociological literature has increasingly emphasised the importance of consumption in shaping patterns of social location and social relations in contemporary societies (Featherstone 1995, Lunt and Livingstone 1992, Miller 1995, Slater 1997) and its significance for self-identity (Giddens 1991, Bauman 1987, Friedman 1994). Also, in the 'cultural turn' of social sciences consumption has been emphasised as a means to wide symbolic communication (Baudrillard 1988, Douglas and Isherwood 1996), much of which has to do with systems of classification. What a family is, or what family one desires to have are some of the social categories involved in this process of communication through consumption. Communication can be directed to others or to oneself (Douglas and Isherwood 1996), as much as identity can mean what one is, or desires to be (Gabriel and Lang 1995). Illustrating this point, Jonathan Gershuny and Oriel Sullivan (2004) demonstrate how consumption fulfils idealised family roles in a recent study of purchase for delayed consumption among those work-rich but time-poor households. They argue that the intention to build a particular close family relationship is firmly demonstrated through investment in the means to have a holiday or to produce some sort of entertainment which may only be realised a long time later, if it is realised at all. Yet, the anxiety is alleviated once the fantasy is somewhat fulfilled by the concrete signal of a potential accomplishment in the future.

The complexity of these issues have required refined instruments to capture the significance of practices of social positioning in everyday life. Taking up the notions outlined above about the connection between consumption and identity, and the idea that material objects convey emotions as they are used in connection with representations of the self and desire, and to support group membership, this chapter investigates how family practices overlap with consumption practices to reveal this process of construction and representation of a way of living.

2 The studies of kitchens by Miller (1988) and Southerton (2001) illustrate some exceptions.

To situate consumption at the level of the home carries a risk of reproducing the classic sociological paradigm in which what occurs within families is taken to be a consequence of changes (usually economic) occurring elsewhere. The family appears in classic sociological frameworks to be isolated from other social relationships, experiences and meanings. However, in contrast to these mainstream trends, families and domestic consumption have been a significant concern in feminist studies, particularly since the late 1970s. The interesting reader edited by Stevi Jackson and Shaun Moores (1995) testifies to this. Like much other feminist theorising about domestic life, Jackson and Moores conceive of the household as inserted in (and having an impact on) wider socio-economic structures. They link domestic consumption to gendered and generational dynamics of family life. Their concern with domestic politics refers to relations of power and social inequality in domestic consumption. They make two important points about consumption in households: (1) homes are differentiated units of consumption (differences and inequalities are found both between and within households); and (2) consumption in the home connects the material and symbolic aspects of daily domestic life. The work by Marjorie DeVault (1991) is also highly relevant. She explores the connections between the mundane everyday nurturance of feeding a family and the sustenance of family relationships in the context of labour market demands, technological and marketing trends in provisioning for the domestic and the class related effects of the conduct of different household practices. Importantly, she addresses the old feminist question of the methods and procedures of knowing about the connections between the 'invisible' or 'magic' work of care and its centrality in producing family life.

The use of the term family practices in this chapter follows from David Morgan's (1996 and 1999) suggestion that the use of the term practices recognises that family life is never simply family life because it is always continuously connected with other areas of existence. Family practices may also be gender practices, class practices, age practices, and, to include this chapter's central concern, consumption practices. A distinction made by Joan Tronto (1993) between care as practice and care as disposition also frames this analysis. The practice of care refers to the material accomplishment of tasks and activities while the disposition to care refers to the emotional investment in caring. In most cases disposition and practice are bound together, but the conceptual distinction between the two allows for a reconceptualisation of care and for a focus on the valuation – or devaluation – of care givers.³

The distinction between practice and disposition is, of course, also constitutive of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the habitus. However, the habitus, defined as a structure of disposition, which predisposes individuals to certain practices (choices and actions), does not give relevance to the emotional aspect of social actions. Bourdieu is attentive to subjectivity when concerned with the relations between the

3 Recent feminist work has built on these complementary distinctions in relation to the study of family obligations (Mason 1996), uses of household technologies (Silva 1999) and the care of children (Smart and Neale 1999).

individual and the collective, but in his framework disposition refers to schemas of classification, expectations and norms. In his major work, *Distinction*, first published in 1979, Bourdieu remarks, for example, that women have precedence in matters of taste, and men in politics because of their inherited cultural capital (Bourdieu 1999: 109). He emphasises that the home is the main site for the growth of the classificatory mesh upon which the educational system builds. He writes (Bourdieu 1998) that the daily real existence of the family depends on the practical and symbolic work that transforms the obligation to love into a loving disposition. This work, he says, falls more particularly to women, who are responsible for maintaining relationships.⁴

Although Bourdieu has an understanding of the gendered character of dispositions, this is by no means central to his framework. Moreover, Bourdieu regards women as mere repositories of capital, appropriated and deployed by men as assets. As Terry Lovell (2000: 20) remarks, in the Bourdieusian framework women are seen as 'capital-bearing *objects*' that have value to the primary groups to which they belong, rather than as 'capital-accumulating *subjects*' with strategies of their own. In my view, this flaw in Bourdieu's framework is connected not only to a disregard for the capital investment strategies of women, but also to a neglect of the emotional dimension in accounts of the habitus. Emotions, like other classification systems, are phenomena that are shaped, experienced and interpreted through social and cultural processes (Lupton 1998). Like other human assets, individuals may be distinguished for their emotional qualities. In contexts where emotional responses are valued as resources, emotional capital can be said to exist. There are various circumstances in which emotions are assets that can be cashed in in specific markets and linked to specific strategies of advancement. These emotions are not exclusively 'good' or 'enhancing' ones. Negative emotions like anger, fear or shame appear to be used with frequency in some business sectors as assets for social positioning. In the field of theatre acting and performing are based on particular displays of positive and negative emotions, as it is also the case in other artistic fields like the visual arts.

The notion of various types of capital to account for individuals' insertion in a social system is a distinctive feature of Bourdieu's approach. Social action depends on social determinants, deriving from an individual's position within the cultural field, the amount of social, economic and cultural capital that she or he possesses and the personal trajectory experienced. Broadly speaking, social capital refers to being in a network (of supporters, retainers, family members); economic capital refers to ownership of stocks, shares and monetary rewards; and cultural capital refers to intellectual or educational qualifications and to distinctions within the fields of art and science.⁵

4 For a detailed account and critique of Bourdieu's thinking about gender, home and the family see Silva 2005.

5 Other kinds of capital are also referred to by Bourdieu, such as symbolic capital, linguistic capital and educational capital. Gershuny et al. (1997: 8) understand Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as consumption *skills*, and they claim that it is Bourdieu's particular application of the economists' concept of 'human capital' (Becker, 1967). This origin of

My understanding of emotional capital refers to a capacity to connect, involving acts, intentions and sentiments. It refers to moral thinking about personal connections and intimate life, related to the self and to others. It is an essential ingredient for a reflexive self.⁶ I suggest, in line with Lisa Adkins (2002), that reflexive practice constitutes a means for re-classifying identity, relationships and divisions. While the reference to emotion as 'capital' is to Bourdieu's original framework, my proposition derives from feminist perspectives on the ethics of care (Tronto 1993, Sevenhuijsen 1998).

These have brought to the fore the relevance of the subjective, personal interdependence and the emotional aspects of intimate relationships for everyday living and political action.⁷ While I maintain that the concept of emotional capital is different from that of emotional labour, I consider that the latter has often been employed for the lack of the former. The argument for the recognition of emotions by the attribution of a monetary value to many of the invisible labours of women in the home or at work is not new (Gardiner 1997). Learning to care is not very different from learning to appreciate and display particular objects of art, sensations and words about artistic performances. The key difference is that care is a deeply devalued social activity. Feminist interpretations of cultural capital have included issues not considered by Bourdieu, such as femininity (see Moi 1994, Skeggs 1997). Beverly Skeggs' identification of the embodied state of cultural capital as one of the three forms of Bourdieu's understanding of cultural capital is akin to my understanding of emotional capital. My conceptualisation makes women active agents who are accumulating emotional capital, which has use and exchange value for women, and for others who possess this kind of capital. This line of thinking also echoes Skeggs' (2004) proposition to discuss the self as part of a system of exchange of value where different groups have different possibilities of evaluation.

This chapter considers the importance of the concept of emotional capital in the discussion of a case study of home life where resources for consumption are generally scarce. The discussion centres on the pattern of access to resources for consumption, the prevailing sense of belonging and the choices and projects of intimacy in family living.

Bourdieu's development of the notion of cultural capital is corroborated by Derek Robbins (2004).

6 The concept of emotional capital is of course different from that of emotional labour (cf. Hochschild 1983). While a person can use, buy and hire another person's emotional labour, emotional capital cannot be exchanged in similar ways. As with social and cultural capital, it is an asset that derives from personal abilities, connections and investments in and from the self. Like other kinds of Bourdieusian capitals, emotional capital has use value and exchange value in particular markets. See Reay (2000) who also employs the concept.

7 In business and self-help literature the vital role of emotions as asset and investment has been increasingly emphasised. See, for instance, Goleman (1996) and Thomson (1998). The concept of emotional labour has also featured in an issue of the journal *Soundings* (1998).

The case: Methodology and context

This chapter draws on a case-study of a family, which was selected from a total of 23 included in my 'Ethnography of Home Life' project. The study was originally designed to investigate the relationship between people and technology in everyday life in the home. The families lived in London (6), East Anglia (2), Lancashire (3), South Yorkshire (3) and North Yorkshire (6).⁸ The fieldwork was done in the home and consisted of extensive visits in the daytime and evenings, on weekdays and/or weekends and during holidays. Qualitative in-depth interviews were carried out with nearly all those living in the homes. Extensive notes from the participant-observation of home life were taken. Interviews and notes were transcribed. Although the material I use in this chapter appears as an account of one encounter, I draw on more extensive notes and on multiple narratives of women, men and also children. The Seaman household was also video-recorded in the kitchen and living room for about 8 hours a day for a whole week. I had, however, not seen any of the recordings before I first contacted them,⁹ although subsequently the video recordings helped me to understand more fully the household dynamics, particularly in the ways the children were integrated in family meals and their use of television and video-recorders.

A profile of the Seaman family selected for discussion in this chapter reveals that they were among the 50 per cent lowest income groups in the UK for families with dependent children, although at the top of this lowest half. There was a relatively affluent level of information and communication technologies in the household. The Seamans had no computer but possessed 3 television sets, 2 video-recorders and 2 play stations. Data for this family was collected in 1999 when ownership of television in Britain was nearly universal. Over 80 per cent of households had a video recorder (*Living in Britain*, 1998). In 1998 in the UK one in four families owned a personal computer (Taylor, 1998: xiv), and only about one-quarter of homes with computers were connected to the Internet. The family owned most kinds of technologies for housework, but not a tumble-dryer (according to *Living in Britain*, 1998, half of households in Britain had a tumble-dryer) or a microwave oven (found in 74 per cent of homes). They had a dishwasher (only 20 per cent of households in Britain had one).

I selected the Seaman household for discussion in this chapter because the forms of appropriation and use of technologies in their home illustrate important issues

8 The sampling strategy for the overall study was theoretically driven, aiming to cover a wide range of technological intake in the home, from those who had all kinds of new information technology to those who had none. Diversity in family life was taken into account through the inclusion of lone parents, a variety of ethnic backgrounds and lesbian and gay households. Some families were contacted via a market research company, and others via friends and acquaintances, in a snowballing process. The total interview sample included 20 women, 17 men and 45 children (21 girls and 24 boys). The children were generally between five and sixteen years old.

9 For an account of the process and use of the video recording material in the first phase of this project – involving 16 households – see Silva 2004.

regarding gender, class and consumption. Different resources of time, money and emotions are employed by them in relation to practices of mundane family intimacy and social positioning.

The story of the beautiful kitchen

I first went to the Seaman home during the school half-term, when Janet was off work and the children were around with more time and flexibility to accommodate me. I arrived just after lunch. Daniel would come home at about 5.30 or 6.30pm. The house was on the outskirts of Sheffield, a working-class area, in a lane with small, relatively new terraced houses. A couple of pubs, a small church and a corner shop were the local public facilities.

Janet was 35 years old. She had two siblings living nearby and kept in touch with them, but rarely saw her parents who lived five minutes away. Relationships were strained. She had a further education degree in catering and a part-time job (sixteen weekly hours plus two evenings) teaching cake-making and decoration in adult education. She was married to Daniel, 39 years old, a 'joiner with metal' in a nearby factory. They were both from white, working-class long-time resident Sheffield families. They had three daughters aged ten, seven and four.

When I arrived, on a cold, wet and grey day, I knocked at the front door but, through the glass panel, Janet shouted for me to come through to the kitchen door at the back of the house. Seven-year-old Sophie with four-year-old sister Alex opened the door for me. Janet came in from the lounge, greeted me, did not wait to be greeted back and said I needed to excuse them for the kitchen decoration was not yet finished. I looked around and saw myself in a most beautiful room.

The floor was an up-market imitation of light-coloured wood, the fully integrated cupboards were painted ocean colour with steel handles and fixtures. The only visible appliance was the hob, cooker and hood, all in steel, fitted with a large steel panel on the wall behind. The ceiling was of a darker colour wood with ten in-built directional lights showing just the chrome/steel and flash of light. A large oak farmhouse table was in the centre of the room, with eight matching chairs around it. On the table was a very big glass vase full of gorgeous flowers of delicate colours. The chairs had cushions in a blue-green tartan fabric. The rug under the table was from Habitat with a sand green-blue geometric pattern. A bowl of fruit, a fish tank and a few decorative plants all seemed well placed with matching colours and patterns. A glass window over the steel sink overlooked the washed clothes drying on a line outside. It was true that one small wall, with a blue painted radiator, had not yet been wallpapered. I took an interest in the decoration and praised Janet for her good taste.

I stayed in this kitchen for about six hours. Janet made sure the door leading to the lounge remained shut. I was not meant to see the rest of the house. Making me come into the house through the back door had been part of Janet's narrative of herself. This was part of how she wanted to show herself to me. Everything looked sparkling clean.

In most native Yorkshire homes it is usual to receive common visitors and trades people by the back door. The front door is very rarely used, reserved for important events. I assumed I was an ordinary visitor, but it felt too intimate to me to appear at the back door. This was also an effect of the design of the house, at the end of a terrace. But there was a contradiction between being taken in naturally and being conspicuously kept out of viewing the adjacent room.

I did see more of the house. I asked to go to the toilet just before I talked to Daniel, at about 6 pm. The lounge was about two-thirds of the size of the kitchen. It was shabby by comparison. The bathroom on the first floor was small. There was just one toilet in the house, which was common in terraced houses of the kind. Although the rest of the house looked clean it was not as tidy and sparkling as the kitchen. Each of the three girls had her own bedroom; two of these had been very ingeniously accommodated into the loft upstairs, with a great amount of Daniel's work. Back to the kitchen. Why is Janet's kitchen important?

First of all it was important to Janet. Secondly, the kitchen was important for the relationship between Janet and Daniel. The kitchen was important for the relationship between, and individuality of, Janet and Daniel. It expressed a fairness in using the household resources to fulfill personal desires.

Daniel said that he had his 'toy', a Land Rover Discovery bought new the previous year. Janet was entitled to have her toy: the kitchen as she pleased. The kitchen had cost £9,000. He had bought it by extending the house mortgage, which was 'not high', about £50 a week (£220 a month).

It was not mentioned, but it is important to note, that the cost of Daniel's toy was much higher than Janet's. However, Janet had the use of the Land Rover Discovery during the week to do the school runs and go to work because Daniel drove to work in an E registration Peugeot 205, a car more than 16 years old. Equally, the kitchen was not solely for Janet's use. Yet, Daniel had simply gone along with Janet's project. He did not like the kitchen, he preferred the old one, he was still struggling to find where things were.

The new kitchen had been in place for just two months. Daniel's contribution had left big marks. He found the sheet of steel to go behind the cooker. Janet wanted one, it was going to be small, he suggested a place where she could get it from, she got it for £50, it would have cost £400. Daniel also did all the electric installation, all under Janet's style instructions. The oak farmhouse table had been a 'present' Daniel was given in exchange for making a steel window frame for a friend's shop. 'It cost me two afternoons in the garage, doing something I like. This is over 300 quid, it is.'

While Daniel, with whom I talked last, was very forthcoming in his accounts and views of the kitchen and its artefacts, Janet's kitchen story was not volunteered. Perhaps she did not expect or wish to disclose the story. It only came out because of my interest in talking about the appliances in the kitchen.

We began by talking about the cooker. The kitchen story emerged when we moved to talk about the fridge, which I could not see around because it was disguised by a fully fitted door (and there was another door of the same size!). 'I had to wait for two weeks for them to arrive, the doors were not the right size,' she said. 'Oh! I see,' I

nodded while she opened the fridge door disclosing that it was a Whirlpool. 'I guess the freezer is Whirlpool as well,' I said. 'Yes, it is,' she confirmed.

Janet: My old fridge-freezer was Bosch, it was new, I wanted them, they were expensive. But when the kitchen was fitted the Bosch didn't fit. I complained and [the Fitted Kitchen Co] said we needed to wait for three weeks for a new kitchen. We had already had problems with this fitting.

Elizabeth: What kinds of problems?

Janet: We were given a choice of three days and I chose Monday. We were going to have our own fitter. I booked him and I arranged for the old kitchen to be taken down on Saturday, they were coming to do the floor on Sunday so the fitting could happen on Monday. On Friday [the Fitted Kitchen Co] phoned saying they had to postpone delivery for three weeks. We had lots of phone calls and they said they would deliver half of the kitchen on Wednesday. I paid the fitter from Monday to Wednesday for him just to stand about. It was supposed to come on Wednesday at 10am, it came at 4pm. We could do nothing. So, the fitter worked very hard ... I paid £650 for the fitter for five days, but we were still waiting for units to come. Units were wrong, damaged ... I thought if we got a company with reputation, like [the Fitted Kitchen Co], we would be OK. How wrong we were. Apparently it's very common practice. I have now taken them to the Small Claims Court. I need £400 to cover the costs of the fitter.

Elizabeth: What a bad story. And what about the fridge-freezer?

Janet: Well, they gave us these ones. Daniel made them give us. He said he wanted everything taken down. I liked the Bosch one; inside, the shelves were glass and it looked very nice inside. We had more space in the fridge. Now we have more space in the freezer but this is not what we need.

Concerning the other appliances, Janet had got what she chose because she did not buy them from the Fitted Kitchen Co: 'I shopped around'. And she found a number of good bargains, she was pleased to reveal. By then the kitchen story was flowing and Janet was telling me of an achievement and of a story that had taken over her life for a while and was still very important. Her oven cost her £380, the hob £200. At Lewis' they were offered for £650 and £400 respectively. She also paid half price (£400) for the dishwasher but this was under a special offer from the Fitted Kitchen Co. The washing machine she wanted (Bosch or AEG) would cost £200 more than the Servis she got for £500. As with the dishwasher, she was limited in her choice of washing machine by her desire to have a fully integrated kitchen, which would show no evidence of appliances by hiding the knobs and displays, as well as the body of the machine.

There was neither a tumble-dryer nor a microwave oven in the kitchen. However, Janet had had both in the past. She had a tumble-dryer before having any children, more than ten years ago, but she didn't like it. 'I like clothes dried in the air outside. It sounds old-fashioned, but that's how I like it.' This comment echoes those of other women in my study who embrace certain features of traditional femininity and domesticity, which is also found on the pages of the middle-class magazine *Good Housekeeping* in reference to good ways of laundering. In the proper middle-class context this practice is linked to time availability. Janet had had a microwave oven

for about eight years, but had given it to Daniel's mother two months ago when the new kitchen was fitted. She felt she did not use it enough and did not need it. She had thought of fitting it in with the new kitchen design but decided not to bother. Daniel said Janet thought the microwave oven did not match with the new kitchen and so decided it would go. 'In the same way she decided we would have one, eight years ago.' 'She never consults me.' Daniel said he'd 'like to have one. ... It would be good for when we are in a hurry and need to defrost things.'

Interestingly, Janet's decision was based on aesthetics, which was for Daniel an irrelevant issue. He valued the use of the microwave oven and regretted not having it. For Janet, the possibility of incorporating the microwave oven into the new fully integrated kitchen existed, but she decided she no longer wanted to have it. She said she did not miss having one; the only time she missed it was for warming up the Christmas pudding.

Why is it significant that technologies that once existed in the home were no longer there? Traditional approaches within the sociology of technology, in line with traditional assumptions of the sociology of consumption, have assumed that citizens are passive victims of advertisers. This would lead to conspicuous and excessive consumption because commodities met 'false' needs. As a consequence, the ideology of individualisation grows, our homes and our lives become increasingly privatised. In this context, consumers, or the users of technologies in the home, appear as non-active or uncreative human beings. How much is missing from the grand theoretical schemes that have been proposed to account for the modern intake of technologies in the home? What is the relationship between people and things in the home in contemporary society?

We see that Janet and Daniel are making active choices. Brushing aside whether they both agree or not with each particular choice, we see them having a creative influence in the everyday practices of their lives and in the artefacts used in everyday life. Theories need to account for the active role of users/consumers in shaping technological artefacts and their meaning. A cultural identity is being created at the same time. It was clear from the moment of my entrance into the house that I had been involved in a rehearsal of revelation of a newly created identity. The fundamental process was not just about buying and using goods. The ways in which objects were employed gave a sense of how people were expected to act, and of the kinds of relationships they had with each other. They conveyed a vision of a moral order of the home, which was not circumscribed by the walls of the house.

The practices involved in Janet's and Daniel's provisioning of the home expressed responsibility to each other and to others. The stress of Janet's story, when she went about making the plans and spending money, is on her ability and skill to find cheap goods and save money. In her narrative she is not spending the resources of the household, but storing resources for the household (Miller 1997). There is no sense of personal indulgence in Janet's choices. Even though it was her choice to have the kitchen renewed, the work expresses her concerns for others rather than exclusively for herself.

The kitchen, as it is renewed, is the space for family gathering, it is where they spend most of their time together, it is the space for family intimacy. In this place they eat and talk to visitors, the children do homework and play, Janet cooks and does the laundry. Janet and Daniel are also seen in video footage checking finances and having an evening drink while the children watch TV next door in the lounge. That this is where Janet chooses to place the resources of the household confirms a gender interest with the distribution of the costs of caring in intrafamily transfers (Folbre 1994). It is in the kitchen that the bulk of the family practical care work is done: cooking, storing food, washing dishes and clothes. Emotional care is obviously not disconnected from practical care but it has its specific concerns. This appears highly valued in the context of creation of a space for talking, feeding and enjoyment in an environment with pleasing aesthetics.

Janet appeared to have a significantly large amount of emotional capital available to her, evident in how she was clear about the identity project for herself and her family and about the concern of her project with the interdependence of the family members. She used her perception of this ideal of caring and living to build an environment that put across the practical and dispositional aspects of her everyday life. The investment both Janet and Daniel made, under Janet's lead, is linked to a strategy of upward social mobility. However, in monetary market terms the capital cannot be cashed in in such a way as to include the family in the desired middle-class environment because the underlying value of the house and the land probably do not immediately justify the investment in market terms. I will return to this point.

Consumption and family practices

There are three key themes in studies of the new sociology of consumption that I consider relevant to explore in relation to ordinary everyday family practices in the context of this study. The first argues that consumption is a critical part of the creation and maintenance of a valued sense of the self, stressing that considerations of use value and exchange value are also important in consumer decision-making. The second concerns the processes of inclusion and exclusion as they relate to economic, social and cultural capital and to a disposition for personal connection and intimacy, related to the self and to others, which I call emotional capital. The third refers to differences of wealth, ethnicity, employment and marital status, number of children, and other factors that have a bearing in terms of access to positions and dispositions revealed in particular consumption practices.

I will now look at the story of the beautiful kitchen case in relation to these concerns in order to further elaborate a few key issues emerging from the empirical study.

Consumption, the self and value

I made a reference in the introduction to consumption studies which have examined the emotional aspects of people's relationships with objects (Miller 1987, Lunt and Livingstone 1992, Silverstone and Hirsch 1992). It has been asserted that material objects are typically used to construct and present a certain persona and to support group membership (Featherstone 1990, Bourdieu 1999). Choices of consumption are also informed by considerations of value as use and as exchange (Warde 1994).

The family and consumption practices of the Seamans illustrate these connections between the emotional aspects of self and group identity and the materiality of objects and the environment. Because they are not well-off, considerations of use value and exchange value are salient in their narratives of appropriation of material goods. All their stories of possession of goods carry a cost tag and a personal acquisition strategy. These are commonly intricately linked. Getting hold of the objects made them feel good and achieving valued. They took pleasure in showing their resources and talking about how resourceful they were in obtaining them.¹⁰

The practices show links between consumption, value and a project for the self, which is most evident in Janet's narrative. Why did Janet Seaman decide to put household resources into making a beautiful kitchen? Janet's kitchen is not a typical working-class kitchen. It is more a sign of a direction for her (and her family's) desired social position within a middle-class group. I say Janet decided to make, not simply to have, a kitchen. She did not simply buy a kitchen, and her economic resources would have been dramatically stretched had she bought it. She actively involved herself and used various personal resources – those of her husband, and social and business connections – to make the kitchen. Her emotional capital was important in the articulation of a family project centred on caring and interdependency. Material exchange-value aspects were very important in the face of her scarce financial resources. All items were purchased for a price lower than the market value. It was a case of bringing into the home large resources from the market. She built a nourishing kitchen and she felt nourished by her project. There was an enormous use value for the family in the project of the kitchen, both because of the ambience of a nourishing family life, and because of the potential middle-class ticket achieved by it. She was able to present herself with a new personal identity, via her kitchen. Yet, this kitchen differs greatly from the rest of the house. It signals a direction, a motivation, and a tense fragmentation of the self.

The senses of belonging are in tension in two ways. First, Janet belongs to two different places: her working-class origin, to which her house location and the decoration of the other rooms testified, and the middle-class she wanted her family to achieve. Perhaps it is appropriate to recall two criticisms of Giddens' idea of the power of a reflexive self. One follows Adkins' (2002) remark that Giddens relies on the idea of equal access of reflexivity by everyone, who would be free to be

10 This resourcefulness is also powerfully present in two other family cases I discuss in a previous paper (Silva 2000a).

whatever they like. Social relations and cultural contexts, however, constrain, and reflexivity of social identity may be more important than reflexivity of self-identity. The other criticism of Giddens is made by Derek Layder (1996). It concerns, again, the limits of the individual's power of reflexivity because, argues Layder, it is the individual's power of motivation that turns them into architects of action. Janet's reflexive self designed the kitchen project in relation to a social identity, while her motivation drove it into a concrete enterprise. But the overall enterprise was limited, and limiting. Her large emotional capital was curtailed by her shorter economic one. Janet could not go further in her relocation project. While the use value of the capital she invested in her kitchen is high, the exchange value would not allow her to invest in a middle-class location for a project of a new home. She remains working class even though she possesses a more typical middle-class kitchen. Yet, hers was not a petit-bourgeois pretension.

Second, Janet's narrative of self and family is fragmented in a tense manner. My confinement in the kitchen meant that Janet did not want me to see the other rooms of the house. The contrast between the hidden rooms and the room on display was more significant because of her effort to keep the door shut. Also, she did not volunteer to tell me her story about the kitchen. This turned out to be a story of struggle to pursue and to achieve her beautiful kitchen. It revealed a very resourceful Janet, but this was not the Janet that she wanted to have revealed. Both these two hidden things showed the small extent of her project, that her social inclusion as 'middle class' was very partial. Janet knew it, but she did not want me to know it. Or, she did not want to know that I knew it.

Inclusion, exclusion and emotional capital

The idea that consumption is a site for the creation and maintenance of a valued sense of the self, but that narratives and performances of selves are also linked to differential access to goods, links the politics of consumption to the availability of economic, social and cultural capital. Yet, I argued in the introduction that these forms of capital alone do not account for the development of capacities to choose and achieve particular ideals of connection and intimacy. A disposition to engage emotionally with the self and with others is an asset that, like other forms of capital, relates to social positioning. Changes of self-identity and senses of belonging are active processes developed in relation to others (persons and objects) by means of a parallel internal development (Lieblich 1993). These are linked to specific strategies of upward mobility in social space.

In contemporary narratives of the self the responsibility for maintaining relationships is less and less restricted to women. Men are expected to care. The overall moral sense of responsibility in provisioning the home was not gender specific in the narratives of the families in my study, but the practices expressing particular senses of social inclusion or exclusion seemed particularly relevant for the women. In the Seaman household the kitchen renovation was Janet's project. Daniel simply went along with it, he was still a bit unhappy with the change. I remarked that

Janet's kitchen is not just about family life. She clearly wanted a space for intimate family living but her project is also about social place, showing where she wanted to be included, what she was claiming to be a part of, together with her family. She had a strategy of investment which carried her family into a more valued social space, internally and concretely in the aesthetic context of the kitchen.

Janet followed particular capital-accumulating strategies on the basis of her emotional capital. This strategy was of great use for her families. She was an active agent in the family and its consumption practices. This was not a case of a family using the woman as an asset, contrary to Bourdieu's (1998, 1999) view of women within the long-lasting gendered habitus of male domination.

Differential assets and particular consumption

I have undertaken a sociological analysis of consumption in the home, which is concerned with the interiority of the family relationship. I am interested in the ways in which individuals (most particularly women) operate as conscious agents of change in the sphere of intimacy. I focus on family and consumption practices with a particular concern about the connections with social divisions. In the case I analyse Janet's consciousness for change and her agentic self suffer from the double structural constraints of gender and class. The kitchen is after all confined to the female-defined private domestic space even though it is used as the public face of the household and may increase family members appreciation of themselves as valued persons, deserving of class mobility.

It seems important to bring back Jackson and Moores' (1995) assertion that homes are differentiated units of consumption, to emphasise that significant differentiation occurs within the home. For example, the cost of Janet's kitchen was much smaller than the cost of Daniel's car, as I remarked earlier. The balance between differential assets in the home and particular consumption may, however, be levelled out if a sense of fairness prevails. The valuing of care, in terms of a recognition of the importance of the emotional capital involved in everyday family practices and consumption practices, is part of an ethical stance towards such a moral sense of fairness. However, this still leaves out the actual issue of economic and financial disparity between women and men, which has been central to feminist concerns. Within an optic of cultural, embodied and emotional capital this disparity takes different contours which require new research perspectives for understanding them and fresh proposals for changing the culture that constructs these differential assets and consumption patterns. Race can also be a significant asset in this regard (Silva 2005). Skeggs' (2004) discussion of class, selves and culture is relevant here as she remarks that only certain selves are seen as capable of accumulating value. Although value is everywhere, not always can it be cashed in.

Conclusions

If it is true that goods mediate social relations and offer opportunities to make social distinctions they also have use value that goes beyond their symbolic status. As I have argued elsewhere (Silva 2000b) high quality kitchen appliances usually make housework easier and more satisfying. A cooker that ‘knows how to cook’ demands less skill and ability from the cook. This can bring into cooking, for instance, new agents like male partners, teenagers and very busy professionals. (Children over 6 have found to be proficient in microwave oven controls.) As says Ilmonen (2004: 27) goods play a role as ‘our partners when we try to cope with everyday life.’ Bruno Latour calls this co-dependency between humans and objects (non-humans) ‘hybridisation’. Others have referred to processes of ‘appropriation’ (Knorr Cetina 1997) or ‘domestication’ (Silverstone et al 1992) to account for how people make objects their own. Kaj Ilmonen (2004) draws from the work of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978) to understand the ways in which objects that are external come to be internalised in subjective terms. An example is ‘my home’. Appropriation consists of internalisation and projection of the self on external goods by ‘objectivating’ the self in the objects. This means the externalisation and transfer of desires, inner feelings and social relations to objects. There is a connection with ‘object relations’ psychology in this approach which is not particularly relevant to explore here. What is important is the recognition of the sorts of work that go into consumption which link up personal internal processes, where emotions are situated, and those of culture. Ultimately this whole process happens in culture.

In the field of culture, Bourdieu (1995) asserts, everyday objects have a role in status differentiation, with their symbolic signification embedded in identity and identification processes. But he stresses that there is a homology between classes of products and classes of consumers, where the intentions of designers and users are symmetric. In his terms, the object objectifies the ‘constituted taste’ of the producer. Consumption choices are thus defined within the parameters of class location which determines the taste of possession.¹¹ His thinking doesn’t give place to processes of appropriation, as noted above. In this regard, Bernard Lahire (1999) remarks that for Bourdieu the same product is not expected to be diversely appropriated across classes or within one same class. The homologies between consumers, producers and products are objectifications of the social class divisions conveying pretension for the *petit-bourgeoisie*, distinction for the *bourgeoisie*, and necessity for the working class. Janet’s practices concerning her kitchen clearly do not fit within this framework. It fits more with the likes of Michel de Certeau (1988) for whom the consumer is an author, or of Slater (1995) who argues that consumption styles can emerge from the internal resources and social experiences of a subordinated social group and from their opposition to higher ranks. Janet’s authorship of a transgressive

11 The producer could here be interpreted as broadly characterising the ‘technological innovator’, designer, or manufacturer. These positions of taste definers are assisted by a variety of institutions like shops and magazines (Bourdieu 1993: 232).

social class practice in the adoption of a not-typical working-class kitchen can be seen as an illustration of this argument. At an individual level the mobilisation of social experience and internal resources, as emotional capital, are fundamental for consumption practices.

I want to firmly stress that objects cannot be reduced to simple signifiers of difference of status and social position notwithstanding the importance of this process in consumption culture. Various projects are involved in consumption like well-being, pleasure, functionality, relationship, intimacy, and also the desire to change identity positions within the social and the cultural. In this regard, the concrete appearance of Janet's kitchen is not simply representational but has material consequences (cf. Dant 1999). The beautiful kitchen story shows that taste can be derived from beyond the immediate context of social class reference – the working class – to be interpreted in an abstract manner typical of those with higher cultural capital due to connections between personal resources in the form of emotional capital, a resource typically possessed in larger amount by women, which are absent from the equations of class positioning in consumer culture.

References

- Adkins, Lisa (2002) *Revisions: Gender and Sexuality in Late Modernity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Attwood, Feona (2005) 'Inside Out: Men on the Home Front', *Journal of Consumption Culture* 5 (1): 87-107.
- Baudrillard, Jean (1988) 'Consumer Society', in Poster, Mark (ed.) *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (first published in 1970), pp. 29-57.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1987) *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Postmodernity and Intellectuals*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Becker, Gary (1975) *Human Capital*. New York: Columbia University Press (first published in 1967).
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1995) *Sociology in Question*. London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1998) 'Appendix: The Family Spirit', in *Practical Reason*. Cambridge: Polity Press (first published in 1994), pp. 64-74.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1999) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge (first published in 1979).
- Cockburn, Cynthia and Fürst-Dilic, Ruza (eds) (1994) *Bringing Technology Back Home: Gender and Technology in a Changing Europe*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Cockburn, Cynthia and Ormrod, Susan (1993) *Gender and Technology in the Making*. London: Sage.
- Cowan, Ruth S. (1983) *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. New York: Basic Books.

- Cowan, Ruth S. (1987) 'The Consumption Junction: A Proposal for Research Strategies in the Sociology of Technology', in Bijker, Wiebe E., Hughes, Thomas P. and Pinch, Trevor (eds) *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 261-280.
- Dant, Tim (1999) *Material Culture in the Social World*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- de Certeau, Michel (1988) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- DeVault, Marjorie (1994) *Feeding the Family. The Social Organization of Caring As Gendered Work*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Douglas, M. and Isherwood, B. (1996) *The World of Goods*. London: Routledge.
- Featherstone, Mike (1990) 'Perspectives on Consumer Culture', *Sociology* 24 (1): 5-22.
- Featherstone, Mike (1995) *Undoing Culture*. London: Sage.
- Folbre, Nancy (1994) *Who Pays For The Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint*. London: Routledge.
- Friedman, J. (ed.) (1994) *Consumption and Identity*. London: Harwood Academic Press.
- Gabriel, Y. and Lang, T. (1995) *The Unmanageable Consumer*. London: Sage.
- Gardiner, Jean (1997) *Gender, Care and Economics*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Gershuny, Jonathan (1983) *Social Innovation and the Division of Labour*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gershuny, Jonathan, Bittman, Michael and Brice, John (1997) 'Exit, Voice and Suffering: Do Couples Adapt to Changing Employment Patterns?', *Working Papers of the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-social Change*, Paper 97-8, Colchester, University of Essex.
- Gershuny, Jonathan and Sullivan, Oriel (2004) 'Inconspicuous Consumption: Work-rich, Time-poor in the Liberal Market Economy', *Journal of Consumption Culture* 4 (1): 79-100.
- Giddens, Anthony (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Goleman, Daniel (1996) *Emotional Intelligence*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Hochschild, Arlie R. (1983) *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ilmonen, Kaj (2004) 'The Use of and Commitment to Goods', *Journal of Consumption Culture* 4 (1): 27-50.
- Jackson, Stevi and Moores, Shaun (eds) (1995) *The Politics of Domestic Consumption*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Knorr, Cetina (1997) 'Sociality with Objects: Social Relations in Postsocial Knowledge Societies', *Theory, Culture and Society* 14 (4): 1-30.
- Lahire, Bernard (ed.) (1999) *Le travail sociologique de Pierre Bourdieu: Dettes et critiques*. Paris: La Decouverte.
- Layder, Derek (1996) 'Contemporary Sociological Theory', *Sociology* 30 (3): 601-608.

- Liebllich, Amia (1993) 'Looking at Change: Natasha, 21: New Immigrant from Russia to Israel', in *The Narrative Study of Lives*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, pp. 92-129.
- Living in Britain* (1998) Results from the 1996 General Household Survey, London, Office for National Statistics.
- Lovell, Terry (2000) 'Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu', *Feminist Theory* 1 (1): 11-32.
- Lunt, Peter and Livingstone, Sonia (1992) *Mass Consumption and Personal Identity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Lupton, Celia (1998) *The Emotional Self*. London: Sage.
- Mason, Jennifer (1996) 'Gender, Care and Sensibility in Family and Kin Relationships', in Holland, Janet and Adkins, Lisa (eds) *Sex, Sensibility and the Gendered Body*. London: BSA/Macmillan, pp. 15-36.
- Miller, Daniel (1987) *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Miller, Daniel (1988) 'Appropriating the State in the Council Estate', *Man* 23: 353-372.
- Miller, Daniel (ed.) (1995) *Acknowledging Consumption*. London: Routledge.
- Miller, Daniel (1997) 'Consumption and its Consequences', in Mackay, Hugh (ed.) *Consumption and Everyday Life*. London: Sage, pp. 14-50.
- Moi, Toril (1994) *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Morgan, David (1996) *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Morgan, David (1999) 'Risk and Family Practices: Accounting for Change and Fluidity in Family Life', in Silva, Elizabeth B. and Smart, Carol (eds) *The 'New' Family?* London: Sage, pp. 13-30.
- Reay, Diane (2000) 'A Useful Extension of Bourdieu's Conceptual Framework? Emotional Capital as a Way of Understanding Mothers' Involvement in their Children's Education', *The Sociological Review* 48 (4): 568-585.
- Robbins, Derek (2002) 'Pierre Bourdieu, Les structures sociales de L'economie', Book review in *Journal of Consumption Culture* 2 (3): 416-419.
- Sevenhuijsen, Selma (1998) *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations of Justice, Morality and Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Silva, Elizabeth B. (1999) 'Transforming Housewifery: Dispositions, Practices and Technologies', in Silva, Elizabeth B. and Smart, Carol (eds) *The 'New' Family?* London: Sage, pp. 46-65.
- Silva, Elizabeth B. (2000a) 'The Politics of Consumption @ Home. Practices and Dispositions in the Uses of Technologies'. *Pavis Papers* no.1. Milton Keynes: The Open University.
- Silva, Elizabeth B. (2000b) 'The Cook, the Cooker and the Gendering of the Kitchen', *The Sociological Review* 48 (4): 612-628.
- Silva, Elizabeth B. (2004) 'What's to be Seen', Paper presented at the ESRC Research Seminar on 'Visual Methodologies', Centre for Research on Family, Kinship and Childhood, University of Leeds, mimeo.

- Silva, Elizabeth B. (2005) 'Gender, Home and Family in Cultural Capital Theory', *British Journal of Sociology* 56 (1): 83-103.
- Silva, Elizabeth B. and Smart, Carol (eds) (1999) *The 'New' Family?* London: Sage.
- Silverstone, Roger and Hirsch, Eric (eds) (1992) *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*. London: Routledge.
- Skeggs, Beverly (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender*. London: Sage.
- Skeggs, Beverly (2004) *Class, Self, Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Slater, Don (1997) *Consumer Culture and Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smart, Carol and Neale, Bren (1999) *Family Fragments*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Soundings* (1998) Special issue part 2: 'Emotional labour' (ed. Pam Smith).
- Southerton, Dale (2001) 'Consuming Kitchens. Taste, Context and Identity Formation', *Journal of Consumption Culture* 1 (2): 179-203.
- Taylor, P. (1998) 'Plugged in, Switched on, Stressed out', *Financial Times* 'Weekend' section, 13-14 June, p. xiv.
- Thomson, Ken (1998) *Emotional Capital: Capturing Hearts and Minds to Create Lasting Business Success*. London: Capstone.
- Tronto, Joan C. (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethics of Care*. New York: Routledge.
- Warde, Alan (1994) 'Consumption, Identity – Formation and Uncertainty', *Sociology* 28 (4): 877-898.

This page intentionally left blank

PART 3

Gender and the Material Culture
of the Domestic Sphere

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 9

The Sensory Home as a Site of Consumption: Everyday Laundry Practices and the Production of Gender

Sarah Pink

Introduction

When I interviewed Jane she was in her forties, a housewife who worked part-time. Speaking of her make-up, clothes, and perfumes she told me she liked ‘the works’, including perfume, ‘body lotion, shower gel’. As part of her wider consumption strategy, thriftiness, punctuated with the odd luxury, was fundamental to her approach. She was a ‘hoarder’ who thought fashion went ‘in a circle’. She insisted ‘I don’t spend money – don’t get me wrong – I say I care about my appearance a lot. I don’t spend money on any expensive clothes because I buy a lot second hand from, um, sort of like dress agencies’ and she had been given many quality items by friends and employers. This enabled her to maintain her everyday expectations for her sensory self, in terms of perfumes, clothing textures and visual appearance, whilst also satisfying her taste for luxury, because:

I use sort of the cheapest Avon ones every day for a little squirt, then when I’m going out I like the more expensive choices like I like Estée Lauder, I like Moschino, um, oh what else do I go on? I like Dior or Elizabeth Arden But I’m very, very tight, I don’t pay full price for it, Sarah, I go to all sorts of these discount perfumeries.

Perfume was one element of her sensory construction of self. Textures and the feel of fabrics were also important. Jane used a ‘good’ fabric conditioner on valued items of clothing, but being thrifty would not waste this on denims. Her taste for luxury textures and deep colours, dislike of ironing and thriftiness combined to make some fabrics more appealing than others:

I think Ooh, if it needs a lot of ironing I don’t really want to know, so I mean ... um ... I do ... I mean I’ve got some silk and that but, again, I think it’s very, very overrated for the price it costs, Sarah, and I’ve got some Thai silk, too, because one of my friend’s husbands goes to Thailand a lot – he’s in the textile game – and, as I say, I’ve got quite a bit of stuff off here, but that again is beautiful. It’s got this lovely sheen to it, but it’s murderous to

wash and it loses its dye as well. So you've got to sort of wash it quick, pull it out, dry it on the line. As I say, it's a lot of trouble, lovely colours but a lot of trouble.

Jane's case study is from one of a series of interviews I carried out in 2000 as part of a study of domestic laundry practices. In common with other women I interviewed (and see Silva 2000), Jane's domestic consumption strategies draw from a diverse set of resources. Through her agency as both a consumer and the controller of domestic processes she combines different forms of acquisition and resources with domestic knowledge about laundry to produce her feminine identity. Later in this chapter I return to Jane to explore the wider context of her sensory home, consumption and laundry practices as a case study in how everyday laundry practices and the sensory knowledge and strategies that inform them are constitutive of gendered identities. First I introduce the ideas, methodology and materials that inform this analysis.

The home as a site of sensory consumption

Understanding the home as a site of consumption is fundamental to social scientific analysis of how everyday life is lived in contemporary modern western capitalist societies. This has focused on a range of aspects. To name but the most relevant to the discussion here, most of which combine with a gender theme, this includes social exclusion and inclusion (Silva 2000), domestic technologies (Cockburn and Ormod 1993, Shove 2003), media (Morley 2000), and material culture (Miller 1998). All focus somehow on how people obtain, appropriate and interact with (usually) objects and services within processes through which human identities are constituted. However existing academic studies of domestic consumption almost universally neglect to question the sensory categories that academics use to describe the way home is experienced, what sensory categories informants use to describe their experiences of home and how academics treat these. Thus existing work does not account for how sensory experience might inform the consumption choices people make, how they creatively appropriate the objects or services they consume, the sensory practices this engages them in and the gendered identities and aspirations they objectify in doing so. To achieve this would not simply mean taking a phenomenological approach to the home as embodied experience, but entails seeing the home as a site of sensory experience and understanding people's consumption practices as being inextricably bound up with their sensory perception of domestic products and services and the moral values they attach to these. Since domestic practices are undoubtedly gendered, and moreover attached to moralities associated with particular forms of femininity, the particular domestic consumption strategies adopted by individuals can be regarded as expressive of how they situate their own gendered identities in relation to their own constructions of conventional housewifery. Seeing gender as plural and recognising that the way gender is performed is contingent on context therefore means understanding the sensory home as a location in which women and men act and consume in ways that are constitutive of multiple (and possibly competing) femininities and masculinities and the moralities these imply.

Commercial manufacturers of domestic products ranging from foods to air fresheners, cleaning products and soap powders have long-since recognised the need to attend to the senses. Discussing 'sensory stimulation and consumer capitalism' (2003: 208). David Howes cites a 1930s text to comment that even if the visual was the 'primary sensory mode of consumer culture' the other senses were always important. In fact 'the sense of touch was also appropriated by marketers as a crucial medium of sensory persuasion' during that period and in the later twentieth century 'multisensory marketing' reached its height 'with artificial scent added to a range of products from cars to crayons, and with Muzak and fragrances wafting through the plushly carpeted aisles of department stores and boutiques, creating a state of hyperanaesthesia in the consumer' (2003: 211). Howes cites a recent business article (Pine and Gilmore 1998) which emphasises how 'experience design' should 'engage all five senses' through, for instance, the use of smell and sound in shoe shine, smell, light and sound in grocery stores and the multi-sensory use of most in Rainforest Cafes (Howes 2003: 212). While much sensory research into consumer preferences is in product design and development in food (e.g. Moskowitz, Beckley and Chambers 2005), it is also applied in other areas, as evidenced by research agendas promised by commercial consumer research companies specialising in sensory research.¹ Indeed commercial applications of interdisciplinary empirical evidence and accumulated expertise about consumers' sensory preferences and practices to product development, marketing and advertising are key to product success in domestic and public contexts – another point that indicates its importance in everyday life and modern western cultural values.

In this chapter I elaborate this idea of the home as a site of sensory consumption where gendered identities are lived out. First theoretically, discussing existing definitions of the home, domestic practices and services, experience and sensory experience. Second, drawing from my visual ethnographic research about domestic laundry practices in what I term the 'sensory home' (Pink 2004), I frame everyday laundry practices as an example of sensory consumption – that is the process by which people obtain, appropriate, and work creatively with commercial and 'natural' products, services and processes in their quest to create a home and gendered self that they believe is morally satisfactory.

What is the 'home'?

Significant effort has gone into defining the concept of 'home'. I shall not attempt a comprehensive review here (see Mallett 2004 for this).² Mallet asks if home is

1 When I ran Internet searches to gain a sense of the scope of this I found many companies offer sensory research services. An interesting example is Wirral Sensory Services <http://www.wssintl.co.uk/default.htm> accessed 1st July 2004.

2 Although I should note that Mallett's otherwise interesting review surprisingly (given her commitment to interdisciplinarity) completely ignores the important body of anthropological work on the home developed in Miller's (2001) edited volume *Home Possessions*.

‘(a) place(s), (a) space(s), feelings(s), practices, and/or an active state of being in the world’ (2004: 64). Existing anthropological work suggests that home might be all these things. Home need not be located in a circumscribed architectural space but is a sentiment that might be evoked by objects, tastes, sounds, practices or relationships (Rapport and Dawson 1998, Petridou 2001), created through everyday practices in situations where its makers are mobile (Miller 2001a), and is as much part of the imagination as a current material reality (see Pink 2004). My concern is with when such sentiments, feelings and practices are invested in the constitution of home within an architectural space – a house, flat, apartment or room. In this context the mutual constitution of self and home becomes an effect of the way the material and sensory are engaged through individual agency. In Jane’s case study below this exemplifies women’s agency, highlighting Silva’s point that women can be ‘active agents in the family and its consumption practices’ (2000: 24), thus contradicting problematic and universalising theories of patriarchy that insist the home is a universal site of women’s subordination. Miller (2001b) also stresses the material agency of the home (as in a house), demonstrating that the home is not simply created through individuals’ practices, but also *acts on* our potential as social actors. As Lawrence-Zuñiga and Birdwell-Pheasant note however, human agency always has the edge on material agency, it does not ‘cancel out’ our capacity for human action (1999: 8).

The existing emphasis on the material home has inspired concomitant attention to the tangible and visible aspects of home and domestic practices (e.g. Gullestad 1993, Drazin 2001, Clarke 2001). Notable exceptions focus on smell, taste, touch and sound in the evocation of domestic memory (Hecht 2001), radio ‘soundscapes’ (Tachhi 1998) and taste (Petridou 2001). However this work usually focuses on a sensory modality in isolation rather than seeing the home and domestic objects, practices and services as part of a wider sensory embodied experience in which the senses are interconnected in complex ways, and essentially inseparable, while culturally categorised and defined. In my book *Home Truths* (Pink 2004) I suggest that in combination with the definitions outlined above, home is defined as a sensory space, of sensory experience and practices. Although some researchers of the home take phenomenological approaches to the home (Mallett 2004: 80–81), they have not questioned what our sensory experience of the home comprises. Below I examine this by discussing the anthropologies of experience and the senses.

What is experience?

Drawing from the philosopher Dilthey, the anthropologist Victor Turner (1986) suggested experience is constructed through a two-part process. First through the flow of ‘mere experience’, which as we reflect on it becomes circumscribed as ‘an experience’. This model was not universally accepted, notably critiqued by Clifford Geertz (1986) who instead suggested that experience is never ‘mere experience’ but always ‘an experience’ because it is an ‘interpretive replay as we recollect it to

ourselves and recount it to others.’ These understandings of experience have been influential in anthropology (see Throop 2003) and cultural studies (see Pickering 1997). However as Throop outlines recently anthropologists have found both approaches unsatisfactory on a variety of counts, leading them to reject the use of the term, deconstruct the concept of experience as a modern western construct, and critique the separation of experience (as ‘an unorganized field of sensory impressions’ and narrative (as ‘the structure that organises experience’) (Throop, 2003: 220-222). Drawing from the work of Turner and Geertz and the phenomenological writings of James, Husserl and Schutz, Throop suggests a more flexible model for experience that ‘works to integrate the immediacy of temporal flux and the mediacy of reflective assessment’. This recognises that while narrative and experience are inextricable, there are also types of experience that do not conform to the structure of narrative, and experiences that defy our reflective abilities to define them and thus remain ‘discontinuous and indeterminate in structure’. Moreover, coherence might emerge in the immediacy of ‘pre-reflective’ experience as well as through reflection. Therefore there is no essential temporal structure to a ‘process’ though which experiences are made (Throop 2003: 233) but experience might more usefully be conceived as part of a relationship between a continuous flow of sensory embodied perception and its definition, with the disclaimer that the order of this might take plural forms. Therefore “‘Mere” temporal succession, fragmentary disjunction and meaningful coherence are thus each important potential constituents of the structure of experience’ (Throop 2003: 233). This flexible plural model of experience, drawn from phenomenological approaches provides a useful tool for considering how people living in modern western cultures might make sense of their sensory environments. In the next section I review recent ideas in the anthropology of the senses to theorise how this might come about.

The anthropology of the senses

Although there was some earlier anthropological interest in the senses (see Howes 2003), it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that the anthropology of the senses became established as a sub-discipline, mainly due to the initial work of David Howes and Constance Classen. This anthropology of the senses was concerned with the cross-cultural comparison of hierarchies of sensory values and the way these were articulated in social relations. It argued that vision was the dominant and privileged sense in the modern west, whereas in other cultures other senses might be given priority, presenting this argument in the relativist terms of a more mature twentieth century anthropology that critiqued the evolutionary model that late nineteenth century interests had subscribed to. However this anthropology of the senses has more recently been criticised by Ingold (2000) for its assumption that vision is the most important sense in the modern west. Ingold’s discussion suggests although modern western philosophy has insisted that vision dominates modern western culture, both biological understandings of sensory perception and

an analysis of the way sensory perception informs our understandings of experience as part of our everyday lives demonstrate that at these levels vision is neither separable from nor more important than other senses. Here I reiterate two points from this discussion (see also Pink 2003, Pink 2004). First, as other academics (e.g. Seremetakis 1994, Taussig 1991, MacDougall 1998) writing from other perspectives have also emphasised, the senses are interconnected, our pre-reflective experience is 'pluri-sensory', in a way that is not separated out into different sensory modalities. If we take what Turner would call 'mere experience' and what Throop has redefined as the 'temporal succession' (ibid) to correspond with the notion of 'pluri-sensory' experience as interconnected and inseparable and undefined through culturally constructed sensory categories, then 'an experience' would be the definition of this through reflecting on the cultural categories of sensory experience, which would in the modern west be sound, sight, touch, smell and taste (but in other cultures might not be).³ Second, even if modern western philosophy defines vision as the dominant sense in modern western experience, the extent to which the visual is dominant in everyday experience is questionable on two levels. First if what Throop calls the temporal flow of sensory experience is pluri-sensory then no sense is dominant over others at this level. Second to know whether modern western individuals privilege vision as the culturally constructed sensory category through which they define their everyday experiences of and practices in any given context of social and material relations, one would need to do empirical research. My case study of how Jane spoke about and organised her laundry practices in the context of the 'sensory home' accounts for this.

Anthropology, sociology and domestic consumption

Existing literature on the anthropology of the home demonstrates how identities are constituted through domestic practices and routines. Models of the domestic appropriation (Miller 1988) of spaces and objects for purposes that serve to consolidate the identities of those involved with them, the objectification of gender identities and personal aspirations through practices of home decoration and other forms of creativity in the home (e.g. see Gullestad 1993, Clarke 2001) and an understanding of the material agency of the home and objects in it as vehicles for the agency of previous tenants or owners, the landlord or the council (see Miller 1988, Miller 2001b) all guide my analysis of the roles laundry practices play in the processes of domestic consumption through which individuals homes and self-identities are mutually constituted. Elsewhere (Pink 2004) I applied these ideas to understand how

3 For example in her excellent ethnography of the Anlo Ewe (Ghana) sensorium Geurts describes how for these people the senses are not divided up into the 5 categories we use in the modern west but (to dramatically simply Geurts' discussion) emphasise audition, balance, kinaesthesia, synaesthesia, tactility, orality, seeing and related tasting and olfaction and related hearing (see Geurts 2002: 37-69) which are related to each other in ways non Anlo Ewe would not interconnect them.

different men and women engage, through their strategies of housework and home creativity, in sensory practices that ascribe to certain moralities and reject others. In doing so they live out and simultaneously define, create and objectify their gendered identities through their sensory creativity in the home. This chapter extends this work through a specific focus on laundry practices, an area I only touched on in previous work. I shall view laundry practices as sensory rather than visual/material/tangible decorative practices, and classify them as something that encompasses both housework and what I have called 'home creativity'. Home creativity goes beyond 'home decoration' to include a wider set of 'decorative' practices involving vision, textures, smells and sounds.

Existing work recognises some of the sensory and gendered dimensions of domestic laundry. Unsurprisingly business writers highlight sensory aspects of laundry. For instance van der Laan and Matthews (2003) suggest the laundry products market is benefiting from a trend in which consumers 'relate to the idea of using all their senses in many different areas of their lives' and tell us that '[a]ddressing consumer needs through a multi-sensory experience is proven to be generally more memorable: the color, texture and lingering scent work together to reassure that the job has been done well'. The sociologist Elizabeth Shove usefully situates laundry as a form of consumption of not soap powders and fabric conditioners, but also domestic services or commodities that can be bought, such as water, electricity and heating to which I would add 'natural' resources such as fresh air, which is not purchased as such, but accessed via a garden or balcony which would be acquired through economic exchange. Shove reviews existing literature to suggest two motivations for washing clothes. The first relates to 'pleasure and sensation'. For instance, the brand name for Comfort indicates 'the enduring importance of sensual values like softness and pliability', and advertising of Lenor 'suggest that consumers will be invigorated and stimulated by their properly conditioned, freshly laundered clothing'. The second motive is to express cleanliness through the visual appearance of material objects⁴ along with the role of laundering in 'deodorization' (Shove 2003: 124-126).

Other work has stressed the gendered nature of laundry. Jean-Claude Kaufmann notes how women have been historically, and still are, associated with linen and laundry (1998: 13-14). In his study of French couples most laundry expertise lay with his women informants, even though these women were generally working towards achieving a form of domestic equality with their male partners. In fact Kaufmann suggests laundry is so firmly engrained in women's identities that they prefer to slow down increases in men's laundry activity since 'It is as if they fear it will mean losing a part of themselves' (1998: 15). His wider argument denies women agency, seeing behaviour as 'largely imposed by "society"' (1998: 210), which maintains gender inequality. As I hope to demonstrate below in fact it is through laundry expertise and practice that women are empowered in the home, even in contexts where a

4 Shove's (2003) comments are also congruent with my own findings from an unpublished study of laundry practice carried out with Unilever research in 2000, which I draw from in this article.

gendered division of labour is maintained.⁵ Shove also frames laundry as 'women's work', suggesting that judgements of laundry constitute judgements of domestic performance, therefore changing criteria for laundry standards are socially significant (2003: 119-121). However Shove focuses on how 'configurations of technology and convention lock people into more or less sustainable and more or less malleable patterns of consumption' (2003: 123). Therefore (although her empirical analysis is actually based on the interviews I designed and carried out for my study described in the next section), Shove does not produce a fine grained ethnographic analysis of how women's agency is articulated in laundry as a domestic consumption processes and therefore to how women as individuals participate in the production of changing laundry conventions.

Drawing from the above discussion my analysis of the case study is informed by two key points. First, doing the laundry is not simply about producing clean items, but about producing one's self and home. Through their everyday laundry practices, related consumption activities and the sensory results these produce people objectify their self-identities. This is a matter of not simply conforming to existing norms about cleanliness, but a creative process by which individuals reject, accept or stretch norms and conventions, which ultimately implicates them as agents in broader processes of change. Therefore individuals' actual practices of domestic consumption of laundry products, services and fresh air are processes through which they constitute their gendered identities and make moral statements about the 'right' way to be a woman or man in a specific context.

Second, sensory judgements about likes and dislikes, the need to wash and the results of a laundry process involve defining 'pluri-sensory' experience in terms of specific cultural knowledge and setting that experience into sensory categories imbued with moral connotations. This involves human agency. First, to decide what sort of person one wants to express oneself as through laundry. Second, as a consumer. When people do their domestic laundry they are not passive consumers of pre-packaged artificial smells as Classen, Howes and Synnott characterise our practices in a post-modern age of simulation (1994: 204-205). I witnessed how people living in European homes 'were creative appropriators and mixers of diverse smells in their practices of home creativity and housework' (Pink 2004).

Background to the research

The case study discussed below is from a video ethnography project I undertook with Unilever Research in 2000. I designed the project with Jean Rimmer of Unilever, to research attitudes to a specific product by locating product use within the context of the sensory home. My use of the data here however is not to comment on perceptions of products, but to underline the importance of the home as a sensory context where

5 By extension, and as I have demonstrated elsewhere (Pink 2004), it is precisely though shifts in everyday practice that gender equality is achieved in contexts where domestic tasks are shared.

gender identities are lived. With each informant in the sample of twenty I first conducted a tape-recorded in-depth interview, which focused on a series of areas of the informants' life and self-identity, their laundry routines and priorities. This was followed by what I call a 'video tour' (discussed in detail in Pink 2003, 2004). Briefly the video tour is a collaborative research method whereby the informant spends up to an hour showing me around their home while I video them and the parts of their home they show. Prompted by my checklist our shared task was in this case a tour of how the laundry process was constructed in the home (the multiple sites for leaving, collection, transfer, washing and drying of laundry and the actual practices that occurred in them), the criteria used to decide what was and was not laundry and when something had satisfactorily been washed, and the items in the home that were not put in the washing machine that day but would at some point become laundry. This included clothing, sheets and towels, and also curtains, cushion covers, footwear, children's toys and more. We discussed the sensory aspects of decision making about laundry, the sensory experience of doing the laundry and the sensory qualities of domestic items that would potentially become laundry. As such we explored the sensory qualities and experience of the domestic process of laundry. The sort of data that this research produces consists of informants' verbal and embodied representations of their sensory, emotional and other experiences and practices of laundry in their homes. It by no means constitutes direct access to the way they actually live their everyday lives as would a participant observation study. However the method is reflexive in two ways because it both asks informants to reflect on what they think they 'really' do as well as enacting this on video, and by using video achieves what David MacDougall calls 'deep reflexivity' that brings the research encounter directly into the research materials rather than simply writing about it later (1998). In terms of the sorts of experience that such methods can reveal there are various levels at which the sensory experience of home is represented: in informants' verbal descriptions, through their embodied performances of laundry practices, and by facial expressions and other embodied metaphors. The video both represents and comments on what we might call mere experience, as it is both a record of the research encounter as it happened and my informants actions as they performed and experienced them, and represents their reflections on these experiences expressed verbally, through gesture and performance.

After the study I contacted eight of the informants I had interviewed personally who gave me their permission to use their interviews in my published work.⁶ Here I draw from their data as context for case study discussed in detail. Using a small sample this is not intended to be 'representative' of the 'whole population' as a larger sociological study might be, and should not be judged as such. Instead it pertains to the tradition of anthropological writing of the subdiscipline of the anthropology

6 Dr Marie Corbin also collaborated with me in this work, by carrying out and interpreting half of the interview. I am indebted to her for our many discussions and the insights that emerged from these which have no doubt informed the ideas I express in this chapter.

of the home (e.g. Miller 2001c). My purpose is to demonstrate how the domestic consumption that individual laundry practices relate to in the sensory home is constitutive of gendered identities and moralities. This approach will not reveal a superficial pattern of what many people have or do not have in common. But will indicate the more intimate level of the way the sensory home is personally experienced by individuals through laundry and in doing so provides an idea of how these relationships are played out. To explore this in detail I have opted to present just one extended case study enhanced by examples from other informants.

The imperfect housewife

The majority of my informants interviewed as part of the laundry study were housewives and mothers who worked part time.⁷ In their families a 'traditional' gendered division of labour was played out with these women taking responsibility for housework and laundry (and subsequently control of domestic consumption) while their husbands worked full time outside the home. Unlike the couples that figured in Kaufmann's (1998) study of how couples negotiate laundry tasks these women were not seeking to share domestic tasks equally with their husbands. However this domestic division of labour is not coterminous with women's subordination. In fact my informants asserted significant agency. A general theme in the analysis was that these women were not striving to be the 'perfect housewife' or to uphold an ideal model of morality through demonstrating extraordinary levels of cleanliness, but rather stressed their aim to primarily be good mothers who did their best for their children. Obviously achieving what each woman regarded as acceptable laundry frequency and results is part of this and was her way of expressing her own self and morality in relation to (and often to contest) what she saw as existing cultural conventions about 'good housewifely conduct' and what she perceived (sometimes critically) as 'proper' ways doing things. In doing this they rejected what they constructed as an 'ideal' of conventional housewifely femininity and subsequently asserted their own forms of housewifely morality and feminine identities through their laundry consumption practices in ways that are emblematic of women's agency. In this context of plural discourses on feminine morality each woman used her laundry to represent to me in our research encounters a vision of her own morally justified femininity and aspirations.

As will unfold in the case study developed below however (as we might expect) these assertions of alternative feminine housewifely identities and the forms of agency they entail are not absolute departures from more 'traditional' forms of feminine domestic power. One of the resources that fuelled my women informants' domestic agency through laundry was their privileged access to knowledge about laundry and laundry practice and their control of this domain of domestic consumption.

7 Men were also included in the study, however in this article I restrict the discussion to domestic femininities as the data provides a much richer perspective on this.

At the beginning of this chapter I introduced Jane, a lower middle class housewife, in her mid forties living with her husband and two teenage sons. Having worked full time as a secretary in the past she now had four part time jobs that allowed her to make her sons her priority, which was her way of doing the morally right thing as well as something she enjoyed more than being in the same office all day:

Um, my boys are growing up and, as I say, a lot of people think ‘Ooh, why don’t you go out to work full-time?’ But it’s just too restricting, Sarah, and I couldn’t sort of ... my house isn’t greatly looked after but it’s better looked after, you know, because I fit these jobs in than it would be if I had a full-time job. So, yes, at the moment I sort of ... I prefer it that way, because my 12 year old, he goes to school just down the road and he still needs help sort of with his bags and things. He’s too young to organise himself at the moment.

As part of this Jane (like most of my women informants) admitted that in some aspects of housework ‘I’m a bit naughty’ and did not feel she needed to be an ‘ideal housewife’. As she put it ‘I mean it’s no good me saying “I’m very house-proud” because I don’t take the settee out every week; I don’t clean under the beds every week, Sarah...so, um, it’s no good saying I’m the most perfect housewife... I like it to be clean, Sarah, but if it can be shoved away, I do tend to forget about it’. However within this it was important for Jane to maintain an appropriate sensory balance in her home and she admitted she was ‘fussy’ about its smell. This was partly because they had a dog and two cats and combating their smell and hair involved significant sensory work. For Jane this meant ‘I do like me smelly candles and me room sprayed’. Like others she embraced ‘anything that sort of enhances the smell of the house because I think sometimes when you’ve been on holiday, you come back and I think “[sniffing sound] Ooh dear, two weeks” and I think “The house smells”’. That summer Jane was using lavender, and lemon candles, and in winter burned oils above her lamps. However she enjoyed cooking smells, and when she had guests for dinner did not burn candles and oils ‘because I find the meal gives a nice aroma around the house’. This would be negotiated with the current sensory balance of the home, because if ‘I think “Ooh, things smell a bit fusty and that” I get me lemon stuff out or me lavender’. Living with her husband and two sons Jane also had to negotiate with other human agents. Although her husband shared her sensory laundry values her sons did not.

In the vignette that opens this chapter I describe how Jane’s consumption choices and laundry strategies intersect to create particular sensory results. The example shows how Jane’s consumption patterns involve a range of different strategies, some things are bought new in shops, however even quality cleaning products are bought in discount stores rather than the more expensive supermarkets. Because she has a preference for luxury fabrics Jane also invests in products that will care for these. Clothing is usually obtained either as a gift or second hand from dress agencies. Priorities in these consumption choices are not simply to do with visual appearance, but are more complexly related to the sensory identity that Jane is aiming to create for herself and by extension where possible to her family. She attempts to make her son’s change their clothing often enough to smell and look appropriate and her

husband is also often clothed in the textures of high quality clothing. This however must be contextualised within a wider strategy of investment that allows Jane and her family to travel, through their consumption, towards her aspirations. Her thriftiness is punctuated by occasional dinners out in one of the area's best and priciest restaurants and both her sons are privately educated. These consumption practices can be interpreted as emblematic of Jane's agency as a consumer. It is her mix of thriftiness and luxury that allows her to constitute a set of family practices and identity that are propelled by the control over resources, odours, textures and sights that results from the way she lives out her femininity through domestic consumption practices.

Within the home itself Jane also used sensory strategies to control the environment her family live in. In Jane's living room laundry processes periodically transformed the sensory environment. This involved restoring the textures, visual appearance and aroma of launderable items, each of which tended to need washing for reasons that were presented in terms of particular sensory categories and was judged as needing to be washed routinely over periods of time. For example, the rugs on the floor would be washed every six months because they both became grubby and needed to be 'fetched up' which could only be done by washing them with quality soap powder in the bath. The cushions, which were prone to stains and get grubby are washed more frequently and the curtains which are old, were also washed rather than dry-cleaned because they need replacing. These sensory transformations are accompanied by burning scented oils and candles, and aromatic products to assist vacuuming the floor.

In Jane's dining area we found not only potential laundry as part of the make-up of the room (e.g. with tablecloths stored in the sideboard), but evidence of drying laundry around the home. Tea towels and socks were drying on the radiator. Jane explained they were left there as it had been raining outside. It was summer and she was not using the heat of the radiator to dry these items, but knew they would dry in the warm atmosphere. In fact in winter she would not have placed them on a hot radiator since this drying technique would have had unwanted tactile results, making them too stiff. Rather she preferred to dry them on the clothes horse.

Jane's home was a busy environment where she, like many women, found herself 'multi-tasking'. To cope with this Jane set herself a weekly routine of which the laundry was part, involving a timetable for putting items in the machine and getting the clothes off the boys at the right time to clean them. Jane's main difficulty was getting their T-shirts into the wash since: 'I have to prise it off them and I say "That needs a wash now", because they're very naughty, very dirty, they don't like showering and they're quite happy to wear them all week.' One of the problems associated with this was the smell of sweat that accumulated on the clothing and was, in Jane's view, not concealed by the boys' use of deodorant. Smell also to some degree determined the timescale of Jane's routine as 'I don't allow them anything on the top more than two days because otherwise its too smelly, even if they put deodorant on, I think sometimes they think, instead of washing, put a bit of deodorant on, that's cleaning their selves.' Although for socks and pants she would just 'sort of grab them' other items were judged according to their smell. This weekly routine ran

with others, like the three and six monthly cycles that governed the items discussed for the living room.

Like my other informants for Jane's laundry to be 'clean' it had to 'be fed through that washing machine', this process aided by soap powder, and to make it 'nice' some fabric conditioner, was enough to produce clean laundry. Additional checking was visual, and ideally clean laundry should have no marks or stains on it, although in practice Jane and my other informants told me that an item would still be clean if it had gone through the machine and had stains on it. Once Jane's machine had finished its normal laundry cycle we discussed each item as she unloaded the machine. Like most of my other housewife informants Jane knew each item that has been washed intimately and knew what might be expected of it in terms of cleanliness – visual and texture – after washing. This allowed her to monitor her family's clothing and ensure that it maintains a sensory quality appropriate to her family identity project. For instance her son's school shirts are old – he is the second son to have worn them and she has limited expectations of them:

Jane: Well these aren't too bad, not exactly snowy white, but as I say, alright for them ... because, as I say, its only their um, its only their school stuff, which is quite, which is quite old now ... As you can see now, that's his name tag that needs ironing on. That's quite good because you saw it before and it was, as I say, I think that's quite good. I mean these shirts were my older sons. So, you know, they are quite old Sarah, and I mean, these are coming to their ... he won't be in these for much longer.

Sarah: So how old are the shirts themselves then?

Jane: Oh dear! Um, six years old Sarah, but he didn't, I mean he's not worn them all, he wore them when he was in year 7, so I put it away, and now because he's in year 7, and so, they've only been worn for a year at a time. But it does come in handy having um, utilising the clothes. Now let's see if that stains come off! I hope so! In the corner somewhere. Oh yes! Look! Let's check its the right corner. Yep, now its got that off Sarah, because it was, it was there.

These evaluations were not simply visual, as is also demonstrated by an extract from Ellen, another informant who similarly had detailed knowledge of her laundry items. Ellen's sensory strategies and anticipated results varied according to the item and the texture she desired for it:

Ellen: I only use [fabric conditioner] every now and again when I've got towels in the wash in. I like it on me towels, towels and the bedding.

Sarah: Does it not bother you about the clothes then.

Ellen: No not really, sometimes it makes the cardies too soft. My little girls cardies they go really too soft, flimsy but apart from that, nothing else. A bit of starch in every now and again I use on my husbands shirts when ironing.

Sarah: What's that?

Ellen: Starch, these are going out clothes, that is, it just gives it a bit of crispness.

Much of what I have highlighted from Jane's interview illustrates elements of the laundry process and priorities that were important for most of my women

informants. One motive for selecting Jane's case study is that she was a wonderfully engaging person who spoke about and showed me her life and her laundry with an openness and enthusiasm combined with wit and self-confidence. However (as for all informants) there were some areas of laundry in which Jane was less typical and to ensure that these are covered I shall now briefly discuss two other sensory aspects of the laundry process that for some women housewife informants were key to both the sensory experience of doing the laundry and the sensory results of that process: drying the laundry (pegging out, tumble drying or drying indoors) and ironing. Jane doesn't like pegging out and usually gets her husband to do it for her and although she noted that she tended to check items for stains when ironing she also offered no further comments on this. When she pegged out it was done as quickly as possible and did not seem to merit deeper reflection than that she found it a bother. Other women informants however found the sensory experiences of pegging out or drying indoors to be amongst the most enjoyable aspects of laundry. For example Ellen often hung her laundry to dry on a clothes horse indoors, I asked her:

Sarah: If someone comes round, would you just shuffle it into the kitchen?

Ellen: No I won't bother. Probably say it's the Chinese laundry in here. In fact I quite like the smell of washing drying in the house, cause its nice and clean. Yes I just say I've got the Chinese laundry going, I'm not fussed.

In the context of domestic services, people may also retain control over the sensory outcomes of their laundry processes. The smell of dry and drying laundry was also important to Margaret for whom 'I think actually there's nothing nicer than pegging washing on a line'. For her pegging out was both an opportunity to check her laundry for stains and to enjoy its smell because 'Yes, it smells lovely and fresh, which again, like you say, the line's just an extension of the house, isn't it?' Margaret expected some qualities of this smell to be retained in her laundry once it had been ironed and was ready to use. An incident she described to me demonstrates the importance of this well. Margaret's cleaner used to take the ironing away to do in her own home. Because the cleaner and her family used to eat a lot of chips fried in her home Margaret found that the clothing had begun to smell of chips and had subsequently asked her cleaner to do the ironing at her home when she came to clean.

Summing up

In this chapter, recognising what Elizabeth Silva refers to as the 'well-accepted notion that all routine decisions such as acts of purchase and consumption, are decisions about how to act and who to be' (2000: 1), I have taken domestic consumption to be about the processes and strategies by which individuals acquire, appropriate (Miller 1988), are influenced by, and develop practices using or surrounding objects in the home. By objects I however do not simply mean material tangible items but also services such as water and electricity supplies and fresh air (Shove 2003). Moreover when the items consumed are tangible objects, I am interested

not simply in their visual material presence, but in their sensory qualities and how these are experienced and appropriated through domestic practices into strategies that result in the constitution of home and self and, by extension in many cases, of family. Exploring how women who live out identities that simultaneously reject some housewifely conventions while engaging quite typically gendered forms of domestic agency reveals how, through domestic consumption processes such as laundry, women's agency to constitute their own femininities and family identities is articulated. At the beginning of this chapter I discussed how my interpretation is informed by the anthropologies of the senses, experience, gender and the home. By developing a substantial case study it is my intention that this should to some extent speak for itself as a description of how sensory experience and categories are inevitably interwoven with domestic laundry practices and identities. To end, with reference to the case study discussed above I sum up what this means for the idea of domestic consumption as an example of women's agency being an unavoidably sensory affair.

In this chapter I have argued that the home and laundry were a sensory experience. Clearly my interviews with Jane did not allow me the impossibility of getting under her skin to experience her pre-reflective pluri-sensory experience of her home and her laundry. Auto-ethnography would be the only way to achieve that. However the research did demonstrate how (if we take it as given that home and laundry are pluri-sensory experiences waiting to be in some variant of Throop's (2003) flexible model for the production of reflectively defined experience) Jane and other informants used modern western categories of smell, texture and vision to understand their sensory experience of home. These understandings thus informed their domestic practices and the consumption strategies and choices that supported them. For instance Jane represented her concern about the cleanliness of her rugs in terms of their tactile and visible state. She responded by using a top quality soap powder and a bath of water to restore what she considers their appropriate sensory qualities. In the case of her son's shirts Jane was selective about when particular sensory categories were important, and spoke of her sensory experience of these garments in terms of different sensory modalities at different points in the laundry process. Before the shirts were washed – that is when they were in the process of becoming laundry, she was concerned with their smell. Once they had subsequently been washed and she was retrieving them from the machine she evaluates them in terms of stains and the 'old' quality of the texture and fibres of the fabric. In selecting these sensory categories Jane was also thinking morally. In extracting her sons from their smelly shirts she was concerned with the moral status of her family, as represented through their smell. In checking for stains she was ensuring that they had no visual markers of dirt. Her evaluation of the texture of the shirts can be seen as a closer reference to her moral discourse of thriftiness, of not wasting re-usable clothing (or anything else) that was rewarded by balancing the family life with sets of luxuries. This (and my other informants' interviews) demonstrates how through their control of such laundry practices, rather than being the pawns of a patriarchal consumer society women are empowered in their negotiations with the other human and material agencies of home (and their

sensory qualities) to simultaneously create a gendered self (and family) and home through the production of textures, sights and smells that are at the same time (similar to the home decoration practices described by anthropologists of the home, such as Gullestad (1983) and Clarke (2001)) objectifications of identities and aspirations.

It is in this sense that I propose laundry (and likewise other sets of domestic practices) can show up how domestic consumption and women's domestic agency are both sensory affairs. As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter this will not be news to the manufacturers of domestic products or the business agencies who supply sensory research. However for social scientists to engage with this idea a more academic rendering of the argument is necessary. To sum up, domestic consumption in the form of laundry is about 1) how we understand our pre-reflective pluri-sensory experience in terms of specific cultural categories of sensory experience, 2) how we (in the modern west) attach those categories of smell, texture and vision to specific moral values about cleanliness and self, 3) how we use those categories and moralities to inform our own practices, which might well reject and contest established moralities by non-conformity to the sensory standards they imply, and 4) the constitution of both home and self-identity through a set of strategies that create and maintain a home and self that smells, feels and looks 'right'. These are inevitably tied up with gender and can be analysed to illustrate how women's agency in the home is articulated.

To end I would propose that it is time anthropologists, sociologists, cultural geographers and other social scientists who study domestic practices alerted themselves to the importance of the sensory context that the home is.

References

- Cockburn, Cynthia and Susan Ormod (1993) *Gender and Technology in the Making*, London: Sage.
- Clarke, A. (2001) 'The Aesthetics of Social Aspiration' in D. Miller (ed.) *Home Possessions*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 23-46.
- Classen, C., D. Howes and A. Synnott (eds) (1994) *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell*, London: Routledge.
- Corbin, A. (1986) *The Foul and the Fragrant*, Leamington Spa: Berg.
- Drazin, A. (2001) 'A Man will get Furnished: Wood and Domesticity in Urban Romania' in D. Miller (ed.) *Home Possessions*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 173-199.
- Geertz, Clifford (1986) 'Making Experience, Authoring Selves' in Victor Turner and Edward Bruner (eds) *The Anthropology of Experience*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 373-380.
- Gullestad, M. (1993) 'Home Decoration as Popular Culture. Constructing Homes, Genders and Classes in Norway' in T. de Valle (ed.) *Gendered Anthropology*, London: Routledge, pp. 128-162.
- Hecht, A. (2001) 'Home Sweet Home: Tangible Memories of an Uprooted Childhood' in D. Miller (ed.) *Home Possessions*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 123-145.

- Howes, David (2003) *Sensing Culture: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Ingold, T. (2000) *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London: Routledge.
- Kaufmann, J.C. (1998 [1992]) *Couples and their Laundry*, London: Middlesex University Press.
- MacDougall, D. (1998) *Transcultural Cinema*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Mallett S. (2004) 'Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature', *The Sociological Review*, 52(1): 62-89.
- Miller, D. (1988) 'Appropriating the State on the Council Estate', *Man* 23: 353-372.
- Miller, D. (1998) (ed.) *Material Cultures*, London: Routledge.
- Miller, D. (1998) 'Why Some Things Matter' in D. Miller (ed.) *Material Cultures*, London: Routledge, pp. 3-21.
- Miller, D. (2001a) 'Behind Closed Doors' in D. Miller (ed.) *Home Possessions*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 1-19.
- Miller, D. (2001b) 'Possessions', in D. Miller (ed.) *Home Possessions*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 107-121.
- Miller, D. (2001c) (ed.) *Home Possessions*, Oxford: Berg.
- Morley, D. (2000) *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, London: Routledge.
- Moskowitz, Howard R., Jacqueline Beckley and Edgar Chambers IV (2005) *Sensory and Consumer Research in Food Product Design and Development*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Petridou, E. (2001) 'The Taste of Home' in D. Miller (ed.) *Home Possessions*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 87-104.
- Pickering, M. (1997) *History, Experience and Cultural Studies*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Pine, B Joseph II, and James H. Gilmore (1998) 'Welcome to the Experience Economy', *Harvard Business Review* 76(4): 97-105.
- Pink, S. (2003) 'Representing the Sensory Home: Ethnographic Experience and Ethnographic Hypermedia' in G. Bloustien (ed.) *En-visioning Ethnography: Exploring the Complexity of the Visual Methods in Ethnographic Research*, *Social Analysis*, 47(3): 46-63.
- Pink, S. (2004) *Home Truths*, Oxford: Berg.
- Rapport, N. and Dawson, A. (1998) 'Home and Movement: A Polemic' in N. Rapport and A. Dawson (eds) *Migrants of Identity*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 19-38.
- Seremetakis, L. (1994) 'The Memory of the Senses: Historical Perception, Commensal Exchange, and Modernity' in L. Taylor (ed.) *Visualizing Theory*, London: Routledge.
- Shove, E. (2003) *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organisation of Normality*, Oxford: Berg.
- Silva, E. (2000) 'The Politics of Consumption @ Home' *PAVIS Papers in Social and Cultural Research*, Number 1, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University.

- Tacchi, J. (1998) 'Radio Texture: Between Self and Others' in D. Miller (ed.) *Material Cultures*, London: Routledge, pp. 25-45.
- Taussig, M. (1991) 'Tactility and Distraction', *Cultural Anthropology*, 6(2): 147-153.
- Throop, Jason (2003) 'Articulating Experience', *Anthropological Theory* 3(2): 219-241.
- Turner, Victor (1986) 'Dewey, Dilthey and Drama: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience' in Victor Turner and Edward Bruner (eds) *The Anthropology of Experience*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 33-44.
- van der Laan, Judith and Imogen Matthews (2003) 'Out of the Box: Drawing Inspiration from both Current and Coming Consumer Lifestyles, Fragrance Creates Opportunities for the Detergents Market to Follow Suit'. (Global report: Soaps) Global Cosmetic Industry; December 01, 2003 <http://static.highbeam.com/g/globalcosmeticindustry/december012003/outoftheboxdrawinginspirationfrombothcurrentandcom/> accessed 1st July 2004.

Chapter 10

Consumption and Sexual Intimacy: Towards an Understanding of Intimate Cultures in Everyday Life

Dana Wilson-Kovacs

Introduction

Drawing on ethnographic work based on semi-structured interviews with thirty-four participants, this chapter explores the ways in which women employ material culture in their everyday creation of intimacy. Its contention is that at a mundane level, erotic affinities are created and sustained via cultural repertoires, and especially those drawing upon the use of material culture. Furthermore, experiencing and thinking about intimacy and its protagonists are based upon access to different ‘props’ and the users’ ability to mobilise those creatively in the rendering of sexual personas. The skilful manoeuvre of a wide range of materials is presented in relation to the participants’ production of erotic spaces and bodies. As such, emotional resources are supported, and often inspired, by domestic consumerist practices that in turn call for a detailed consideration. With a focus on performance as well as taste, the chapter advances a view of physical intimacy as continuously negotiated, and of its performers as both knowledgeable agents and assertive consumers. Not only does the research contribute to the topic of domestic consumption and gender, but it also proposes an understanding of closeness as grounded in daily routines that challenge traditional dichotomic relationship between subject/object.

Rather than being understood as a repository of goods, culture has increasingly come to be recognised as ‘a “tool-kit” for constructing strategies of action’ (Swidler 1998: 176), a sense making device by which actors are able to assign meanings through praxis (Baudrillard 1988, de Certeau 1984). Such a perspective illuminates other previous conceptual approaches that examine the social and symbolic meaning of goods (Douglas and Isherwood 1979), and their intrinsic link with production (Mukerji 1983) and consumption (Bourdieu 1984). More importantly, it also underlines how culture itself takes shape ‘through the practices of living with things’ (Dant 1999: 24). The present chapter considers the complexity of this undertaking in relation to sexual closeness, and it does so by looking at how women configure intimacy.

My task here is to observe the ways in which the creation of erotic routines owes to practices of domestic consumption, and more generally, to the mobilisation of material resources in this process. The study of sexual intimacy has so far been dominated by an emphasis on the discursive technologies accompanying the production of femininity (e.g. Betterton 1987, Smith 1993, Tseëlon 1995) and the gendered discrepancies in the attainment of pleasure (Holland et al. 1998, Jamieson 1998, McRobbie 1990). While implicit to both these directions, the role played by consumption in intimate routines has been under-researched.

From roses, lingerie and candlelit dinners to erotic paraphernalia and beyond, the broad spectrum of intimate consumption offers a rich seam for scholars of intimacy. This area of consumer culture has been recognised as an increasingly present facet of contemporary living but seldom scrutinised (Evans 2003). While at a theoretical level the frenzy of consumer eroticism arguably illustrates and re-qualifies arguments on the democratisation of intimacy (Giddens 1992) and the aestheticisation of everyday life (Featherstone 1992), it also indicates the need to explore the process in detail in order to understand better the protean exchange between commodities and individual routines. Although various resources may figure prominently in some women's configurations of intimacy but not in those of others, their overall growing visibility raises questions on the role they held in the construction of intimacy and calls for a closer examination of how cultural materials are consumed, i.e. deployed in passionate interludes and in the maintenance of intimate sites, events and dispositions.

Authors across academic divides have acknowledged the connection between various resources, goods, services, daily pursuits and identities, and analysed the ways in which the erotic realm is framed by practices of consumption when looking at music (DeNora 1999), objects in sex work (Moore 1997) or branded sexual paraphernalia (Storr 2003). Yet, although these studies have concentrated on some of the resources mobilised to sustain sexual closeness, further examinations of the ways in which other materials are deployed in everyday intimate encounters are needed. In its focus on how miscellaneous devices are engaged in the preparation of erotic episodes, this chapter initiates such a documentation.

In doing so, it informs the dynamic between personal versions of intimacy and the normative practices, institutions and ideologies surrounding women's lives. Debates on the de-traditionalisation of the private sphere (Giddens 1992) have fostered an understanding of intimacy as cultivated choice, expressed through lifestyle preferences, and connected to broader cultural changes. Although feminist critics have underlined the persistent structural differences present in the relationships between men and women (Duncombe and Marsden 1993, Jamieson 1998, Langford 1999), understanding how the discrepancies in pleasure are reproduced necessitates a grounded investigation of the very fabric of erotic encounters and the ways in which they are navigated in everyday life. Not only it is at this level that, the 'normalising effects of power are most insidiously deployed' (Foucault, 1990 in McNay 2003: 250), but also here individuals embark on a gendered course of self-creation via the sexual that is central to subjectivity and the politics of the private in late modernity

(Richardson 2000, Plummer 2000, Weeks 1998). An emphasis on the largely overlooked role played by cultural materials in the articulation of sexual closeness, can offer a contextual view of its development and enhance our understanding of the process. Based on the findings of a doctoral project that used an ethnographic approach to consider how intimacy is accomplished, the discussion below suggests one possible way of attaining this goal.

Methodological and theoretical considerations

The aim of the research was exploratory and the study did not intend to produce statistically representative data. Instead, it sought to contribute to writing on women, sexual agency and intimacy (Meadows 1997, McRobbie 1990, Holland et al. 1998), and the literature on material and cultural provisions for domestic sexual consumption (Juffer 1998, Storr 2003).

The analysis draws on the biographical accounts of a self-selected sample incorporating thirty-four self-defined middle class British women between 18 and 67 years of age, of mainly, but not exclusively heterosexual orientation, who discussed the ways in which they have created, achieved and maintained sexual closeness. The sample was chosen through a snowball method and the interviewees were selected from two sites: one metropolitan area and a Southwest town, with approximately three-quarters of the sample living locally. The participants had different cultural, educational and occupational backgrounds: about 20 percent described themselves as members of an ethnic minority; roughly 40 percent presented themselves as career professionals and about 70 percent as coming from broadly defined health related areas. Uniting them was a shared interest in lifestyle and well being issues. At the time of the interview, most were in employment (including part-time and freelance), 80 percent were sexually active, around three quarters experienced motherhood and a same number had been involved in a long-term/move-in relationship. They each had at least two sexual partners in the past, and on average around 16.

A combination of qualitative methods was used to observe women's deployment of cultural resources in the creation of intimacy. This involved lengthy semi-structured interviews taken at an interval of about six month between each other. The questions were open-ended and focused on women's depiction of and reflection on their sexual histories. Interviews took respondents through the presentation of personal erotic trajectory and then focused on the configuration of intimacy at various stages of this history, with particular reference to intimate consumption. The data was analysed using a grounded theory approach where emerging themes were developed in relation to participants' stories (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The interviews evolved around 'lovemaps', a term adopted from the clinical examination of sexual predispositions (Money 1986) without retaining its original meaning. Used previously by Gould (1991) to comment on patterns of sexually related consumption, the lovemaps were seen by him as generated by the commercial potential of the sexualised body and instrumental to the micro-politics of sexual

closeness. They included the use of erotic paraphernalia and more general aspects involving 'consumption, i.e. the purchase and use of products in the process of attracting a mate, engaging in sexual activity and maintaining sexual love relationships' (Gould 1991: 381). Unfortunately, Gould gave little indication on how to use the lovemaps empirically, or indeed, develop the idea further. However, his view of lovemaps as beneficial to understanding the relationship between intimacy and consumerism inspired both this project's conceptual framework and the production of data.

Essentially visual aids to accompany the examination of fluctuating and uneven intimate trajectories, the lovemaps were produced by interviewees as devices for eliciting memories and enabling subsequent rich descriptions. They provided self-fashioned representations of each participant's intimate past that were used to organise the accounts. Not only has this approach captured 'the presentness of past events' and provided 'an insight into their sensuous construction' (Witkin 1994: 268), but it also helped illuminate the complex relationship between cultural resources, pleasure and intimate conduct.

Using lovemaps to inform this relationship links to understanding individual manifestations of sexuality as examples of sexual scripting (Simon and Gagnon 1984). The scripting refers to navigational vectors (such as influences, desires and schemes of action) employed by individuals in everyday intimate conduct. The lovemaps illustrate the cultural repertoires supporting the scripting, i.e. the array of resources that offer individuals and communities different meanings to draw upon in their action (Lamont 1992, Swidler 2001). In what follows I present two of the emerging themes from the data on heterosexual coupling. Referring to the organisation of personal space and demeanour, they open to inquiry several additional issues, which are briefly introduced below but whose full implications to academic debates on consumption, gender and sexuality will be discussed elsewhere. My aim here is to provide an initial step towards documenting the gendered mobilisation of cultural resources in sustaining intimate practices.

The bedroom

The lovemaps highlight the home as the most suitable location for staging intimate action. Although commentators have acknowledged it as the main site of sexual closeness (Juffer 1998), little research has been done on its use in the orchestration of passion. The home is a poignant illustration of how space informs and defines social processes and provides the context of social interaction (Durkheim 1968, Massey 1984, Zukin 2002). Not only does it offer a unique space for the presentation of self (Goffman 1959), but it also represents an individual's statement about status and domestic life that highlights the owner's taste, degree of financial security, and social achievements. Moreover, rather than being simply an act of personal signification, the home is a process, a place where 'past and future trajectories (inseparable from external abstractions such as "class") are negotiated through fantasy and action, projection and interiorisation' (Clarke 2001: 25). Expectations and desires are

reflected in material translations, point evident in my respondents' accounts, which highlight a logic of accumulation and ordering where meaning is carefully constructed and space rarely randomly organised. The home is regarded simultaneously as the place where one can relax and master, and the dynamics between these two states seem central to the staging of intimacy.

If the home is the metaphor of intimacy (Bachelard 1969), the bedroom is its sexual counterpart, the place where an array of sonic and material resources are mobilised to inspire desire. This is not to say that configuring intimate spaces is strictly the domain of the bedroom; in line with Douglas' (1991) observation, the accounts suggest that intimate locations are not necessarily fixed spaces and that the ability to create them does not lie in the space itself. The bedroom however, is for most of my participants the place where personal versions of intimacy are materialised and established. As such, its organisation as erotic space illuminates the aspirational process identified by Clarke (2001). For instance, Tanya a thirty-year-old teacher regards her bedroom as a 'temple' and herself as 'its goddess':

Tanya: It's my favourite room. Tom [previous partner] called it the ice queen's parlour ... I don't see it at all like that, it sounds cheap, cold ... I planned it for ages, and waited for 16 years to have enough money to have it like this ... like white with polished floors covered in white sheepskins, and voile curtains, and silk bed linen. I have a big mirror on the wall on the left – I would've liked to put it in front of the bed but I had no room as I've got a king size. I've got a dressing cabinet on the side of the bed with my music and a silver-plated candleholder where I always light church candles ...

Dana: So how do you see it?

Tanya: This I know, because I've been thinking about it since then. It's pure without being virginal. Just how I'd like my relationships to be.

Connecting spatial coordination and self-fashioning, the bedroom stands for a material expression of intimacy and idealised erotic conduct. Similarly, other narratives draw parallels between concrete exterior locations and more volatile interior states. In this sense the bedroom can be seen as the visible marker of an often imperceptible and elusive female erotic identity. Illustrating Goffman's (1959) view of impression management at an intimate level, bedrooms are perceived as 'parts' of their creators, physical extensions of their subjectivity (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Sometimes seen as translations of erotic propensities, sometimes used to signal distinct moods, the décors offer recognisable geographies, and reinforce a sense of self that renders them as active props in the maintenance of intimacy.

Spatial re-arrangements are usually triggered by emotional considerations and/or financial possibilities. For some the passionate staging alters with each partner. In one case, a respondent would buy another bed for each live-in boyfriend, and regard the physical disposing of the old bedstead as the symbol of a new beginning. More commonly, others would rearrange the bedroom periodically with or without the change of partners. This erotic production of the bedroom illustrates both women's ideas of pleasurable locations and the importance given to material culture in this rendition. Tanya's description is typical for capturing the minutiae with which

intimate space is planned. Months and sometimes years in making, the *mise en scène* is meticulously put together and involves many hours spent catalogue browsing, window-shopping, mixing, matching, and thinking about the venture. As other studies on the creation of personal space indicate (Southerton 2001), the process is as important as the final product. This is conveyed by Michelle, a twenty-eight-year-old mother of two, who remarks on how her bedroom dream has covered many weekends, witnessed break-ups and make-ups as well as served as the trigger for spontaneous love making:

I never thought it would take me six months to get it finished. With him working nights and that it's really difficult to get it done in the daytime when the kids are at school and he is asleep. And then the weekends, which were really our only time together, got spent doing the bedroom, well a bit like doing everything else as well. He would get frustrated being tired and wanting to watch the football, I would get upset because it didn't move from one week to the next. I can't even tell you the amount of times we fell out because of this, and made up really nicely for it. So much so that when it was ready we thought what are we going to fight over for now to have this amazing sex after?

The extract illustrates further aspects in the staging of sexual closeness. Firstly, not only are the two parties brought together closer while creating an intimate zone, but these ordinary occasions may result in extraordinary manifestations of passion. More generally, the accomplishment of intimacy cannot be separated from that of physically building the 'love-nest', anticipating future sexual episodes and in this case eliciting ad-hoc passionate episodes. Impromptu erotic action can thus require preparation.

Secondly, the mechanics of DIY transformation of intimate space whereby women plan and men execute reveal a gendered division of this work. The participants emerge as the architects of intimacy, both literally and symbolically responsible for the production of intimate spaces and encounters. The act of presenting the bedroom as alluring, from planning the general purchase of the furniture to arrangements and final touches is woman's territory, and the bedroom is the place where their preferences, as opposed to their partner's choice, can be manifested, as Marlene, a forty-eight-year-old care assistant explains:

He told me that I can have anything I wanted for the bedroom, and I always wanted an Arabian bedroom, you know, with cushions scattered all over the floor and muslin drapes, and a thick rug, where you can just relax and laze around and forget about everything else, and indulge, a dream love nest, so to speak ... So I put it together and though some people was (sic) saying that it was no room for it, it's amazing what you can do if you really think about it.

This comment shows how function and symbolic meaning are implicit to bedroom decoration. By offering an insight into how activities are delegated into the household, it opens to speculation this distribution – can it be that an agreement over intimate décor would both smooth out differences and inspire more sexual action? Chloe, a forty-five-year-old teacher, offers a possible answer:

I suppose that at a very simplistic level being able to arrange the bedroom the way I want it makes me want to spend more time in here. I feel more comfortable with whatever I'm doing here, and that obviously goes for sex too. In fact, some of these things in here were chosen with it in mind – the mirror for instance, the mattress and the bed itself, the way in which when we shut the curtains and put the lights on the room is cosy and inviting, even the bulbs, the soft light they give, were chosen with that in mind.

Space becomes intimate as a result of a carefully negotiated process of acquisition and display, and erotically staged through a consensual mobilisation of materials and resources. Bedrooms are both creations of comfort and of intimate routine: couples would for instance watch films in bed, photograph or record each other in the bedroom, others would have texts by their bed side for reference. Both men and women would subsequently bring various tokens into the space as statement of their interest: books, stockings or new items of lingerie left on the bed are used strategically to express their desire openly yet neutrally.

The ways in which bedrooms are arranged and described conjure intimate feelings where the boundaries between fantasy and routine, between the extraordinary and the ordinary are blurred. There is a sense here that mundane intimate performances are distinctive, singular exercises, distanced from the humdrum of everyday life. This informs Weitman's (1998) discussion of the socioerotic realm (i.e. a set of opportunities to get away from everyday life and reconfigure erotic space and reality), which contains rituals that allow individuals to focus primarily on bodily pleasures. According to Weitman, objects and actors alike are transferred to the erotic realm, and such occasions establish fundamental bonds between partners by sustaining characteristic practices separated from the everyday level of experience. The socioerotic realm is backed up by material resources that give a location its intimate character together with the distinctive set of practices employed in the original physical transformation of the space and the ensuing everyday adjustments to erotic interludes. In this sense bedrooms can be fluid, changeable spaces that allow for appropriate additions and support a couple's erotic vision and practice.

The descriptions of the white bedroom draped in satin and silk, and its Arabian counterpart, with its velour cushions, rich carpets and tapestry, illustrate how desire is manifested in the creation of intimate milieus. Not only is changing the meaning of the bedroom from a resting-place to that of a pleasurable milieu circumscribed by financial considerations (planning, saving and negotiating the allocation of time and resources) and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), but also these concerns are reflected in routines that require the mobilisation of materials to enhance physical appearance and create erotic allure.

The erotic body

While commentators have yet to examine in more detail the sensuous experiences generated by consumerist exchanges (Gomart and Hennion 1999), the participants' accounts of intimacy map such experiences when describing how the erotic body

is staged. Although preparation routines vary widely among the respondents, there are also similarities ranging from a general concern with cleanliness to the design, manufacture or purchase of specific attire. Resources are mobilised here to enable the shift from the mundane to the passionate. Bathing, for instance, cleanses and unwinds at the same time. While on one level it illustrates the normative regulation of the female body (Douglas 1996), it also marks as an event the transition between work space/time to leisure and play. The change of pace it entails is heightened on occasions by massage, burning oils, and luxurious cosmetic products that augment the transition. Washing aside, the preparation for intimacy ranges from presenting one's body as 'organic', unaffected by what some regard as traditional markers of femininity to an equally elaborate procedure involving some or all of these very markers: make-up, perfume, false nails, hairdos, wigs, jewellery, lingerie, stockings, dress, footwear and sex aids.

Similar to the organisation of the bedroom, the rendition of the body as attractive entails a constant input in terms of both maintenance and innovation, which likewise reveals the strategies through which intimacy is articulated. It is, as participants previously observed in relation to the organisation of intimate space, a matter of practice, of failed and triumphant interludes, where the right combination of factors work together towards rewarding sexual congress. Just as the staging of the bedroom, that of the body is instrumental to the perceived success of intimate encounters. Preparation makes for better action, and the calculated display of available resources ignites passion. These exercises are regarded as instrumental to sexual self-formulation as well as the ways in which one is perceived as desirable by potential partners.

Making the body sexually attractive depends on a combination of successful time allocation, readiness to embark on this transformation and available resources. Most importantly, it is circumscribed by aesthetic judgement, as Gabrielle, a thirty-six-year-old podiatrist notes:

I get an idea of what I like and what I look like when I try things on. I suppose to a certain extent I have preconceived ideas of what I should wear, I mean cheap lacy bras, forget it, but having said this I do have a range of things I wear. For me it's a mix and match affair: I can do slut one night and virginal the next, and the main thing is it's fun, in the best possible taste.

There is at work here a perceptible hierarchy of resources and artefacts, not simply according to their market value but also to their personal history of use: for instance, as new purchases are added to existing collections, their use is customarily reserved for special occasions.

When I buy something new I make it special, because I think of it as more special than the others, because, it's like this empty page on which I write the memories of the night, so to speak. (Di, forty-two-year-old market researcher)

This ensuing ceremonial inclusion into personal practices translates the objects' materiality in symbolic configurations that sustain subsequent erotic meanings in intimate routines, as well as grant encounters an extra-ordinary possibility. Not only do the latest add-ons become 'old stock' used to sustain intimate encounters, but also favourites are perceived as powerful tokens that can channel desire, rekindle interest and ignite new passions. While pragmatists would point out that the effects of well fitted lingerie cannot be ignored, there is here an implicit feeling that the replication of previous passionate episodes can be helped by wearing a certain outfit or item that independent of context or interaction would guarantee a superlative outcome. Part of everyday practices intended to construct the body as alluring, such items, alongside other resources, support ideas of control, style and sophistication that configure the erotic conduct of participants.

While the resources and practices related to adornment can be seen as linked to educational and cultural types of capital (Bourdieu 1984, Tseëlon 1995), the process behind the choices of body display reveal the reflexive application of taste, an exercise where women emerge as sophisticated consumers and skilful arbitrators of appropriate erotic allure. Far from being adopted in a copycat fashion resources are discerningly chosen to fit the occasion: the use of lingerie, for example, is carefully considered according to circumstances, and as Gabrielle observed above occasionally rehearsed beforehand. Different strategies are revealed according to the type and length of the participant's liaison(s): first times seem to trigger more care and sensitivity to what Stewart (1999) refers to as the 'technologies of reputation'. Asked for instance how she differentiates between body presentation in an ongoing relationship and a first date Beatrice, a twenty-three-year-old dental assistant elaborates:

You don't want to scare the horses but equally don't want to come across as naïve, so what I opt for is some discrete make up and pale lingerie. You don't know what you're going to get or what he likes either, umm, I found it's better to be prepared than not at all...if it works, later on in the relationship you can make some adjustments and learn what he likes, and hopefully teach him what you like.

The awareness of what is expected and acceptable, alongside the staple artefacts used to create normative erotic stereotypes is central to projecting the 'right' image. As well as mapping desire, an ongoing cultivation of erotic choice reinforces ideas of appropriateness and self esteem:

It's nice to dress up, I mean he enjoys it as much as I do, but equally, as long as I'm willing it doesn't matter really. It's making me feel better really, because everything gets pushed up and perked up and it's like the sexy me. (Denise, fifty-five-year-old paediatrician)

Women often reference their use of material artefacts in connection to their partners' preferences: as most interviewees see themselves desirable through the eyes of their partners, the presentation of the body is often sensitive to their wants and likes. However, while supporting evidence to Segal's (1994) argument on the social

construction of heterosexuality and Jackson's (1982) idea that women's sexuality is defined as finding pleasure in meeting their partners' need, my participants' accounts unveil a more complex understanding of fulfilment. In doing so, they point to an emotional mechanism of reciprocation and offer an explanation to how sexual self-adjustment takes place.

Kimberley: Yeah, I like suspender belts, I have a couple – a black one, a white one, one I had for Christmas last year, red, with a matching bra. I used to have a pink one, with a garter but passed them on as I put on weight. They're not anything fancy, just the usual Marks' range, just good, solid underwear, apart from the red one, which he got for me, the rest I bought myself. Had I had the chance to change the red one, I probably would've done it, but you can't, can you? And he really likes me in it. He's got this look when he sees it, makes me think, 'whoops, here we go again'.

Dana: Do you enjoy wearing it?

Kimberley: I guess I do ... But I wouldn't buy this sort of stuff for myself, it's a bit tarty, you know, red, and it's not really me. I mean, what is it about these men? Red, how much more predictable can you get?

Dana: Where did he buy it?

Kimberley: Oh, I don't know, but I remember reading an article in the Sunday Times about Valentine and lingerie, and he must've read that as well. Yeah, that's right, because I remember thinking, give me a break, is this all you can come up with, red underwear? And then HE came with it, and, without taking the piss, I guess it makes me feel different about it, because it's not any red Valentine underwear, it's the one we've had some of our best moments in, and the memories of that, which kind of dismisses it being red. (Kimberley, thirty-eight-year-old therapist)

Kimberley's story illustrates how erotic occasions are governed by specific rules of etiquette (Denzin 1970; Goffman 1967) that similar to everyday routines, are important 'as a means of communication by which the individual expresses his character or conveys his appreciation of the other participants...' (Goffman 1967: 74). As in all ceremonial activity, conformity to or violation of practices conveys information about the actor through deference and demeanour. In intimate encounters gifts are regarded as ceremonial tokens. Their offering and acceptance have a bearing upon both parties: not only are they consonant with the recipient, but they also self-define the giver (Schwartz 1967), confirming identities and re-inforcing social bonds (Komter 1996, Mauss, 1989). The ensuing occasional or regular use of the gift indicates the commitment to the relationship and advances a view on sexual intimacy as reciprocal. Thus, the interpretation participants attach to these gestures is one of symbolic reciprocity, where items are displayed primarily as signs of affection.

Typically, Kimberley's remarks reveal a compassionate attitude towards accommodating the desires of a partner, which reflects the emotional work (Hochschild 1983) undertaken to make sense of such offerings and engage in reciprocal exchanges. This becomes more poignant in relation to unwanted material tokens presented by partners as contributions to passionate episodes. The display of the gift(s) belongs to a sequence of erotic routines that is central to intimate coupling,

regardless of personal opinions on the gift's quality, or indeed the scenarios, fantasies and implicit meanings behind the act of giving. Exchange can be seen as mutual in a more substantive way. Some of the items given by women to their partners can have a genuine utility (thongs, silk robes), while others simply contain an ironic message. Participants use these exchanges to signal their participation in the erotic reciprocal exchange of the couple, and comment on its appropriateness. There can be both resistance to the initial act of giving in some participants' reciprocation of gifts, as well as approval of the exchange manifested in similar aesthetic reciprocation. The aim of the latter is to reinforce shared taste, as well as estimate, achieve and sustain passionate liaisons. In this sense, gifts are an enduring feature of personal intimate cultures and perceived as instrumental to negotiating the relationship as a whole.

Conclusion

Consumption in the intimate sphere, and in particular the mobilisation of cultural resources to sustain sexual interaction, has been under-researched. The present chapter aimed to bridge this gap by looking at intimacy as an everyday ordinary accomplishment which relies on the mobilisation of a range of material resources in its making. Using lovemaps as a means to investigate how erotic action is staged, it proposed that a contextual understanding of intimacy requires an investigation of the strategies employed by individuals in their assemblage of sexual episodes, in terms of both setting and devices. In doing so, the chapter highlighted the significance of consumption in the production of intimacy and its place in relation to both the economy and politics of domestic consumption. Its main focus was on how the women orchestrate intimate events via a reliance on material goods, and in particular the ways in which a group of middle class women re-create personal versions of intimacy, and sustain collective meanings of femininity, romance and sexual respectability.

Various *modi operandi* are deployed to translate visions of sexual closeness into actuality, process in which the 'using' of culture can be understood essentially as a 'making' (de Certeau 1984) of intimate practice, a production embedded in domestic consumption where women mobilise a range of cultural materials to render intimacy anew. The participants' stories reveal the everyday re/creation of passionate routines as largely home-bound: not only do the construction and maintenance of erotic sites and personas take place behind closed doors, but they are essentially a woman's domain. While not all passionate episodes are carefully rehearsed events, attention is usually given to spaces and the presentation of the body as relaxed/ready/desirable in order to distinguish between times and states of being, to denote specific occasions as erotic, distinct and different from ordinary rhythms and events, and to order experience itself.

The staging of passion may replicate normative versions of intimacy as well as challenge existing categories. The ludic character of consumption, for instance, particularly visible in the construction of sexual personas, evidences that resources

are not unconsciously mobilised to complement dominant ideologies (Swidler 1998). Similarly, far from being perceived as stereotypes of sexual production, the alluring display of the female body and the reciprocation associated to personal gifts, have been used by participants to negotiate erotic routines and cultivate intimate aesthetics. Thus, while following established rules, the participants seek to transform these rules in order to adjust them to their own interests. Such adaptations are context bound, and cannot be disassociated from the social capital of those interviewed, whose approach to intimacy reflects assertiveness in manipulating cultural meanings and the practical means to do so. Moreover, not only do the participants' stories illustrate how specific preferences legitimate action, but they also show how the production of intimacy and the consumption associated with it support social, aesthetic and moral hierarchies. In this sense, the creation of sexual closeness is both gender and class specific.

In their adoption of erotic guises and careful appropriation of dominant codes the participants portrayed themselves as pertinent producers of intimate sub-culture/s. These preferences are expressed as a means of self-formulation. Erotic identity is thus articulated through sets of practices via which intimate cultures are re-produced in an ongoing exchange between individuals and larger cultural frameworks, or what de Certeau calls the 'dominant cultural economy' (1984: xiv). However, personal configurations of pleasure are not mere reflections of the broader institutional shifts in its understanding, but everyday renditions of the intimate as an interactional achievement. The creation of intimacy is an on-going process where individuals and collectives develop intimate meanings, and where by adapting cultural practices to specific aims, their actions can inspire any given, yet changing, conventional order (DeNora 1997, Swidler 1998). Not only does this view of intimate culture at the micro-level of action point to a type of performative use, but it also transcends an understanding of gendered identities and domestic consumption as simply configured through resistance and conformity to various cultural forms.

The narratives further underline how material dependencies are central to the maintenance of intimate selves. Here artefacts are relied upon as gate openers to both the realm of the extraordinary and that of the sensual self. Traditional distinctions such as those between the subjects of consumption and its objects can be blurred; other resources transform their users too, and in doing so are engaged with by subjects who deploy them as cultural materials that accord situations specificity, as well as support identity work (DeNora 2001, Hennion 2001).

To conclude, a focus on consumption in the intimate sphere highlights one of the many facets of everyday domestic consumption and its embeddedness in broader understandings of socio-economic relations. While presenting intimacy as a gender specific cultural production, it illuminates the relationship between consumption, self and erotic agency. In this process women configure themselves as aesthetic agents. While it could be argued that the artefacts and devices employed here do not necessarily belong to the traditional domain of the aesthetic, the practices through which consumption in the intimate domain is manifested are intrinsically aesthetic, reflexively configuring their subjects, and contributing to the advancement of a

sense of self (Miller, 1998). These practices show women as pertinent bricoleurs and agents involved in intersubjective practice, who improvise passion in a taken for granted mobilisation of material resources.

References

- Attwood, F. (2002) 'Reading Porn: The Paradigm Shift in Pornography Research'. *Sexualities* 5(1): 91-105.
- Bachelard, G. (1969) *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Baudrillard, J. (1988) *Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Betterton, Rosemary (ed.) (1987), *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*. Pandora: London.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Clarke, A. (2001) 'The Aesthetic of Social Aspiration'. In Daniel Miller (ed.) *Home Possessions. Material Culture behind Closed Doors*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 23-46.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., and Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981) *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dant, T. (1999) *Material Culture in the Social World*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- de Certeau, M. (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- DeNora, T. (1999) 'Music as a Technology of the Self'. *Poetics* 27: 31-56.
- Denzin, N. (1970). 'Rules of Conduct and the Study of Deviant Behavior: Some Notes on Social Relationships'. In J. Douglas (ed.) *Deviance and Respectability: The Social Construction of Moral Meaning*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 120-159.
- Douglas, M., and Isherwood, B. (1979) *The World Of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Douglas, M. (1991) 'The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space'. *Social Research* 58/1: 287-307.
- Douglas, M. (1996) *Thought Styles: Critical Essays on Good Taste*. London: Sage.
- Duncombe, J. and Marsden, D. (1993) 'Love and Intimacy: The Gender Division of Emotion and "Emotion Work"'. *Sociology* 27(2): 221-242.
- Durkheim, E. (1968), *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Evans, M. (2003) *Love. An Unromantic Discussion*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Featherstone, M. (1987), 'Lifestyle and Consumer Culture'. *Theory, Culture and Society* 4(1): 55-70.
- Foucault, M. (1990) *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Giddens, A. (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. London: Polity Press.
- Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine.

- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, London: Anchor Books, Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1967) *Interactional Ritual*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Gomart, E. and Hennion, A. (1999) 'A Sociology of Attachment: Music Amateurs, Drug Users'. In J. Law and J. Hassard (eds.) *Actor-Network Theory and After*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 220-248.
- Gould, S. (1991) 'Towards a Theory of Sexuality and Consumption: The Consumer Love Maps'. *Advances in Consumer Research* 18: 381-383.
- Hochschild, A.R. (1983) *The Managed Heart. Commercialisation of Human Feelings*. London, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Holland, J., Ramazanoglu, C., Sharpe, S. and Thomson, R. (1998) *The Male in the Head: Young People, Heterosexuality and Power*. London: Tufnell Press.
- Jackson, S. (1982) *Childhood and Sexuality*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jackson, S. and Scott, S. (2001) 'Putting the Body's Feet on the Ground: Towards a Sociological Reconceptualization of Gendered and Sexual Embodiment'. In K. Backett-Milburn and L. McKie (eds) *Constructing Gendered Bodies*. Hampshire: Palgrave, pp. 9-24.
- Jamieson, L. (1998) *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Juffer, J. (1998) *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex and Everyday Life*. New York: New York University Press.
- Komter, A. E. (1996) 'Reciprocity as a Principle of Exclusion: Gift-Giving in the Netherlands'. *Sociology* 30: 299-319.
- Lamont, M. (1992) *Money, Moral and Manners. The Cultures of the French and American Middle Class*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Langford, W. (1999) *Revolutions of the Heart: Power and the Delusions of Love*. London: Routledge.
- Massey, D. (1984) *Spatial Divisions of Labour*. London: Macmillan.
- McNay, L. (2003) 'Foucault: Aesthetics as Ethics'. In Jeffrey Weeks, Janet Holland and Matthew Waites (eds) *Sexuality and Society. A Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 245-255.
- McRobbie, A. (1990) *Feminism and Youth Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Mauss, M. (1989) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: Routledge (orig. 1923).
- Meadows, M. (1997) 'Exploring the Invisible: Listening to Mid-Life Women about Heterosexual Sex'. *Women's Studies International Forum* 20 (1): 145-152.
- Miller, D. (1998) *A Theory of Shopping*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Money, J. (1995) *Gendermaps. Social Constructionism, Feminism and Sexosophical History*. New York: Continuum.
- Moore, L.J. (1997) 'It's Like you Use Pots and Pants to Cook. It's the Tool. The Technologies of Safer Sex'. *Science, Technology and Human Values* 22(4): 434-471.
- Mukerji, C. (1983) *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Plummer, K. (2000) 'Intimate Choices'. In G. Browning, A. Halcli and F. Webster (eds) *Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present*. London: Sage, pp. 64-74.
- Richardson, D. (2000) 'Claiming Citizenship? Sexuality, Citizenship and Lesbian/Feminist Theory'. *Sexualities* 3(2): 255-272.
- Schwartz, B. (1967) 'The Social Psychology of the Gift'. *American Journal of Sociology* 73: 1-11.
- Segal, L. (1994) *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*. London: Virago Press.
- Simon, W. and Gagnon, J. (1984) 'Sexual Scripts'. *Society* 22: 53-60.
- Smith, D. (1993) *Texts, Facts and Femininity. Exploring the Relations of Ruling*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Southerton, D. (2001) 'Consuming Kitchens. Taste, Context and Identity Formation'. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 1(2): 179-203.
- Stewart, F. (1999) "'Once You Get A Reputation Your Life's Like...Wrecked": The Implications Of Reputation for Young Women's Sexual Health'. *Women's Studies International Forum* 22(3): 373-383.
- Storr, M. (2003) *Latex and Lingerie. Shopping for Pleasure at Ann Summers Parties*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Swidler, A. (1998) 'Culture and Social Action'. In P. Smith (ed.) *The New American Cultural Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 171-187.
- Tseëlon, E. (1995) *The Masque of Femininity. The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life*. London: Sage Publications.
- Weeks, J. (1998) 'The Sexual Citizen'. *Theory, Culture and Society* 15(3-4): 35-53.
- Weitman, S. (1998) 'On the Elementary Forms of Socioerotic Life'. *Theory, Culture and Society* 15(3-4): 71-110.
- Witkin, R. (1994) 'Running a Commentary on Imaginatively Re-lived Events'. *Journal of Sociology* 45: 265-285.
- Zukin, S. (1990) 'Socio-Spatial Prototypes of a New Organisation of Consumption: The Role of Real Cultural Capital'. *Sociology* 24(1): 37-56.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 11

Gender at Play: Décor Differences Between Boys' and Girls' Bedrooms

Irene Cieraad

Led into a room of an eight year old girl, the floor scattered with parts of toys and with doll's clothes, the proud inhabitant shows me her new bunkbed by demonstratively climbing her way up. When throning on her pink bedcover like a little fairy princess, she introduces me to her royal household of stuffed toys with which she so lovingly shares her bed. It strikes me that pink is the dominant colour, not only in the romantic decoration of the room, but also in the toys and the dress of the girl. How different the bedroom of a like-aged boy is. Warned by a little skeleton fixed on the door I enter a dangerous world: alien space ships skim the wall, suggesting Star Wars is already on. The bedcover, depicting a racing car, conceals his secrete bed-mate: a teddy-bear. He treats me to demonstrations of a robot in action, the firing arm of a miniature superman and the velocity of a supersonic racing car, lecturing me on how to press the buttons for the desired effects. When I leave the room, I notice there is neither a dominant colour in the decoration, nor in the toys, but it is rather a mixture of strong colours, like black, red and shades of blue.

Introduction

When visiting friends or relatives, I never refuse the invitation of the children of the household to see their rooms and their latest acquisitions. Such an invitation is a perfect alibi for the professional voyeurism of an anthropologist of domestic space (Cieraad 1999a). Not only as an invited guest, but also as a researcher I have analysed the décor of children's bedrooms. It all started in the early nineties with a collection of photographs taken by student-ethnographers in documenting Dutch households. This material indicated that when a boy reached the age of about six, the decoration of his room somehow needed a radical change. For example, wallpaper decorated with sweet mice or elephants in soft colours was replaced by wallpaper decorated with speedy and often futuristic images. The girl's bedroom, however, did not witness such a radical change of decoration. Differences that were intriguing.

In a search for more photographic documentation I came into contact with a female photographer, Charlotte Bogaert, who had photographed a large number of children's bedrooms in the city of Amsterdam in the early nineties. In sum she has portrayed 32 girls' and 25 boys' rooms of children ranging in age from six to twelve (1993a). Bogaert also interviewed most of the children on their hobbies and dreams

for the future (1993b). Her photographs confirmed my first impression of huge décor differences between girls' and boys' rooms. Differences, not only due to the age of the boy or girl, but also and more so to different expectations of future gender roles.

Strange as it may be, but in the fifties gender specificity in the décor of children's bedrooms was not as outspoken as they are now. Still the history of gender specificity in the domestic domain traces back to the nineteenth century, when it was an upper-class affair of adults. How gender specificity has been materialised in the décor of Dutch boys' and girls' bedrooms in the second half of the twentieth century will be the topic of this chapter. A distinction between promoted or mediated gender markers as represented in ideal situations like model homes and catalogues, and adopted gender markers as represented in Bogaert's photographs of actual settings, will be crucial in understanding the nature of domestic consumption.

First, however, the historic continuity or discontinuity of promoted gender markers will be established. To determine what gender markers were used in the fifties and sixties to mark a boys' or a girls' room, the photographs of the model homes of the Dutch organization for the promotion of modern living, called *De Stichting Goed Wonen* (best translated as *The Association for Correct Living*) will be compared with the gender markers in *IKEA* children's rooms as displayed in their catalogues of the nineties. Next the promoted or mediated gender markers will be confronted with real situations, as represented by my memory of the fifties, and Bogaert's frozen images of children's bedrooms in the nineties, complemented by Isabelle Makay's ethnographic research on the changing material world of a group of girls (2003).

Finally, the question is addressed why gender differences in the bedroom decoration of boys and girls grew stronger over the decades in contrast to the simultaneous social trend towards equalising gender differences in the public domain. One of which is the official ban on sex discrimination in professional life and job applications. If there is some truth in the words written in 1907 'The children's room is an apartment of major importance; a microcosm in which the child will have to prepare himself for the macrocosm of his future existence' (Matthias 1907, 13), then décor differences between boys' and girls' rooms are likely to have their impact not only on gender formation, but also on children's respective gender roles in adult life.

The emergence of gender-specificity

When discussing the gender-specific décor of children's bedrooms not only the opposition between the private and the public domain has to be addressed, but also the gender specificity within the private realm of the family home. Nowadays it is seldom realised that the gender-specific decoration of contemporary children's bedrooms contrasts with other domestic spaces, including the parents' bedroom (Cromley 1992, 128). The present domestic situation is quite the opposite to the upper-class situation in the nineteenth-century, when the parents had their own gender-specific rooms and children shared a common nursery which was decorated in a casual and rather neutral

way. Distinctive children's rooms, however, and distinctive children's furniture, like most gender-specific toys became only more common in the first decades of the twentieth century, according to Karin Calvert (1992, 75).

Although Calvert describes the development in North-American upper and middle-class homes there is an evident continuity with the European domestic development. Also nineteenth-century European manuals for furnishing and decorating lack any reference to gender specific decorations of nurseries. The Dutch translation of Ashy's *Health in the Nursery*, published at the turn of the nineteenth century, is no exception to this rule. Although it is modern in its décor advice to cover the floor and walls with smooth and easy-to-clean material, and the promotion of separate rooms for sleeping and playing for hygienic reasons, there are no references to sex or gender differences when discussing children's rooms, clothing or toys (de Lange 1889). As the translator of the book, Cornelia de Lange, was one of the first female physicians in the Netherlands, it is all the more surprising. Still nineteenth-century publications on the implicit gender neutrality of the nursery also imply an opposition between the public and the private domain, for public life in the nineteenth century was known for its sexual segregation, at least where adults and adolescents were concerned. More or less in the same vein also the private domain of the upper-class house was divided in gender-specific spaces for adults, either by its use and decoration, or by its connotation. Studies, master bedrooms in the proper sense, and billiard and smoking rooms were considered male domains by its use and decoration, whereas the hall, library, office space and even the dining room were male-connotated spaces in its reference to the public domain and to the reception of visitors. Likewise boudoirs and bedrooms of adolescent girls were female domains by its use and decoration, while music rooms, drawing rooms, conservatories and conjugal bedrooms were female-connotated spaces. The decoration of rooms and spaces reflected the gender of the domain: serious, substantial and dark-toned for masculine rooms, and refined, decorative and colourful for feminine spaces (Kinchin 1996; Cieraad 2000).

The notable exception of the nursery within the highly gendered universe of a nineteenth-century house, draws the attention to the social nature of childhood and the social position of children in the family household as reflected in the use and decoration of the nursery. In its use the nursery was either a communal room for sleeping and playing shared by young children in the household, or a separate children's room for play, training and eating under the supervision of a nurse (Clavert 1992). The furnishings of a typical Victorian nursery would have been secondhand adult-sized goods, with only the cribs and perhaps one or more child-sized chairs specifically purchased to accommodate their new little owners, according to Calvert (1992, 81). Victorian nurseries, however, were filled with toys, not only moral and educational board and card games, but also miniature versions of gendered adult artefacts, such as carpentry-sets to develop manual skills in young sons and diminutive tea-sets to foster domestic instincts in little daughters. Calvert relates the late-nineteenth-century emergence of make-believe and stuffed toys, like soft cuddly Brownies, to a new perception of childhood in which fantasy and mischief

were not considered to be immoral sins anymore, but a stage in children's mental development (1992, 85).

This new adult's perception of childhood, according to Calvert, was first introduced into the nursery by toys, and gradually pervaded into the furnishing and decoration of the nursery as a whole, and introduced not only specially child-sized furniture instead of the usual cast-offs, but also a special colour code for children's rooms. First pastels were in vogue, primarily blue for babies and pink for young children, but in the twenties white with colourful accents was typical for nurseries. Also decorations and motifs of wallpaper became child-specific and age related, and as varied as balloons, clouds, clowns, sailboats and ducks. Calvert stresses the role of parents, and especially mothers in the creation of the new nursery décor and their adherence to the new perception of childhood. However, it also entailed a less angelic and innocent image of children than their Victorian predecessors who had roomed boys and girls together, confident of their children's innocence and purity (1992, 86-87).

In due process, the nursery became a name for the baby's bedroom, while older children moved into separate or single-sex bedrooms. A visual code to distinguish the gender of the room's occupant fairly quickly developed. By 1910, American boys' and girls' rooms looked very different. While the decoration of boys' rooms tended to be very spartan, drawing on a visual vocabulary borrowed from the military and the navy, like model sailboats, prints of maps, ship's lanterns, naval emblems and bunk beds, girls' rooms remained Victorian in a cluttered air of old-fashioned charm, with antiques, draperies, cushions and ruffles everywhere. Not only in the type of furnishing, but also in the colour range and material preference gender specificity was outspoken. Unadorned surfaces of plain wood, metal furniture and dark colours dominated the boys' room, while decorated textiles in pastel shades, a large mirror, a wooden dresser and an ornate metal bed in white finishing dominated the girls' room – décor differences which pertained to gender specificity of nineteenth-century adult rooms. Parents, however, with both sons and daughters complained about the expense involved, for the new gender-specific codes were definitely more expensive than a common nursery (Calvert 1992, 86-89).

A room of my own

Although there is only a small number of historic photographs documenting Dutch boys' and girls' rooms in the first decades of the twentieth century, it is evidenced that decorative gender differences invaded the bedrooms of Dutch upper-class children in more or less the same period as described by Calvert for American homes (Cieraad 2000, 216). Not only separate rooms for playing and sleeping, but also separate boys' and girls' rooms were a privilege of the well-to-do (Cromley 1992; Wils 1923, 37; Couperus 1979, orig. c. 1910). Children in less fortunate circumstances, however, slept in drafty atticks, built-in box beds, or better still shared one bedroom and slept in separate beds, but two or three siblings sharing one bed was not uncommon either. Also their playground was not indoors, but outdoors (van Setten 1987, 71-73). Due to cramped housing conditions after the second world war most Dutch children shared

their bedroom with brothers and sisters. These cramped bedroom spaces favoured solutions like the wall bed and the bunk bed, or the creation of a separate sleeping-level (Cieraad 2005). One of the main objectives of the post-war *Association for Correct Living*, an association of interior designers, furniture producers and a consumers' league, was to stimulate housing corporations and parents alike, in the creation of child-friendly domestic environments with room for indoor play. *Correct Living* was even rather successful in attaining this mission (Cieraad 2004).

Nowadays bunk beds, high beds or separate sleeping levels are seldom installed to facilitate the sharing of a bedroom, but to create a multi-purpose space which will attend to the needs of an individual child not so much at night as at day. Only migrant households in the Netherlands, notably of Moroccan origin, tend to cling to the traditional concept of a bedroom as a place to sleep and store clothes. Bunk beds are considered to be the inevitable space economisers in the cramped housing situation of extended migrant families. However, whenever space allows bunk beds are exchanged for separate bedsteads, as demonstrated by a Moroccan girl who Bogaert proudly portrays within the narrow space between two elegantly shaped bedsteads. The type of bed seems to be more related to the age of the child, and less to the sex. Except, however, the four poster-bed, which is only to be found in girls' rooms. Most children up to the age of nine, however, favour a high bed, like the upper part of a bunk bed, while children in the age of ten or eleven fancy a low bedstead. Nowadays, not the high bed as such, but the space underneath is definitely gender-related. In the case of girls it is transformed into a little home, while in the case of the boys it is more often used as a storing space.

Not only because the reduced number of children per household and today's more spacious housing conditions warrant private rooms for children, but also because today's parents are convinced of a child's need for a place of his or her own, even if they have to give up space of their own (Beker and Merens 1994, 29; Peeters and Woldringh 1994, 31-33; Munro and Madigan 1999, 112-114). Children of divorced parents, for that matter, have two private bedrooms, one at their mother's and one at their father's place. While migrant children, according to Charlotte Bogaert's documentation, are still more likely to share a room or even a bed. Not only because migrant households are larger and live in more cramped conditions, but also because migrant parents are less convinced of the privacy needs of their children. The size of a child's room, the equipment, number of toys and above all a fancy furnishing and decoration are still very much related to the parents' social status. Separate rooms for playing and sleeping, however, have lost their status-appeal.

The material world of boys and girls

When Calvert (1992) stresses the role of parents in choosing a décor suited to the gender of the child, Cromley traces the emergence of the notion of self expression in the decoration of American children's bedrooms in the early twentieth century (1992, 128). For the first time home-decorating books advised parents on the proper



Figure 11.1 Girl in her bedroom, 1993

Photograph by Charlotte Bogaert.

decoration for the boys and the girls of the family. It was advised to give children, and especially girls, the opportunity to select their favourite wallpaper pattern and the curtains for their room, and as such enabling them to express their real selves. The role of parents' choice or advice, and the child's so-called self expression are also important elements when analysing the décor of contemporary children's bedrooms. However, considering the limitations of the research material at hand these issues have to be addressed in an indirect way.

Still the material world of boys and girls as displayed in the decoration and furnishing of their bedrooms is much wider than the consumer choices made by either parents or children, whether or not their choices are mediated by home-decorating advice from catalogues. Contemporary children's rooms are unique depositories of objects and stuff acquired in all possible ways. Not only objects and materials which are bought for or by them, or toys that are borrowed or shared with a sibling, or objects handed-down by the parents, or bartered with schoolmates, or birthday gifts, or stolen objects, but also prizes won at school competitions, objects found, like shells or stones, collections of free merchandising, like beer spils, or statuettes, also the drawings and diplomas that are pinned on the wall, and the toys or furniture specially made for them or self-designed or transformed objects. If children do have a sense of self identity mirrored in the decoration of their bedroom, it is often more related to objects which are not part of the consumption cycle, but acquired in another way, as illustrated by Isabelle Makay's research (2003) on the relation between children and the decoration of their bedroom.

Makay's research shows that when a girl reaches the age of eleven, she wants to get rid of the 'childish stuff' and engages more actively in the re-creation of her



Figure 11.2 Boy in his bedroom, 1993

Photograph by Charlotte Bogaert.

bedroom into a self-styled space. Spending their pocket money on decorative objects is an important element of the styling. The first transformation often results in a more messy appearance of the room, Makay concludes, as if it reflects the girl's in-between position as a teenager. In the girls' coming of age the material cycle of acquiring possessions, displaying, hoarding, discarding and eventually destroying or selling comes into view. A material cycle which is inaugurated by the parents who did away with the baby stuff and which will accelerate even more when the child grows older. Today's parents are very alert to the fact that the child's material environment, be it toys or the decoration of the child's room, has to reflect not only the gender but also the age of the child. Incongruities are as shameful to the child as to the parents.

Mediated consumption

It will become evident that the actual material universe of boys and girls was neither reflected in the images of children's model rooms as represented in *Correct Living's* journal in the fifties and sixties, nor in IKEA's images of children's rooms as represented in their catalogues of the early nineties. As such it marks a difference of approach between consumer studies and material culture studies, especially where children are concerned (Martens et al. 2004). In consumer studies, however, there is a neglect of mediated forms of consumption, like expert advice of the consumers' league and suggestions in journals or catalogues. The mediation is characterised by a certain degree of authority and in a more subtle way than commercials or advertorials it links consumers to products and producers. Not only *Correct Living's* journal and its articles on model homes and decoration, but also IKEA's catalogue

images of completely furnished children's bedrooms represent mediated forms of consumption.

A vital part of the mediation in the case of the décor of children's rooms is the authoritative use of gender markers to convey to potential consumers, mostly parents, the gender specificity of the décor. Neither IKEA nor *Correct Living* labelled the portrayed rooms explicitly as a boys' or a girls' room. The presence of gendered objects, notably toys supplemented in both cases the imagery. Although toys were the first gendered objects to be introduced into the Victorian nursery, it is questionable whether today's toys witness the prevalent gender roles, as Cross states (1997, 52). In comparing *Correct Living's* and IKEA's mediation the historic continuity or discontinuity of gender specificity since the nineteenth century can be put into perspective.

It is a man's world

A model of a wooden sailer was one of the primary examples used by *Correct Living* to convey to the public that the decorated bedroom was an intended boys' room (van Moorsel 1992, 175; Niegeman 1958, opposite 37). Also carpentering tools were frequently portrayed to convey the message 'mind you, it is a boys' room you are looking at'. In the same way as badminton rackets or roller-skates symbolised boys' activities in *Correct Living's* model homes (Niegeman 1958, opposite 101; van Moorsel 1992, 179, 190). Even the age-old male marker of the globe was presented in some early specimens of *Correct Living's* boys' rooms (van Moorsel 1992, 176; Niegeman 1958, opposite 101). Ever since the seventeenth-century Dutch paintings of the interior images of globes and printed maps have referred to the male-dominated domains of travel, transport and exploration (Cieraad 1999b). Technology, however, although a typical male domain since the nineteenth century, was not over-represented in *Correct Living's* décor of boys' rooms (compare Cross 1997, 52-67). Except a carpentering-set and an out-moded telephone device, only once were a father and son portrayed while constructing a radio transmitter (Teijmant et al. 2001, 20; van Moorsel 1992, 190). Car models or dinky toys, however, are absent from *Correct Living's* examples of boys' rooms. On the whole, *Correct Living* fancied a craft-like 'wooden' image.

Issues of home decorating magazines and furniture sales-books in the nineties show a striking continuity of these gendered toys. For instance, in 1994 an advocated 'trendy' boys' room was decorated with several models of wooden sailers (Ariadne 1994, 1, 86-93). Like a combination of a wooden sailer and a teddy bear present not only in a young boys' bedroom of *Correct Living* in 1955, but also in 1995 by IKEA. The linked representation of a boys' marker, being a sailing vessel, and a more child-like stuffed toy seemed to indicate the ambiguous status of premature boys. IKEA sales-books portray the established array of gendered toys and objects, not only car models, a rugby ball or an angling rod are unmistakable signs of a man's world, but also the traditional globe and map. However, also more modern toys, like roller-skates and beach-balls adorn the floor of IKEA's boys' rooms. Technology, the

male domain since the nineteenth-century, is updated by IKEA in the representation of audio sets. IKEA's colour and furniture arrangements, however, contributed in a reverse way to the image of a boys' room, as will be illustrated in the following description of girls' rooms.

A woman's homey world

The absence of male gendered objects was *Correct Living's* primary way of representing the image of a girls' room. *Correct Living's* more obtrusive indicators, however, referred to Nature, as was demonstrated by a vase with flowers, a poster with birds, or wooden statuettes of farm animals (van Moorsel 1992, 179, 183). However, more than the objects on display the spatial organisation of *Correct Living's* girls' rooms betrayed the designer's ideas on the needs of little girls in contrast to boys. For example, whereas bunk or high beds were advised for boys and girls, only in girls' rooms a 'snug' space underneath was created, which was furnished like a little room with a doll's cradle and lighted by a little lamp. Also the furniture arrangement in *Correct Living's* model room for a teenage girl resembled the propagated arrangement of family living-rooms in purpose-specific corners. The girl's bed was disguised as a couch, which formed in combination with an easy chair and a coffee table a 'real' sitting-corner for relaxation, while the presence of a writing desk signalled the office-corner.

A furniture arrangement which became female gendered, considering the pictures of girls' rooms in the issues of decoration magazines and IKEA-catalogues in the nineties (e.g. Doe het zelf 1994). IKEA's images stress the homy character of girls' rooms even more by the display of served food and drinks on the coffee table, and by complementing the bedroom's sitting-corner with a real couch. Except correspondences, however, there are also differences to account for. In IKEA's catalogues the girlish snug space is not only advised for little girls, but also for little boys. Although symbols of domesticity, like a carpet, floor-lamp or cushions, invade IKEA's boys' rooms, they are all the more present in its girls' rooms. Like reversely, technology, in the guise of a real telephone, invaded IKEA's designated girls' rooms. However, positioned in the snug space underneath the bunk bed, the telephone reinforced the gendered link between women and socio-talk in lengthy telephone conversations.

Although in the fifties stuffed toys, often a teddy bear, were typical toys of wee ones of either sex, there was hardly any trace of stuffed toys in the children's bedrooms decorated by *Correct Living*, in contrast to IKEA's where legions of stuffed animals are portrayed in rooms designed for little girls, whereas only two teddy bears show up in a room designed for a young boy. Not only the number of stuffed toys is indicative of sex and age, but also its location. In the case of both teenage and young boys' rooms teddy bears are positioned on a shelf or cupboard and not in the child's bed, for the bed proves to be the gendered location of stuffed toys in IKEA's girls' rooms. The prominent presence of a rocking-horse in one of its girls' rooms seems to be related

to the actual horse riding hype amongst girls. Traditionally, however, rocking-horses were boys' toys. The rocking-horse is one of the few gender shifts in toys.

Strange though, but the doll, the most evident girls' symbol, was not portrayed in any of the pictures of *Correct Living's* model rooms for girls. The only reference to a doll was the presence of a doll's cradle on one of its pictures (van Moorsel 1992, 183). However, also in the images of IKEA's girls' rooms there is never ever a Barbie-doll represented and its boys' rooms lack dolls what so ever. The absence of audio-technology seems to be IKEA's best indicator of a girlish décor. When reading the images not only the presence of gendered objects and toys is telling, but also its absence.

Also in the depictions of girls' rooms there is a long persistence of gender markers, like the gendered toy combination of a blackboard and an abacus. A combination which was not only present in a girls' room designed by *Correct Living* in 1963, but also in IKEA's girls' rooms in addition to a tiny shopping basket and a bucket. Objects which refer to the traditional gender image of an economising housewife engaged in calculating, shopping and cleaning. However, also the persistence of absence is telling. For example, neither *Correct Living's* designs of girls' rooms, nor IKEA's images presented modern sports goods. IKEA came up with traditional girls' objects like a skipping-rope and a hoop, but no ballet shoes, riding boots, or jockey caps.

Gendering colour and material

Also the persistency in the gendering of decorative colours and furniture material is striking. The finishings and textiles in *Correct Living's* boys' and girls' rooms had bright, primary colours, mostly blue for boys', and red and yellow for the girls'. More or less the same colour scheme is displayed in IKEA's full-colour catalogues in the nineties. There was, however, more diversity in colour schemes of designed boys' and girls' rooms in the nineties when other sources than IKEA's catalogues are taken into account. For example, pastel shades – and in particular pink – are more prominent in the finishings of designed girl's rooms in lifestyle magazines. As regards the type of furniture used in the fifties and sixties' model rooms of *Correct Living*, there were no differences in the kind of furniture propagated for either boys or girls. The most pronounced difference, however, was a difference in design: an elegant writing desk for teenage girls and a sturdy work bench for boys (van Moorsel 1992, 173, 179, 190, 176; Niegeman 1958, opposite 101). It was, however, the presence of additional furniture elements, like an easy chair or a low table, that typified *Correct Living's* teenage girls' rooms. The same holds true for the colourful designs of girls' rooms in the nineties (IKEA 1995, 174, 111; Ariadne 1995, 1, 95).

The selection of furniture material for children's rooms, however, differed over the decades. Steel tube was a dominant material in the furniture designs fancied by *Correct Living's* architects, especially for the legs of furniture, often in combination with painted wooden tops. IKEA's dominant furniture material in children's rooms, however, is plain pinewood, in combination with white-coated or brightly painted fibreboard, a choice of material that pays tribute to IKEA's Swedish legacy of

producing cheap pinewood furniture. Neither *Correct Living*, nor IKEA gendered their material preferences. In reality, however, there proves to be huge differences between furniture materials used in boys' or girls' rooms.

Since the early twentieth century there is a fast continuity in the way designers labelled rooms to be a boys' or a girls' by their usage of gender-specific toys, gender-related colour schemes, or by gender-related furniture arrangement. The imaged traditional boys' toys refer to the public domain of sports, transport, adventure and technology, like the traditional girls' toys refer to the private, domestic domain and to domesticated nature. Over the last decades, however, the designed gender specificity of the decoration of children's rooms has become more outspoken. But how effective were these gender images in moulding the minds of twentieth-century parents and children when decorating their rooms.

***Correct Living's* mediated consumption**

Growing up in the fifties and sixties, as I did, some of the developments in décor differences between boys' and girls' bedrooms have been intimately experienced. My parents advocated the upper middle-class ideals of *Correct Living*, and as a matter of course, my own bedroom and my brother's resembled the photographs of *Correct Living's* sparsely furnished children's bedrooms in an austere modern style. Not only a multi-coloured blanket, being the bedspread, but also the yellow curtains were colourful elements in my bedroom, laid with black lino. The colour scheme of my brother's room, however, was more gloomy: grey and dark blue, lighted with patches of yellow. Our rooms represented the colour gendering as propagated by *Correct Living* rather well.

There was, however, some difference in the presence of gendered objects, for there was no vase with flowers on my desk, nor a model of a wooden sailer on my brother's. Instead there was a plastic baby doll sitting in my room and there were plastic aeroplane models hanging from the ceiling in my brother's. Plastic toys, however, did not fit in with the advocated material philosophy of *Correct Living*. Also the popstar images I pinned on the wall, or the Mickey Mouse painting my brother fancied were abhorred representations of mass culture according to *Correct Living's* cultural paradigm. My parents, however, indulged our attacks on their scheme, and my mother even made a special wall hanging to display our collection of brand pins and picture postcards. On the whole, however, *Correct Living's* gender philosophy dominated our bedroom-scene, for indeed a little felt parrot and a few peacock's feathers were the references to nature in my room and not in my brother's. Like carpentering tools were prominently present in my brother's room and not in mine. My room had steel furniture, like my brother's had a wooden work bench.

It was a major event when I got my first bookshelf at the age of eight. The bookshelf was part of a rather expensive wall-mounted system of metal shelves, including a desk and drawers, which was advertised in nearly every issue of *Correct Living's* journal since the late fifties. My parents presented it to be a trophy of

adolescence and a prime element in the re-creation of my bedroom into a small-size bed-sittingroom, in due course complemented with a metal desk, an easy chair with iron tube legs, a carpet and a coffee table. Although my parents stressed the distinctive quality and brand name of the wall-mounted system of brightly coloured bookshelves, which were not to be mistaken for an inferior but more popular system, I was more impressed by the expense involved. As such it did not contribute to my sense of self-expression, but more to my sense of brand awareness. My collection of green bottles in different shapes and shades, which I had carefully arranged on the shelves, would have been a more likely candidate. At that time I was even surprised by my parents enthusiasm for my design preferences, however, without realising that *Correct Living* used the shape of bottles in their campaigns for taste reform (Cieraad 2004). In mediating consumption *Correct Living* had been rather effective, at least where my parents were concerned.

IKEA's mediated consumption

IKEA's appeal is less class-bound than *Correct Living's*, although both are rooted in the same post-war social-democratic philosophy of supplying well-designed furniture at reasonable prices. The Swedish company opened its Amsterdam branch in 1979 and attracted a huge crowd at the opening through its publicity campaign. Previous to the opening IKEA's full-colour catalogue was delivered in nearly every household in Amsterdam and beyond. In its consumer approach IKEA lured their clients by playing on the economising desire and by putting their design philosophy second, while *Correct Living* stressed that good design does not come cheap. IKEA's strategy was far more successful from a marketing point of view, but if also its material philosophy and gender coding was as effectively mediated will be the topic of the following sections. Charlotte Bogaert's photographs of 57 children's rooms (32 girls' and 25 boys' rooms) from all over Amsterdam, portray a cross-section of Dutch urban society: not only the better and the less well-off, but also different taste and ethnic groups.

The pink reign

When looking at the photographs of all these actual children's bedrooms, the most striking difference between the boys' and the girls' room is the colour scheme. The dominance of pink in most of the girls' rooms contrasted with the blue or black in most of the boys' rooms. Pink not only dominated the bedlinen of most of the ten to twelve year-old girls, but expanded its reign into curtains, wallpaper and even floor covering (Sparke 1995). The toys displayed in the girls' rooms, like Barbie-dolls and the doll's accessories, were also dominantly pink-coloured, including a fair number of stuffed toys. The colour pink evolved from an initial age marker into a real gender marker for girls in the eighties and nineties. It emancipated from a dull female baby-image in the fifties into a colour with a revolutionary touch when

linked to the sexual liberation of homosexuals in the seventies. Nowadays the colour pink seems to have been faded into a highly commercial sign for the female gender, robbed of its revolutionary image (Cieraad 2004). A colour scheme, however, which in the early nineties was not in any way mediated by IKEA.

Also the massive influence of the media, and especially tv-series, movies and popstars on the design of children's toys can not be ignored when looking at the decoration of the images of real boys' and girls' rooms (Bauer and Hengst 1980, 184; Cross 1997, 182). From the seventies onward a lot of popular tv-series for teenagers focussed on horses, but these series seem to have affected girls only. Most of the portrayed eleven-year-old girls practised horse-riding. They dreamed about a future career as a horse instructor, or to become an actress in a horse movie. The success of the Barbie-doll was also due to the tuning to the growing girls' obsession for horse-riding. It caused not only a shift in Barbie's anatomy, but also in the doll's wardrobe: from a glamorous, party outfit to a more casual, sporty look (Bauer and Hengst 1980, 134). Pink lost its supremacy in the jockey outfits of eleven-year old girls, who are really horse-crazy. Some bedrooms have been over-decorated with pictures of free-running horses and one had even a large mural of a horse. IKEA, however, did not fancy pink for girls, neither did they display Barbie-dolls, nor any other American image of popular culture. IKEA also refrained from the English-inspired horse-hype.

Gendered technology

Although technology was a nearly exclusive boys' marker from a designer's point of view, in reality, however, the situation proved to be more diverse (see also Peeters and Woldringh 1994, 50). Girls possessed as often a tv-set as boys, but more girls than boys had a video device and an audio-device in the early nineties. Girls had sets in bright colours and boys' devices were predominantly black. Also karaoke devices to record a join-in voice with an instrumental tape seemed to be especially popular amongst girls. The device was promoted by a popular tv-programme in the nineties showing children in a play-back contest. Not surprisingly girls rather than boys aspired to a career as a singer.

In the case of game computers and personal computers the situation was reversed, for more than twice as many boys than girls possessed a game computer. This difference might be due to the marketing policy of the firm Nintendo who gendered the game computer by naming it 'Game Boy'. However, when the type of games to be played on a 'Game Boy' are taken into account, there may be another reason why the games were not appealing to girls. Most games are highly competitive and are played individually, whereas research into the separate social worlds of teenagers indicates girls' opposite preferences (de Waal 1989). In the case of the personal computer gender differences were even more pronounced. In 1993 none of the portrayed girls had a personal computer, but most boys did. Only one girl, twelve years old and of East-Indian origin, stated that she would like to buy one and hoped that her savings would make her dream come true. A like-aged boy, however, stated that he got the

computer from his mother who was a professional computer saleswoman. Although he hated to disappoint her he confessed he never used the device. In most cases, however, it was the other way round: fathers had donated their outdated computers to their sons.

In sum, when technology is concerned, the actual situation is more complex and diverse than the situation suggested by IKEA. Audio-sets are in reality more linked to girls' aspirations than to boys', and illustrate an actual gender shift of a technical device from a male to a female dominated domain. Like the telephone shifted from a male to a female specific technology, at least from the designer's point of view, for an old-fashioned telephone was used as a boys' marker in *Correct Living's* model room in the fifties, while IKEA-designers used a modern telephone device as a girls' marker in the nineties. In reality, however, none of the portrayed children possessed a telephone device in 1993. A situation that has changed dramatically in ten years, considering the popularity of cell phones even amongst teenagers.

Although technology may generally be considered more a boys' than a girl's thing, the boys Bogaert interviewed did not burst with technical ambition. On the contrary, technology so it seems, and perhaps more the manual labour associated with it, was unpopular. In contrast to the work-bench in the designed boys' rooms of *Correct Living*, there was only one boy who had a work-bench in his room in 1993, while most of the fathers of these boys would have been actively engaged in DIY and as such possess at least a foldable work-bench and an electric drill. Perhaps sons don't imitate their father because the toy industry is not eager to convey father's domestic role model. There are not as many toy DIY-tools for sale as toy domestic appliances, except of course the traditional carpentering set. Toys, like Calvert stated, seem to be of prime importance in conveying traditional gender roles, but not in promoting more up-to-date gender roles.

Female fitness and male sports

Only in the display of sports goods the designed situation in the IKEA catalogues more or less parallels the actual situation. Winner's trophies, like medals, ribbons or cups, were prominently displayed in boys' rooms. Most of the boys confirmed to be engaged in football, baseball, basketball, tennis, kick boxing or karate, also most of the girls confirmed their engagement in horse riding, aerobics, ballet, tennis or hockey. A situation that matches the national percentages of boys and girls engaged in sports (ter Bogt and van Praag 1992, 106-107; Beker and Merens 1994, 77). The prominence of team and duel sports amongst boys compared to the solo sports amongst girls may be responsible for the boys' over-display of winner's trophies.

However, contrary to boys there was no display of sports goods in the girls' rooms. Jockey caps, riding boots, horse whips and ballet shoes are stored out of sight, and probably not in the girls' room. A large mirror, however, known to be a traditional gender marker since the late nineteenth century, is prominently present in most late twentieth-century girls' bedrooms too, but absent in IKEA's decoration. These full-size fitting mirrors, may be considered to be sports items too, for the girls claimed to

use the mirror to correct ballet and aerobic poses. Even if these mirrors are taken into account, still the display of sports items and goods in boys' rooms is overwhelming. Most of the décor of boys' rooms is a glorification of sports: wallpaper decorated with rugby items, posters of sports heroes, club flags and bedcovers decorated with the national football-team, with surfers or racing cars. No wonder more boys than girls dream of a professional sports career, for only a few girls aspired to a horse-riding or a ballet career. Sports goods have been a male gender marker for more than a century, and are still recognised as such by children of both sexes to be boys' stuff, as Makay noted (2003).

Gendered TV-Idols

Images of TV and pop idols were present in nearly every actual boys' or girls' room, but totally absent in designed rooms. As IKEA's commercial philosophy was akin to *Correct Living's* cultural paradigm, there is the same avoidance of images of popular culture in the design of children's rooms. It also explains the absence of tv-sets in IKEA's design of children's rooms in the nineties. However, children's reality has become – for decades now – a media reality or, a second-hand reality as Bauer and Hengst (1980) termed it. Characters of popular tv-series were widely displayed in children's rooms, for children are known to be highly sensitive to media messages. In response they have become a main consumer target group for tv-commercials (Mergen 1982, 114; Seiter 1993; Engelhardt 1994). Marketing departments of toy firms do realise that children more than their parents determine the choice of toys. Considering the media impact on children, it is no wonder that the sale of simple wooden toys motivated by pedagogical intentions, and less loudly propagated in IKEA's catalogues was bound to fail.

Also the well-marketed Walt Disney's cartoon characters, although more than 60 years old, proved to be still popular, especially in the decoration of boys' rooms. Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Pluto are also overrepresented in boys' rooms, while the clumsy character Goofy only appeared in girls' rooms. It seems as if the more life-like cartoon characters, like the coquettish Betty Boop and Little Mermaid or the philosophical dog Snoopy and even the heroic Batman, were more appealing to girls, than bizarre characters like the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Gremlins, Ghostbusters or Jurassic Park Dinosaurs. These bizarre creatures only populated boys' rooms and always in large numbers: turtle wallpaper in combination with a bedcover decorated with turtles or a bookcase completely filled with miniature dinosaurs.

For the same reason, human characters like those in the nineties' tv-series *Beverly Hills 90210* seem to be popular among girls from the ages of ten to twelve, considering the posters on the wall and bedcovers with portraits of the members of this neighbourhood group of rich youngsters. Their portraits competed with those of sexy female pop stars and numerous animal pictures stuck on the wall. Like-aged boys, however, had fancy posters of macho characters from nineties' movies like *Bay Watch*, *Cop* or *Double Impact* or posters of science fiction or horror movies.

Competing images were those of kick boxers, football-stars or male pop stars like Michael Jackson. Both boys and girls in the age-group of six to twelve did not seem attracted to images of pop or movie stars of the opposite sex. A situation that seems to be changing, for ten years later notably eleven year old boys also prefer posters of individual female pop stars, while like aged girls tend to favour female pop groups (Makay 2003, 76). To nine-year olds, according to Makay's research, posters are the most evident way to express the social self.

Musical instruments, though absent in IKEA's arrangements, were prominently present in the actual children's rooms. Surprisingly, however, only one boy wished to be a popstar, although more boys than girls played a musical instrument, notably the drums. Even boys who performed in bands did not value a career in the performing arts. From a male perspective, however, a professional sports career may have more or equal performing qualities. Also there are few if any tv-series or movies in which artistic qualities or technical ambitions are incorporated in its leading characters.

The effect of tv-series or movies seems to be stronger on the social self of boys than girls. Especially when the tv-induced influence of sports is taken into account. For example, the traditionally dusty image of an archaeologist was successfully upgraded by then popular movies like the 'Indiana Jones' series and 'Jurassic Park', and was very attractive to boys. Moreover, statistics reveal that boys watch more tv than girls (Peeters and Woldringh 1994, 50; ter Bogt and van Praag 1992, 98). Also the traditional professional aspirations of girls in becoming a hairdresser, housewife, teacher, or a nurse – only expressed by girls in the age of six to nine – seem to be toy and not tv-induced ambitions. For example, the future hairdresser is portrayed with a giant long-haired doll's head to train her hairdressing abilities and the future nurse rolls a doll's carriage in a nurse's outfit. Gender-specific toys as presented by IKEA are not fore-grounded in any of the photographs.

Gender-specific schemes

Except for toys, objects, and poster images, gender specificity is also represented in colour and material preferences. Also the children interviewed by Makay characterised boys' and girls' rooms primarily on the prevalent colour scheme: pink and pastel colours for girls and predominantly blue, black, red, and yellow for boys (Makay 2003). Although IKEA has not advocated gender specificity in furniture material, the actual situation is different, for there is a dominant use of coated fibre board, painted wood and steel in the boys' room, while plain natural wood is the dominant material in the girls', among other things due to IKEA's popular wooden bunk beds. These trivial décor differences between girls' and boys' rooms are nowadays characteristic traits of contrasting gender schemes, which have grown stronger over the last decades of the twentieth century.

Especially, the gender specificity of metal furniture turns out to be the most recent example, for in the late nineteenth century metal bedsteads were still advised for both boys and girls. At that time metal furniture represented modernity and hygiene. *Correct Living*, however, assigned metal furniture to girls, not so much

because of the material but more because of the elegance of the designs. In the course of the sixties, however, the suitability of metal furniture for domestic spaces was contested. Societal controversies were stressed in contrasting material preferences of consumers. Notably young consumers with an academic education discredited modernity and progress for causing exhaustion of natural resources and environmental pollution. Metal, plastics and synthetic coatings were banned, while plain, natural wood was glorified as the very symbol of nature, purity, roots and tradition. The controversy was extended into the related colour schemes: natural shades contrasted with modern white finishings and artificial colours. Hard-liners, for instance, banned shocking pink, which was increasingly commercialised by Barbie's producer Mattel to indicate a girly dream world.

However, these contrasting material codes became also linked to the aggravating split between the public and the private domain. The public domain of commerce and progress expressed itself predominantly in a modern material code of 'cold', coated and polished materials like metal, glass and stone. While the homely world had to express community and care in a preferred use of 'warm' and natural materials like pure wood, cork, natural wool and cotton (Cieraad 1991, 30-31). The linkage of these contrasting material schemes to the public and the private domain resulted also in a linkage to gender. For the 'cold' material scheme of the world of commerce and progress came to be the expression of a male-dominated professional world, while the 'warm' material scheme of the home came to be an expression of the female-dominated world of care.

Although gender specificity in the home is rooted in the nineteenth-century décor differences between male and female spaces, it is differently materialised in the late sixties and early seventies. The traditional schemes, however, are revived and blended into new. Its domestic course parallels the traditional nineteenth-century schemes, for the material coding initially affected only adults and their related domains, but progressively it invaded the décor of boys' and girls' bedrooms in the eighties and nineties (Calvert 1992, 90). The radical re-decoration of a boys' room when a boy reaches the age of six illustrates the invasion. Wallpaper in soft colours decorated with sweet animals is replaced by wallpaper of darker shades decorated with objects referring to technical progress, commerce, competition or to the public domain. For example, decorations like futuristic space shuttles, racing cars or science-fictional Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles encoded the young boy's professed orientation towards a technological future (see also Engelhardt 1994).

Not only the predominance of brand names and club names, but also the number of printed announcements and commercial and national flags in the décor of teenage boys' rooms are numerous material references to the public domain and the world of commerce. For example, a twelve-year-old boy is portrayed in his room surrounded by objects with Coca-Cola's brand name on it. The walls of boys' bedrooms are decorated with movie-posters, kick boxing announcements, graffiti, foreign number plates, or traffic signs. They merge into the traditional male scheme of transport, technology and velocity, as expressed by numerous images of trucks, motorcars,

motorcycles and aeroplanes. All these visible material references to the public domain are missing in the décor of girls' rooms.

Nature was not only encoded in the wooden material of the girls' furniture, but also in the pictures on the wall, representing a multitude of animals, mainly horses and cats. Images that contrasted with photographs of ferocious African wildlife, skulls of antelopes and a mural of a savannah landscape which decorated the only nature-dominated boys' room. The overall-image of Nature in girls' rooms is rather traditional, for it is a cultivated, domesticated and therefore a safe kind of Nature. Murals of a flowering meadow or a running horse, a row of real potted plants in the window-sill, or vases with bouquets of artificial flowers are all representations of domesticated Nature. Although pictures of free-running horses on the walls of girls' rooms may suggest an image of the wild, the horse's domestication in horse-riding is ignored. Nature as being unspoiled, innocent and in need of protection was encoded in pictures of little seals and sleeping babies. Numerous images of the Holly Hobbie doll in rustic dress – being a typical seventies outfit – underlined the gender specificity of traditional romanticism, like reversely futuristic images underline the male gender.

The homy code of care and share, however, invade the rooms of girls of a younger age than in the fifties. It was not only expressed in the young girls' furniture arrangement, but also in the caring and sharing values that go along with it. For example, a portrayed family of stuffed animals all sharing the same bed, numerous posters with yearning looks of helpless animals begging for support, and last but not least doll's cradles and carriages referring to maternal love and care. Most teenage girls' rooms, however, also function as private stage floors: safe training grounds for the aspired performing career, managed with the help of mirrors and recording devices, like video cassettes. Teenage girls stress the importance of privacy, especially when practising their ballet and street-dance poses (Makay 2003).

Conclusion

Décor differences between boys' and girls' rooms have a history since the late nineteenth century. The continuity of gender markers as mediated by home-decorating books, journals and catalogues is striking. Within the context of domestic consumption the authority of advisory literature like manuals, journals, and catalogues is seldom recognised. However, viewed as mediated consumption its effect on the material environment and décor of actual children's bedrooms can be judged. When scrutinising photographic documentation of actual boys' and girls' rooms the material reality proves to be more diverse and at some points even contradictory to the promoted gender markers. For example, the model of a wooden sailor promoted not only by *Correct Living*, but also by IKEA to mark a boys' room, is not present in any of the actual boys' rooms. Whereas brand names are very visible when inspecting the photographs of the actual teenage boys' rooms, there is no visual

evidence of brand names in the arranged settings. The same with Barbie dolls in the actual girls' rooms and their absence in IKEA's arranged rooms.

These examples illustrate not so much the limited authority of mediated consumption, as its censorship in filtering out the day-to-day commercial reality children are confronted with. For instance, the authority of mediated consumption is not in jeopardy where adults and notably couples are concerned, for in the decoration of kitchens, bathrooms, living rooms and also their own bedrooms not only commercial references, like brand names are screened out, but also images of pop stars or media personalities.

This brings to the fore the special position of children in the domain of domestic consumption, and notably the creation of an age and gender-related material environment, which is by every means a co-production between parents and children. Teenagers, however, are more likely to take over in a deliberate attempt to express their new social self into their décor. In their judgements they will tune more to their social peers outside the household than to family members. A vital part of the expression of their new social self is the keen awareness of creating a visible gender specificity in the décor, according to Makay. The peer group represents in the minds of teenagers the public eye. As such the décor of teenagers' rooms can be perceived as a representation of the public in the private realm of the house. This may also explain why references to DIY as a domestic affair of parents, and notably fathers, are missing in contemporary boys' rooms, like it explains why technology in the guise of kareoke-sets and video-devices has become more a girls' than a boys' thing. And that is why neither cookers nor washing machines are appliances to be found in teenage girls' rooms, while a few years later these appliances will be part of her private student room.

Visibility and display, however, are key words, not only in the parents' creation of the décor of children's rooms, but also in the teenager's re-creation, characteristics that confront us with the limitations of reading meaning exclusively from a material environment. Brand names may not be displayed in girls' rooms, but this does not entail that girls lack an awareness of brands or miss commercial expertise. On the contrary, they seem to be as price and brand-conscious as boys, and perhaps even more, but their expertise is related to other gender-specific products. Also the absence of sports goods in girls' rooms does not mean girls are not engaged in sports, but that riding boots and jockey caps are stored elsewhere. In reading the décor of a room absence can be as telling as presence, and only by comparing boys' and girls' bedrooms, and children's rooms with family living rooms differences can be put into perspective.

The notion that a child's room, as stated in 1907, '(...) is an apartment of major importance; a microcosm in which the child will have to prepare himself for the macrocosm of his future existence' is still very true on a psychological level in providing a personal haven for an individual child. However, the research presented here questions the continuity between the microcosm of the children's room and the macrocosm of society on the material level of the gender specificity displayed in the objects and décor of boys' and girls' rooms. In the case of the proclaimed continuity

it would forecast children's respective gender roles in adult life. However, not only the history of the gender neutrality of the nineteenth-century nursery illustrates a discontinuity between the private and the public domain, but also the gender-specific decoration of contemporary teenage boys' or girls' room bears witness to a discontinuity with the gender roles of contemporary adults in domestic and public life. As such it typifies the present societal situation in which sex discrimination is prohibited by law, but justified in decorational differences between boys' and girls' rooms at home.

References

- Ariadne, 'Het Ariadne kinderkamerplan. Spelen en slapen in sprookjessfeer. De Alice in Wonderland-kamer. Trend: zonnen en sterren. De Country-kamer vol beren en boten. Met unieke kinderkamerkasten'. *Ariadne* 1994, 1, pp. 86-93.
- Ariadne, 'Kinderkamer special. Spelen in sprookjessfeer of in Robin Hood-stijl'. *Ariadne* 1995, 1, pp. 87-95.
- Bauer, K.W. and H. Hengst, *Wirklichkeit aus zweiter Hand; Kindheit in der Erfahrungswelt von Spielwaren und Medienprodukten*. Reinbek, 1980.
- Beker, M. and J.G.F. Merens, *Rapportage jeugd* 1994. Rijswijk, 1994.
- Bogaert, C., Dromen van later: een fotoserie over kinderkamers. Private publication, 1993a.
- Bogaert, C., Interviews kinderkamers. Private publication, 1993b.
- Calvert, K., 'Children in the house, 1890 to 1930' in J. Foy and T. J. Schlereth (eds) *American Home Life, 1890-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*. Knoxville, 1992, pp. 75-93.
- Cieraad, I., 'Traditional folk and industrial masses' in R. Corbey and J. Leerssen (eds) *Alterity, Identity, Image: Selves and Others in Society and Scholarship*. Amsterdam/Atlanta, 1991, pp. 17-36.
- Cieraad, I. (ed.) *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*. Syracuse, NY., 1999a.
- Cieraad, I. 'Dutch windows: female virtue and female vice' in I. Cieraad (ed.) *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*. Syracuse, NY., 1999b, pp. 31-52.
- Cieraad, I., 'De gestoffeerde illusie. De ontwikkeling van het twintigste-eeuwse woningininterieur' in J. Huisman, I. Cieraad, K. Gaillard and R. van Engelsdorp Gastelaars (eds) *Honderd jaar wonen in Nederland 1900-2000*. Rotterdam, 2000, pp. 44-107.
- Cieraad, I., 'Alles roze! Hoe Barbie de droomwereld van meisjes kleurde' in B. Kruijsen (ed.) *Barbie, historische opstellen over een droomvrouw*. Amsterdam, 2004a, pp. 24-51.
- Cieraad, I., 'Milk bottles and model homes: Strategies of the Dutch Association for Correct Living (1946-1968)'. *The Journal of Architecture* 9 (2004b), 4 (Winter), pp. 431-443.

- Cieraad, I., 'A nation under reconstruction never sleeps. The rise and fall of the Dutch wall bed'. *Journal of Design History* 18 (2005), 2, pp. 167-177.
- Couperus, L., *Kinderkamer*. Banholt, 1979.
- Cromley, E. Collins, 'A history of American beds and bedrooms, 1890-1930' in J. Foy and T. J. Schlereth (eds) *American Home Life, 1890-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*. Knoxville, 1992, pp. 120-141.
- Cross, G., *Kid's Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood*. Cambridge, Mass., 1997.
- de Lange, C., *De hygiëne der kinderkamer; vrij bewerkt naar Ashy, Health in the Nursery*. Hengelo, 1889.
- De Waal, M., *Meisjes: een wereld apart*. Meppel, 1989.
- Doe het zelf, 'De sfeervolste, de allermooiste, de origineelste tienerkamers'. *Doe het zelf woonideeën* 7 (1994), pp. 20-27.
- Engelhardt, T., 'Met Power Rangers verlaten we de geschiedenis'. *De Volkskrant* 30 Dec. (1994), p. 9.
- IKEA 1995; *4 verschillende afdelingen. 328 pagina's vol interieurs*. Verkoopbrochure, 1995.
- Kinchin, J., 'Interiors: Nineteenth-century essays on the "masculine" and "feminine" room' in P. Kirkham (ed.) *The Gendered Object*. Manchester, 1996, pp. 12-29.
- Lenders, J., 'Maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen en jeugdcultuur vanaf 1945'. *Jeugd en samenleving* 21 (1991), 2/3, pp. 100-118.
- MaKay, I., *Mijn domein. Over hoe kinderen een eigen ruimte creëren*. Master's thesis Cultural Anthropology, University of Amsterdam, 2003.
- Martens, L., D. Southerton and S. Scott, 'Bringing Children (and Parents) into the sociology of consumption: Towards a theoretical and empirical agenda'. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4 (2004), 4:2, pp. 155-182.
- Matthias, *Onze Benjamin van de kinderkamer tot in de maatschappij. Opstellen over opvoeding, bewerkt door G.W. Elberts*. Amsterdam, 1907.
- Mergen, B., *Play and Playthings: A Reference Guide*. Westport, Con., 1982.
- Munro, M. and R. Madigan, 'Negotiating Space in the Family Home' in I. Cieraad (ed.) *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*. Syracuse, 1999, pp. 107-117.
- Niegeman, J. (ed.), *Ik kan wonen; geïllustreerd handboek voor allen, die hun huis goed willen inrichten en bewonen*. Leiden, 1958.
- Peeters, J. and C. Woldringh, *Kinderen; van privé-zorg naar overheidsbeleid*. Utrecht, 1994.
- Seiter, E., *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture*. New Brunswick, 1993.
- Sommerville, J., *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*. London, 1982.
- Sparke, P., *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste*. London, 1995.
- Teijmant, I., J. Versnel and B. Sorgedragter, *Goed Wonen in Nieuw-West*. Amsterdam, 2001.
- ter Bogt, T.F.M., and C.S. van Praag, *Jongeren op de drempel van de jaren negentig*. Rijswijk, 1992.

Van Moorsel, W., *Contact en controle; het vrouwbeeld van de Stichting Goed Wonen*. Amsterdam, 1992.

Van Setten, H., *In de schoot van het gezin. Opvoeding in Nederlandse gezinnen in de twintigste eeuw*. Nijmegen, 1987.

Wils, J., *Het woonhuis II. Indeeling en inrichting*. Amsterdam, 1923.

Afterword

Gender, Consumer Culture and Promises of Betterment in Late Modernity

Lydia Martens and Emma Casey

Introduction

This collection points to some of the ways in which it is important and appropriate to develop gender-informed perspectives of consumption. In the introduction to this book, we argued that existing accounts of consumer culture are lacking in terms of the dearth of attention paid not only to the particular role of women as consumers, but also to the everyday, gendered practices underpinning consumer activity pertaining to domestic and intimate life. One of the key issues that the chapters in this collection bring to the surface of consumer studies is the very multi-faceted nature of a whole range of women's consumer practices. Moreover, they demonstrate the ways in which gender operates alongside other structural categories such as class, sexuality and age; all of which work to shape and reproduce women's consumption decisions and activities. The chapters also draw attention to the *ordinary* and *mundane* in everyday patterns of consumption. Building upon the arguments developed in Gronow and Warde (2001), this allows the reader to juxtapose the different purposes served by consumption in women's lives in different contexts. Moreover, it points to the dialectic between the *special* and the *mundane*, embodied not only in the diverse forms in which consumer culture confronts us, but in dominant ways of thinking about what constitutes improvement in the quality of life during the twentieth century. Arguably, this is an important prevailing theme that is shared by the collection's otherwise often diverse chapters and which will be a central theme for discussion in this afterword.

The authors, whose work is brought together here, offer the reader a diversity of substantive materials and theoretical engagements. This is due in part to the diverse disciplinary backgrounds of the authors and reflects the diversity of ways in which facets of social existence are questioned in the academy. The collection therefore offers a rich database of work with which to think through our quest for how a focus on the domestic, the intimate and everyday consumption aids the development of more gender informed ways of conceptualising consumption. In this afterword, we return to the main themes which we originally planned would form the backbone to the collection's contributions. These are the relationship between

the public and the private, between the market and domestic spheres and how we may understand the processes and cultural responses whereby opportunities on offer in the market place come to be part of domestic and intimate life, and how and why women work creatively on the domestic sphere's infrastructure and its material culture. As well as considering these issues from the point of view of research on contemporary issues, such as the reception of commercial introduction services and the contemporary wedding experience, we will think through how these themes relate to an understanding of consumer culture in the late modern period.

As this afterword consists of developments in our own thinking about some of the issues raised in the contributions to the collection, and how they relate to the themes which originally stimulated us to put this work together, we make no claim to having integrated the work of all of the collections' authors here in equal measure. This should certainly not be taken as a sign of the relative quality or strengths of the chapters published here, but must be understood as an inevitable result of the limitations of what can be achieved in an afterword and the shortcomings of its authors, who are both feminist sociologists. We nevertheless hope the reader will enjoy this attempt at fusing and developing some of the collection's food for thought and we invite them to do the same in the quest to further develop ways of thinking about women, gender and consumer culture.

Lastly, as editors we thank the authors of the chapters in this collection. Without their willingness to spend time on writing for this collection, it would not exist. They agreed to draft and redraft their chapters, prodded by our concerns to bring together materials which could be used to further thinking about gender and consumption and by our concern to stick to a time-table of work. We hope that like us, they will come to enjoy reading contributions in this collection that sit alongside their own work, and that the end product warrants the work they have put in.

Gender, class, feminism and twentieth century consumer culture

Whilst social, cultural and feminist historians have been active in mapping the development, significance and impact of consumer culture in modernity, we know relatively little about its development during the second half of the twentieth century and how this relates to the social and cultural upheaval that some scholars see as the advent of our current post-modern reality. Following Cross (2000), whose work really engages with the advance of consumer culture in North-America, the post-war years started as a period of limited desires and moderated consumption. In the UK, this is exemplified in post war rationing, which indicates the power of public policy in limiting domestic expenditure. When rationing came to an end in the 1950s, both societies entered a phase of relative affluence, and this is characterised by shifting modes of consumerism which identified a move away from 'the practical' symbolised, for instance by consumer durables and the primacy of value for money towards a mode that exhibited more scope for domestic dreaming and the desire for luxury (Johnson and Lloyd 2004; Martens and Scott 2005). This new phase of late modern

consumer culture has not yet received much attention from consumption historians of the modern period¹ and given the theme of this collection, we are particularly interested in how this culturally turbulent period connects with the interrelationships between gender, feminism and consumerism.

The contributions by Giles, Reid and Hollows in this volume help us to further our understanding of these conjunctures, and their work can be read alongside some other interesting recent publications.² In fact, a reading of Giles (2002, 2004 and 2006) suggests that we need to add another salient dimension to our discussion, and that is class. Giles convincingly argues for the importance of not equating middle class and working class women's experience of twentieth century domesticity, even though, she argues, the market was at this time perpetuating the image of a classless housewife. In this sense, she gives voice to an earlier call for attention to the connections between class and gender in consumer culture (see de Grazia 1996 and Benson 1996). Theoretically, Giles builds upon Felski's (1995) rejection of the well-rehearsed argument that women have not played a major role in the experiences and literature of modernity, an argument that has also found support amongst feminist scholars (see e.g. Wolff 1985 and Pankhurst-Ferguson 1993), but she does so by asserting that the domestic is not modernity's antithesis. In *The Parlour and the Suburb*, Giles explores three salient facets of what she calls domestic modernity in the early part of the twentieth century: the decline of domestic service, the rise of suburban living and the development of consumer culture. These were without doubt interrelated social phenomena, and Giles expands by outlining the relationships between middle class and working class women in relation to them and by highlighting how their experiences were so different.

But let us return to Giles's argument that one of the crucial characteristics of consumer culture at this time was to actively create the home as an appropriate female space, home-making as a worthy activity for women to engage in and the housewife as a worthwhile 'profession' for women to adopt. Essentially, as servants disappeared from the middle class home and more middle class women were doing their 'own' housework, the figure of the housewife as a professional worker appeared as a model of this newfound domesticity. But this model was quite distinct from the common image of domesticity as drudgery. The positive image of the housewife, visually sketched in women's magazines as 'a young, neatly-dressed woman with softly permed hair, a frilly apron and, of course, a smile' (Giles in this volume), was set apart from its negative counterpart, the working class domestic drudge Giles's mother is seen to impersonate in the family photograph at the start of her book (2004: 2). Importantly, the domestic advice literature of this time proclaims that the housewife should not be a domestic drudge, but a professional worker who, with

1 For an exception, see Matthew Hilton's work (2002, 2004).

2 Judy Giles's (2004) *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* and Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd's (2004) *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife*. Both published by Berg Publishers, Oxford.

the aid of labour saving domestic technology, manages the household with an easy competence that leaves sufficient time and energy for her other important interests:

Good Housekeeping questions the dividing line between ‘housewives’ and ‘educated women’. The suburban housewife is not constructed as unintelligent, over-acquisitive, apathetic or ‘neurotic’ as in some accounts (Giles 2004: 39-47). On the contrary she is addressed as someone who is a quietly competent manager of her home, a professional worker, who is capable of reading and debating controversial issues. Linked to all this is her ability to select, buy, and use a range of beauty and domestic products: she is the discerning consumer whose competence in consumption and household management determines her social status. (Giles in this volume)

It is not before, but after the Second World War that the image of the classless housewife and domesticity itself come to be seen as problematic, and in the vanguard of this critique is early second wave feminism, as embodied in the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer.³ Hollows’ contribution is particularly relevant here because it focuses on the ‘demonisation’ of the housewife and her domestic activities in the influential 1960s text *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan.⁴ She outlines how Friedan provided a severe critique of consumer culture and the way it ensnared the housewife as shopper for the household, resulting in a form of domestic femininity that was vehemently rejected. Despite Friedan’s forceful critique of domestic femininity, Hollows shows that an alternative and perhaps more feminist discourse of domestic femininity could be found in the writings of the cook Julia Child at this same time. It would seem, though, that Friedan’s discourse proved to be the more forceful influence on the direction feminist agendas took in subsequent years, and provides evidence for how domestic consumption came to be marginalised within second-wave feminism. Hollow’s chapter therefore usefully engages with the interesting but up until now insufficiently highlighted or understood phenomenon of feminist reticence on consumption (Martens 2001). It also indicates, following Johnson and Lloyd (2004), how feminism came to share in the idea, also furthered by modernity theorists, that self realisation could only be found outside the home. This may also explain why feminist historians have found the analysis of the early department store more exciting perhaps than an analysis of domestic modernity, as developed by Giles. For self-realisation became equated with ‘being’ in the world outside the domestic sphere; it was here that excitement and adventure could be realised and where the heroes of modern life were created.

But why did this shift in thinking about domesticity and the housewife occur at this particular historical juncture? The answer, we argue, needs to be sought at the intersection between understandings and experiences of gender, class and consumer

3 That it became problematic can be gleaned from Hollows in this collection, and Johnson and Lloyd (2004). See also Horsfield (1998) who discusses de Beauvoir’s stance that domestic cleaning is basically a waste of time and that the mid-twentieth century’s ‘cult of cleanliness’ was evidence of a domestic femininity gone completely ‘over the top’.

4 Note that this was first published in 1963.

culture at this time. Not only that, but it is related to the issue of betterment in women's lives, the debate about the implications of the 'encroachment' of the market into the private domestic sphere and it requires an interpretation of early second wave feminism as a middle-class distinction project.

Whether consumer culture or modernity more generally offers betterment in everyday life and more specifically, how it does so, is one of those monumental questions that have kept the minds of modernity theorists, historians and feminists occupied. Summing up early discussions on the implications of the development of consumer culture, de Grazia (1996) has argued for the need to move away from the debilitating 'either/or' interpretation of consumer culture – meaning that it has been construed as either good or bad for women and their prospects in life. One way of creating distance from such 'simplistic' readings of the impact of the growing presence of markets in 'our' lives is to acknowledge that views about 'what betterment entails' and 'where it is seen to reside or result from', vary historically and between women. It is therefore essential to trace the historical manifestations of such views and Giles (2004 and 2006) and Johnson and Lloyd (2004) show that understandings about the potential opportunities offered by consumer culture for women's betterment have not always been the same for working class and middle class women during the twentieth century.

In relation to this, we have recently argued that first wave feminists and women's lobbies which were vocal in the early part of the twentieth century were optimistic about the opportunities offered by the world of commerce for the enhancement of the quality of life. This was a period of modern confidence when bourgeois entrepreneurship and the products spurned by modernity were viewed with optimism in a variety of middle class women's interest groups, who looked in this direction to provide answers for the hardships of everyday life (Martens and Scott 2005). Whether considering Judy Giles' analysis of this period, or Irene Cieraad's (2002) discussion of transformations in efficiency thinking in relation to the internal design of homes and domestic practices, or Tomes' (1998) account of the changes wrought in domestic practices as a consequence of the discovery of germs, in all we find evidence of a discourse that heralds the modern and the products it generates as providing opportunities for betterment.⁵ We go on to note that this confidence gave way to increasing scepticism in the post World War II years, when such early feminist stalwarts as Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein (1956) and Betty Friedan (1963) started to question whether so-called 'labour saving' domestic technologies indeed saved labour and whether the new technological innovations which laid in lure of the domestic practitioner in shops and advertisements really did what they promised. It is this type of questioning which heralds the end of middle class women's optimism

5 Tomes, for instance, points out how, in an effort to improve domestic cleanliness and therefore the prospects of survival from infectious disease, home economists advised domestic practitioners in the early part of the twentieth century to adopt changes in their cleanliness practices which incorporated a diversity of new cleaning products. New domestic technologies, like the vacuum cleaner, were hailed as a 'great hygienic boon' (1998: 144).

about the opportunities offered by the products of modernity to better their lives and a shift towards seeing opportunities for their self-realisation elsewhere and, literally, outside the sphere of 'stifling' domesticity (Johnson and Lloyd 2004). This supports Hollows' claim in this collection that there is the connection between a critique of the 'encroachment' of the market in the domestic sphere and the more general feminist critique of the housewife and domestic life.

As evidenced in Johnson and Lloyd (2004) and Giles (2004), feminists were not alone in sketching the domestic sphere as rife with boredom. In fact, it may be argued that their ideas were squarely positioned within the hegemony of critical cultural thought, which was evident in the writing of Frankfurt School theorists and also within many literary commentaries listed in Giles (2004) and Lawler (2005), and which circulated in the educated middle classes at this time. Meanwhile, it is apparent that for working class women the opportunities for a better life offered by the products of consumer culture were becoming more of a reality than ever before. Frankfurt scholars lament the move towards mass consumer culture at a time when more goods and services became available at lower prices thus potentially lowering their worth in the eyes of the discerning middle class consumer. Johnson and Lloyd point out how the housewife was called upon to help design and dream about the shape of the post-war suburban home and rising affluence levels more generally would have made it possible for more people to purchase the necessary domestic accessories to furnish such new homes, making them approximate to the pre-war magazine image of the type of home that made domestic life that much easier. In this context, the discourse of the classless housewife and her visual representation, seemed to become attainable to a wider range of women, and in this context it is not surprising to find the middle classes shifting the goal-posts in an effort to maintain class distinctions. The 'demonisation' of the housewife and domestic life, and the invention of a route of self-realisation that was positioned outside the domestic sphere and that negated consumerism, may thus be read as a distinction project in which middle class feminists took the side of their male counterparts in rejecting consumer culture.

The rejection of consumer culture at this time should thus be read in part as a rejection of a model of feminine identity that negated class distinctions and working class taste more generally. A reading of Giles's (2004) work makes it possible to speculate that class distinction in the early part of the twentieth century could focus on the distinction between those 'who could have' and those 'who could not'. When consumer culture turned into mass culture this may have shifted more to the form of distinction central to Bourdieu's (1984) work, and that is distinction based on taste. Illuminating here is Lawler's recent argument that middle class disgust of the working classes in late modernity has refocused on 'femininity and consumerism, as that for which "this class" was traditionally respected and valued – skilled male labour and a role in the political transformation of society – has disappeared completely, "leaving only a slavish acquiescence at the lowest level of consumerism"' (Lawler 2005: 435 quoting Hudson 1994: 79). Through various illustrations, Lawler (2005) shows how middle class representations of the white working class have conjoined a rejection of working class appearance and their taste:

Bodies – their appearance, their bearing and their adornment – are central in representations of white working class people. References to shell suits, or to ‘large gold earrings [and] tightly-permed head’ or to the ‘Essex Girl’ whose ‘big bottom is barely covered by a denim mimi-skirt’ do a great deal of work in coding a whole way of life that is deemed to be repellent. (Lawler 1995: 432)

These observations bring us to *moralties of consumption*, which has turned out to be one of the central themes to develop out of our reading of the collection’s contributions. We will develop this in the following sections, alongside some other closely-related themes and the question of how consumerism is seen to offer ways to improve everyday life.

Moralising about modes of consumption

The moralities of consumption identifiable in the discussions in this volume speak of two different though related facets. As indicated in the above discussion, one of these concerns the normalisation of specific tastes as superior and the formulation of acceptable and unacceptable modes of consumerism within the context of competitive class struggles. The other concerns the extent of the normalisation of specific markets in consumer culture, or, to put it in Hochschild’s (2002; 2005) terms: where the ‘wall’ that symbolises ‘the commodity frontier’ is positioned at any point in time and how that makes us feel. Moralities of consumption here are cultural and emotional reactions to the relationship between the public world of the market and the products and services it offers and the private and intimate world of domestic life. As should be clear from the early feminist critiques of domestic labour saving technologies just referred to, in some instances these two facets clearly merge. Our starting point is the second manifestation of moralities of consumption.

Moralising about the market and private/domestic life

The manner and extent to which the market has been increasing its presence and prominence in everyday life has been a topic of considerable debate within consumption studies, though Hochschild (2005) illustrates how wrong it would be to assume that developments go simply in one direction: of the market taking over tasks done in the home. If we are to agree with Campbell (1995) that feminism has had a stimulating impact on the development of a consumption related research agenda in the social sciences, then surely this must be one area in which feminists have historically shown an interest. Interestingly, their curiosity arose through a focus on the domestic sphere and the question whether the new domestic products, which were increasingly on offer as a consequence of the coming together of technological innovation, product design and entrepreneurship on the lookout for new and profitable markets, were on the whole ‘good’ for domestic conditions of life or not.

The debate on the implications of commercialisation in the home has historically taken different directions, though feminist commentaries have often been critical in tone. As indicated earlier, one of the first critical discussions coming out of this debate centred on the question whether new domestic products were time-saving (Myrdal and Klein 1957). Friedan is said to have argued that the snare with such new technology was that it allowed for higher standards and therefore created more rather than less work 'for mother' (Cowan 1984; Hollows in this volume). Moreover, new domestic devices were seen to render housework less skilful and therefore less satisfying. There are variations in how this argument is achieved but a recurring discourse is that the advance of the market into the domestic sphere initiated a shift from the 'producer' homemaker to the 'consuming' housewife, with the latter sketched as deskilled, manipulated and dissatisfied, leading a life without joy or meaning (Friedan 1963).

One could express surprise at the fact that this type of argument has lingered in feminist commentary. As shown by Hollows' discussion of Mary Drake McFeeley (2001) and Luce Giard (1998), the argument that the inventions of consumer culture 'debase' or 'deskill' domestic practitioners is still popular in contemporary commentary. Even so, as indicated by Frances Short (2003, 2006) in relation to cooking and Marjorie DeVault (1991) in relation to feeding work more generally, domestic practice 'still' demands a great deal of co-ordination and competence, even though it is clear that domestic products transform domestic practices. The women who were the domestic caretakers in Majorie DeVault's study, for instance, were perhaps not so accomplished at turning out amazing dinners, but they did achieve significant juggling feats in order to create occasions for the family to come together at mealtimes, thereby 'doing' family in specific ways.

What is perhaps most surprising about these debates and their longevity is the limited understanding they purvey of what actually goes on in domestic life in preference for sweeping value-laden statements. So, we know little about the minutiae of how practices in the home come together in the performances of domestic practitioners⁶ (Martens and Scott 2004). Not only that but DeVault's work shows how problematic it is to consider simply one element of domestic practice, such as cooking, and to infer from 'evidence' in this field that domestic practice more generally has become less skilled and satisfying, as this does not give credence to the way in which various domestic practices come together or an understanding of the diverse priorities given to specific tasks in relation to those of others. A related point is that *how* specific domestic tasks are prioritised changes over time so that it may well be that our mothers' homes were cleaner than the ones we inhabit today, but contemporary parents are expected to spend significantly more 'quality' time with their children than was the case a generation ago. So, there is a need to be aware of social and cultural transformations in what it means to 'run' homes and 'do' families, and shifting meanings around how this is achieved in terms of the specific product/service/practice combinations that can be found in domestic life.

6 For an explanation of our understanding of the concept domestic practitioner, see Martens and Scott (2006).

In two related papers (2002; 2005) Arlie Russell Hochschild addresses the very idea that what we see as domestic, private or intimate in our everyday lives is subject to continuous change. Yet, we apparently wish to maintain one distinction; that between the idea that the public world is 'out there' and the private world, which is our sanctuary from the 'heartless world outside', is 'in here'.⁷ It is this distinction she calls 'the wall', and in *Rent a Mom' and Other Services* (2005), she outlines the manifold ways in which the wall is in fact porous, and that it and the meanings we attribute to it shift about.

Both service providers and clients 'move the wall'. That is, while the difference between paid and unpaid life remains, the meanings associated with each shifts. What once seemed too personal to pay a person to deal with now doesn't seem that personal after all. (Hochschild 2005: 78)

However, we should not assume that such shifts are easily accomplished, for in the cultural wrangles that lead up to the acceptance of some of the new commercial opportunities that become available in filling in everyday domestic and intimate life, 'heart sores' are apparent.⁸ During research on eating out, conducted by one of the editors during the middle of the 1990s, excellent examples illustrating this point were derived from the 'contorted' manner in which some female participants answered the researcher's question whether they wished to eat out more often than they did (Chapter 5 in Warde and Martens, 2000). The answers from the women in this study who clearly had busy home and work lives illustrated that commercial food services, whilst coveted for their ability to make their everyday lives easier, were still seen to lower the quality of family life. Alan Warde (1997) has shown how this antinomy of everyday life; that between convenience and care is reflected in the representations of cookery articles in women's magazines. As the 'commodity frontier' is moving on, some new ways in which the market offers itself as an aid to the domestic practitioner will become relatively accepted and acceptable, whilst in other areas they still create significant emotional dilemmas on the part of the potential user. In two of the volume's contributions, those of Clarke and Davidson, these two different scenarios are apparent in relation to children's birthday parties and commercialised introduction services.

Alison Clarke is quick to note that commerce had moved into the realm of children's birthday parties in the neighbourhood in North London which she investigated in her study and she wonders how this increased presence needs to be interpreted:

... is this commercialisation of an idealised facet of domestic work, the preparing for and shepherding of a child through the symbolically pertinent social ritual of the birthday,

7 For a related discussion on the notion of the domestic safe haven and the role of discourses of domestic cleaning products, see Martens and Scott (2006).

8 Hochschild here talks about feeling rules (2005: 83), which stand for how we emotionally manage our relation to the wall.

yet more evidence of the penetration of market forces into the sacrosanct non-economic worlds of children and motherly love? (Clarke in this volume)

Clarke discusses how organising children's birthday parties and participation in the children's party circuit more generally, is wrought with motherly anxieties, as participation is expensive, open to the scrutiny of participating others and the organisation of such events are both time-consuming and require the necessary cultural skills to understand what pertains to the 'norm' in the neighbourhood. Commerce, rather than adding to such anxieties, is here interpreted to offer sanctity from them. This is so because it offers standardisation⁹ in provisioning, which for Clarke's mums meant that the difficulty of hosting a 'normal' birthday party was eased. This connects with Giddens' (1991) notion of the lifestyle, which also is a form of routinizing the rituals of consumption that offers a means to assuage everyday anxieties associated with the choosing self. What is particularly interesting here is how it is commerce, perhaps as the 'third party' (Hochschild, 2005: 81) in the intimate relationships between mothers and children, which is allowed to set the new cultural standard of the children's birthday party norm.

Clarke also describes the invitation of commerce into the birthday party as a form of motherly 'subversion of the tyranny of idealised roles of carers' offering mothers 'alternative renditions of being a "mother"' (Clarke in this collection). It is clear, therefore, that the mothers in Clarke's study come close to Hochschild's description of the 'modern market person' (2005: 84), as they apparently had few reservations about using the opportunities offered by commerce to transform what it meant for them to organise a children's birthday party and to make those parties confirm to the specific localised idea of normality.¹⁰ This meant, too, that the mother who did everything herself in the staging of an aesthetically excellent birthday party was the one who raised most eyebrows exactly because she still resided on the other side of the 'wall':

While Martha Stewart (or Camilla Knowles) type renditions of creative, expressive mothering might be popularly aspired to, in this ethnographic context they are regarded with the highest suspicion as they pose the greatest threat to a culture of negotiated 'sameness'. The woman most likely to garner admiration is the mother who 'gets away' with pulling off the most affective party with the minimal effort and expense, all within the bounds of the accepted aesthetic of the group. (Clarke in this collection)

Hence, by making the 'commercial' party the norm, the intimation here is that 'non-commercial' events come to be seen as 'abnormal'. Clarke's work is therefore an excellent example of a study which reveals how the normalisation of consumer

9 Standardisation is also discussed by Hochschild (2005).

10 Through the careful spatial positing of her findings, Clarke makes it clear that her findings must not be read as representative of mothering and children's birthday parties, for it must be acknowledged that where the 'wall' is positioned and what the meanings are around that, may vary socially and spatially.

culture in everyday domestic life may mean that it becomes hard to justify not resorting to commercial options rather than to justify their use, as is the standard implication of the gist of feminist critique on this issue.

By contrast, the women in Jacqueline Davidson's discussion on commercial introduction services (CIS) had not yet been converted to the idea that their use was a good thing. For a number of the women in her study, Hochschild's observation: 'we feel one way about the location of the "wall" between market and non-market life. But we may actually *be* in another place *vis à vis* that wall' (2005: 83) seems very appropriate. The feeling rules of the single women in Davidson's study were confronted with the contradiction that whilst they wanted to be in a romantic relationship and did not seem to manage to meet an interesting partner in 'the normal way', CIS now offered an alternative route of meeting Mr Right. Utilising such services generated a considerable amount of anxiety, not only relating to how to manage and make successful first time meetings, but also because CIS required the women to turn themselves into *enterprising selves*, by figuring out how they could present 'themselves' in advertisements and the literature of dating agencies to good effect. And of course, the notion of the *enterprising self*, on which we will elaborate later, did not cohere well at all with the heterosexual romantic ideology, which does not 'allow' women to 'take initiative' and which stipulates that meeting a mate is something that happens naturally.

Aspirations for betterment and the language of restraint

Moralising about consumption took the form of a critique of types of consumption, such as playing the Lottery in Casey's research and using CIS in Davidson's research. Moralising about types of consumption is closely connected with moralising about consumers themselves, and in this collection, these consumers have invariably been women, though clearly varied in terms of their social and cultural characteristics. In Casey's chapter, for instance, there is a clear underlying awareness in the responses of her female Lottery players that it was not only their Lottery participation that is potentially suspect but also their working class 'selves' because they were 'perpetrating' acts of consumption with the greatest potential to be conceived off as devious. In an earlier piece (2003a), Casey explained why concentrating on working class women makes for a particularly potent case-study of moralities of consumption. Their participation in gambling has historically been viewed more critically than that of (working class) men because of an underlying assumption that when working class women, who tended not to be well off in the first place, participated in gambling, they were seen to be spending 'household money'; that is, money that should have gone towards the care of others (see also Reith 1999).

In Clarke's case, we find that moralities of consumption are conjoined with the motherly identity of women mostly known to each other through their children, where the deviant form of motherhood is the one that goes 'over the top', that is too overtly 'excellent' at the job of mothering. In contrast to Casey, where

women's dubious identity is connected with dubious consumption practices, in Clarke engagement in consumer culture is seen to be crucial in enabling mothers to adhere to degrees of sameness ('normality') when they organise their children's birthday parties. Here, the deviant mother was the one who did not keep herself to the standardised commercial format on offer. Equally, the use of CIS in Davidson's chapter was connected with a perceived deviancy of the 'enterprising feminine self', which, perhaps somewhat contradictorily when compared with Boden's enterprising brides, was seen to work against the notion that love and romance should happen 'naturally'. Whilst these chapters primarily offer a critique of 'deviant' feminine identities rather than of 'deviant' classed identities, in Casey and Giles, participation in consumption practices also reflects on domestic and feminine identities – and importantly, caring motherhood – but it does so in the context of the classed realities of these women's lives.

We continue to consider the consequences of moralities of consumption for the ways in which class informs and affects how working class women talk about their consumption experiences. Two issues are at play here. One is how the realities of everyday life impinge on the consumption opportunities open to working class women; the other is their apparent need to react to the moralities that are at play around working class consumerism. We identify a consumption disposition that differs in important ways from those of other women and which is evident in the complex ways in which these women talked about their participation in consumer culture. We will address how this disposition implicates the relationship between moderation and excess and informs the experience of pleasure, fantasy, adornment and dreaming in relation to consumer culture.

The language used by Casey's female Lottery players had a tone of defence in it as these women justified, explained and rationalised their participation in a form of consumption, which for them clearly offered itself as an opportunity to improve their lives, but which in the eyes of the middle class observer has no obvious and immediately apparent utilitarian outcomes.¹¹ In doing so, they participated in moralistic discursive constructions around Lottery participation in order to create an opposition between 'appropriate' and 'unacceptable' forms of gambling. This was then followed by an argument for why they fitted into the 'acceptable' or 'respectable' category

11 The chapters in this collection demonstrate that the middle class 'surveyor' other not only manifests him/herself in the form of journalists and other social, political commentators. The researcher also could be framed as a key middle class 'other'. In an earlier piece, Casey (2003b) argued that as a middle class researcher, the women who took part in her research anticipated disapproval and critique from her, both during the interview and in the writing up. Often the defensiveness that ensued took the form of humour and gentle mocking with comments such as 'the National Lottery? How do you get a PhD in that?!' (116). It is important then, that in discussing and researching the language of betterment and restraint we avoid glossing over our own role as academic researchers and how our own academic and feminist interpretations of the world are snapshots of reality rather than all-encompassing theories of women's lives. Domestic consumption, then, is best researched with an open mind, and an awareness of alternative ways of seeing the world.

of 'gambling' consumers. Casey's chapter is composed around how these women construed their own participation in terms of creating family time, making Lottery play something that the family does together and derives pleasure from together. They also placed great emphasis on their skilful management of the household's resources around routines of spending making it plain that this gave little leeway to any kind of *impulse* spending on gambling and they spoke about spending significant amounts of Lottery earning, either already won or imaginary winnings, on treats for the family or on improvements of their homes and their children's lives. The Lottery thus offered two types of opportunities; the very small chance of winning a substantial amount of money and the more realistic possibility of earning smaller amounts of cash, which were used to buy treats for family members. Participation in the Lottery, therefore, offered one of the few opportunities available to these women for making their life 'that little bit better', to coin a phrase used by Giles (2004; 2006).

In Giles, too, we find a discussion of how working class women (during the interwar years and thereafter) rationalised their consumption behaviour in line with the need to portray their own practices as respectable and responsible and to have it seen as such by others (see also Giles 2004). Like Casey's women, Giles' working class research subjects also discursively created an opposition between the irresponsible consumer 'other' and themselves as responsible consumers. Interestingly though, they identified the irresponsible consumer with themselves when they were young, suggesting an opposition between the young with unbounded consumer desires and their own grown-up selves, whose desires had been 'successfully' reigned in to generate a sensible consumer and lifestyle disposition that would be more effective in furthering their aspirations for a better life.

Gertie Harris and Hannah Arkwright both told stories about their lives prior to marriage in which they enjoyed dancing, dressing up and flirting. Both were insistent that such 'silliness' ended when they married, 'it was silly, it was a silly life, it was living in a cloud because you have to come down to earth and I did with a bang!' and Hannah said of her return to North Yorkshire after her 'adventures' in London that 'I had stopped being flighty'. Both women recognised that their aspirations for a better life depended on making a 'sensible' marriage to a home-centred man with a steady income who did not drink or gamble. (Giles in this collection)

In Casey's chapter, we find an equally pertinent story about the regulation of working class women's desires. Of particular interest was how little the women allowed their imaginations to run wild when asked what they would do if they won the Lottery. Surely, this was the type of question which offered the chance to voice how fantasies and dreams could 'come true' if money was no object? Yet there was very little in this chapter that tapped into individual fantasies and desires. This question rather seemed to generate two types of responses. It connected with the issue of 'perfecting one's self' through caring for others and it identified currently unsatisfactory situations in life that more money might alleviate. Examples include spending the money to re-house and/or educate offspring or, in Judith's case, the potential of staying at home to be a 'good' mother rather than needing to go out to work to pay the bills.

The absence of any freely voiced 'selfish' reasons for why it would be great to win the Lottery was particularly interesting. There is a sense here that such fantasies are restricted or limited, of being sequestered, hidden deeply in the unconsciousness or simply being absent because it does not connect with the women's sense of self, which is too much tied up with the self as a social entity, for instance, through an identification with caring motherhood. What this emphasises is the social rather than the self-directed nature of consumption dispositions in working class life. It brings to mind Elizabeth Chin's (2001) ethnographic work on the consumption practices and perceptions of poor Afro-American children, which also outlines the deeply social nature of the working class consumption disposition. Chin invited some of the girls and boys in this neighbourhood on shopping trips with her. By offering them \$20 to spend, she effectively mirrored the experience of coming into a sum of money discussed by Casey's Lottery players. Chin writes:

... the effort to understand these children's consumption was not possible if I insisted on considering their choices as being generated out of self-interest and personal desire – the starting point for so much theory on consumption in general and shopping in particular. The process of consumption was for these children based quite overtly on a complex and sometimes convoluted web of social relationships – especially to kin ... (Chin 2001: 119-120)

Chin's children showed a high degree of awareness of the material conditions of their existence and this gave rise to specific social relations of consumption. So, on their shopping trips, a number of the children came away having spent their money 'responsibly' by buying things for themselves which they needed (the purchase of pairs of shoes was prominent) thereby taking away the necessity of their care-takers spending precious money on them. They also frequently bought presents (treats) for their care-takers. According to Chin, these children were acutely aware of their dependence on the goodwill of their carers in a familial economy of exchange in which their own shopping expeditions were also tied up.

Chin's account of the consumption behaviour of young, poor and black American kids suggests how the disposition described by Casey and Giles in relation to adult consumers is learned early in life – the children in this study were 10 years old. Not only are there cunning similarities in the observations in these various studies, Chin also provides evidence which suggests that these children were also already reflecting on the imaginary and 'other' child consumer; the 'everyone' in these children's stories who were wearing Air Jordans and who, though seemingly real in the eyes of her kids did not really exist in these children's own consumption reality. This imaginary child consumer was strikingly similar to the 'nonexistent amoral and pathological consumer that these kids are so often portrayed as being' (Chin 2001: 137), which reflects how the powerful presence of discursive moralities around working class consumerism is already at play in considering children's consumption practices. The main difference between Chin's children, and the adult women in Casey and Giles' studies is that whilst the children regulated their consumption through an early awareness of the material realities of their lives, the working class women

showed how moralities around modes of consumption had become internalised into a consumer disposition in which the regulation of desires and consumption worked also at the symbolic level; as a response to the negative allegations made against 'their' assumed consumerism.

A reading of working class women's responses to a questioning about their consumerism thus enables an understanding of what respectable female consumption constitutes. These offer themselves as a series of discursive binary oppositions. Hence, the proper mode of consumption is a way of consuming which signals the careful management of (financial) resources and contrasts with impulse spending. It is also 'family' or 'other' orientated rather than selfish. Moreover, it is rational, controlled and regulated rather than 'silly', fantasy driven or excessive. The proper mode of consumption points to the 'double jeopardy' (Lawler 2005: 435-436) faced by working class women, for whilst they may claim to adhere to these facets of the proper mode of consumption, these binary constructions lend themselves well for their opposite interpretation:

...working-class women must constantly guard against being disrespectful, but no matter how carefully they do this, they are always at risk of being judged as wanting by middle-class observers. And this is a double jeopardy since if working-class women can be rendered disgusting by dis-respectability and excess, they have also been rendered comic and disgusting in their attempt to be respectable ... (Lawler 2005: 435-436)

Seen in this light, it is perhaps not surprising that Silva's research engagement with Janet turned into such a peculiar experience, since Janet was acutely aware that her exuberant kitchen could be interpreted by the middle class researcher/observer in a negative way, as too dream-like in its insinuation and signification of a way of life that was not her own. A positive response by the researcher, on the other hand, would support rather than disrupt Janet's own positive feelings about her new kitchen, which Janet was keen to maintain.

Enterprising selves make dreams come true

Discursively, appropriate consumerism is associated with carefulness in how money is spent; with ensuring that the 'necessities' in life are covered before contemplating spending money on luxuries; with a social rather than self-directed focus; with a practical, rational and utilitarian outlook rather than a tendency to fantasise and dream. Yet, this is an austere disposition; one that never lets go, and that suggests complete self control. It is not the face of consumerism shown to us in upmarket department stores and shopping malls, in the showroom that displays flashy sports cars, in the holidays on offer in exotic parts of the world and in product advertisements. These speak of exuberance, luxury, fantasy and dream worlds, and continuously toy with the disposition just discussed. So, when Giles talks about the two contradictory faces of modernity, we recognise in them the two contradictory faces of consumer culture:

... one of the tensions of modern life is the contradictory pull of conflicting discourses. On the one hand the discourse of rationality and betterment offers the promise of order and stability, on the other hand the discourse of romantic transcendence invites us to leave behind the mundanity of everyday life that is the price for this security. (Giles 2004: 101)

We would argue, though, that it is not only through its discourse of rationality that consumer culture offers opportunities for betterment; its discourse of romantic transcendence also engages consumers in hopes and aspirations for betterment. In the voices in this collection, we hear a strong desire to be (and be considered as) 'full' consumer citizens. This connects with Bauman's (2001) insistence that consumer citizenship functions as an indicator of social inclusion and for the working class women in this collection, this means a desire to be an 'autonomous' consumer in more ways than having the wherewithal to participate in financial expenditures. The desire to be free from the moralising discourses just discussed, that impede the 'freedom' to engage in the diversity of experiences that are on offer in consumer culture, may be another. It is a voice which suggests that full consumer citizenship is approximated when consumer rationality is joined by fantasy, creativity and dreaming. Yearning for the fantastical clearly provided a strong stimulus for an 'enterprising self' in the studies reported here, and it operated as a strategy for making dreams to come true.

The 'enterprising self' is apparent in Giles' working class women, for whilst Eileen Hutchings expressed the level of control necessary to get there – 'you had to save so hard to get your home together' – the stimulus to engage in this controlled behaviour was the fact that a desire had been created in the first place through dreaming of 'a home of your own'. Moreover, following one's dreams and aspirations did not always mean a controlled consumer disposition, as Doris remembered the purchase of a beautiful yet 'second-hand suite' which:

cost more than they could afford but was significant for what it said about Doris' pride in the work carried out to make a comfortable home and as a symbol of her ownership of those commodities that had previously only been available to the affluent. (Giles in this volume)

In their own ways the women in other contributions in the collection were also enterprising selves attempting to make dreams come true. Casey's women budgeted so that money could be spent on the weekly lottery, which might give them the ticket to the jackpot; Boden's couples budgeted and shopped around to make their wedding day pertain to an image of romance and fantasy; Silva's Janet had wielded her excellent capabilities in seeking out the best deals to make her kitchen what it was; Davidson's unhappy singles were exploring 'enterprising' ways to make changes in their situation and Wilson-Kovacs' women were actively working on their bedrooms to make them approximate to their sexual imaginations.

Yet, the 'enterprising self' essentially operates as the antithesis of the dreamlike. Another interesting feature of these studies was therefore how the 'enterprising self' was made invisible. One of the clearest examples of this was Janet, in Silva's study, who was eager to show Silva the end result, but who did not respond obligingly

when asked to discuss how the end result was achieved. In Boden, too, the notion of transcendence, when woman turns into bride, signifies the departure from reality. For public display is the bride in all her glory, but not the work which went into achieving the aesthetic ideal! This resonates with the aesthetics of display created in the early department store, where goods are also on show in their 'true glory', but where the methods by which the display was achieved were studiously hidden from view. Bringing the practical and the rational of the 'enterprising self' into view clearly obscures the magical properties of the finished product.

Enhancing selves through enhancing domestic material culture

One of the key themes of this collection is the material culture of the home and in particular, domestic material culture. What we have tried to show throughout is that focusing on its domestic nature and how this is related to gender can enhance debates about material culture. It acknowledges a debt to earlier work on gender and consumption such as Andrews and Talbot (2000) who in an earlier collection on the theme of gender and consumption also showed how for women, consumption represents a complex combination and balancing act between responsibility or duty to others and pleasure.

Pink, Wilson-Kovacs and Cieraad's chapters add to debates surrounding material culture by offering a gendered account of agency and identity formation via three different types of domestic material culture. By positioning *women* as central to such debates, it is possible to see how femininity is constructed and structured by the everyday domestic performance and engagement with material culture. We can thus explore identity (especially gender identity) formation by looking at domestic material culture. This shows how femininity is negotiated and constructed via material culture and how women operate within the domestic sphere with the resources available to them to use material culture to stimulate, enhance and enrich the everyday routines of the domestic sphere; whether through home décor, sensory experiences or erotic goods. According to Butler:

The critical task [of feminism] is ... to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the imminent possibility of contesting them. (Butler 1999: 188)

We argue that through their everyday domestic performances of domestic material cultural practices, women's identities are formed. This collection shows that one of the key contributions to feminist theory that a gendered account of material culture can offer is that in their everyday lives, women are under surveillance from others and seek approval, but that they also seek to use material culture to enhance their own pleasure and to experiment with a variety of alternative identities. In addition, it opens up many possibilities for future research including notions of the public and private as the spheres of consumption become less tangible and more complex and 'domestic'.

Pink's chapter is interesting because she parts company with existing accounts of consumption which have looked at 'real', tangible material goods such as Cieraad's bedroom furniture and décor and Wilson-Kovacs' 'erotic' material cultural goods by proposing an account of the *sensory* experience of material culture. The absence of sensory experiences in the consumption studies literature is significant when one considers the many references made to sensory experience and appeal by advertisers of a whole range of domestic products, from washing powder to fabric softener, to air freshener. Ethnographers and phenomenologists have also frequently overlooked the importance of the sensory despite their insistence that experience is complex, multiple, and often transcends the usual boundaries of time and space. Pink expands the notion of material culture to encompass 'home creativity'. Material culture is thus something complex that is created in part via sensory experiences. Agency is performed, produced and reproduced via the sensory experience of material culture, and it is possible to speak of 'domestic agency' which could also inform future work and research.

For Pink, the sensory home enables a balance of control, power, agency and visual appearance. Material cultural decisions are part of who we *are* and who we would like to be. Aspiration, envy and betterment combined with a desire to please and a commitment to maximising the comfort of the domestic sphere for the benefit of self and others. For Wilson-Kovacs, sexual intimacy is one novel and appropriate area of research given the range of literature available exploring women's relationship to sexuality within a broadly heterosexual and commercial environment. The research is also apt when one considers the increasing popularity, and the normalisation of high street shops selling 'erotic' and sexualised merchandise. Wilson-Kovacs's chapter has enormous potential particularly in exploring the uneasy relationship that feminists have traditionally had with women adopting male, heterosexual fetishistic fantasies, especially when these constitute a particularly lucrative commercial market. There is also scope to examine in detail the extent to which women through their sexual (or sensory or visual) performances, reproduce, resist and negotiate pleasure and personal satisfaction.

All three chapters illustrate the complex web of relationships between commerce, freedom to consume and the place of individual desire and fantasy in material culture. These chapters add to existing understandings of how femininity is formed via cultural practices. It was certainly the case that women's domestic material culture operates within a range of constraints, both ideological and financial but moreover that although women seek to stimulate and enhance the experience of the household via their domestic consumption, they also seek *pleasure*. To begin with then, the women who took part in Pink's research were often constrained by a lack of financial resources necessary to create the 'ideal' sensory home. Women frequently set themselves very high targets in terms of caring for others (see for example, DeVault 1991; Pahl 1989), and criticisms, both real and imagined of others form a significant role in women's everyday domestic performances of femininity. Often a fear of responses from others displays itself as a combination of guilt and defence. Jane, for example, in Pink's chapter defends her decision to work part-time by

showing how her commitment to maintaining the sensory home needs to be carefully balanced against the financial requirement to work; 'it's better looked after ... than it would be if I had a full-time job'. For Jane, then, engaging in material culture cannot take place in isolation from a whole range of other everyday commitments; in Jane's case, to supplement the household income. These findings add to previous research into femininity, caring and respectability, such as Skeggs (1997) who argues that for women, especially working class women, 'respect' from observant others and cultural capital are never taken for granted, and that 'becoming respectable' is an on-going process by which women constantly seek to prove and present evidence of their respectable and caring abilities.

This also resonates with Winship's suggestion that consumption for women is *work* (1987); that is, productive labour. It was certainly the case that the relationship that the women in this collection developed with material culture was closely associated with work. Consuming required planning, effort, skill and financial management to ensure that the usual household and domestic relations were kept stable and balanced. The complex planning and organisation that went into the consumption of erotic goods in Wilson-Kovacs's research was notable, and can certainly be seen as a form of labour the consequence of which is to produce a desired experience. The descriptions that the women gave of the often very time consuming decoration of bedrooms and the planning and preparation of erotic 'spaces' illustrate this work of consumption. What was especially interesting though were the women's regular references to 'my space', and the work towards the creation of a pleasurable sexual space 'for me'. Wilson-Kovacs' chapter then, parts company with Pink's to the extent that whereas the women of Pink's research talked about the ways in which they gained pleasure by creating a clean, sensory space for the family, the women in Wilson-Kovacs' chapter speak constantly about the creation of a pleasurable space for themselves. Thus although the family are discussed and referred to, the emphasis of the interviews was on the women's pleasure, and sometimes that of their partners.

Without wishing to fall into clichés of women 'taking control' of their lives, what comes across in all of these chapters are stories of women seeking pleasurable experiences from within the often very stressful constraints – of time, money, and responsibilities to others – infiltrating their everyday lives. Many of the women were very conscious of the critiques (feminist or otherwise) of their consumption and adopted defences to potential criticisms from others. Thus although she is happy to present the pleasure via erotic goods as her own, Kimberley taking part in Wilson-Kovacs' research is aware of the possible limitations of respectable representations of herself and offers a defence of her use of erotic material culture to a potentially critical researcher by arguing that: 'I wouldn't buy this sort of stuff for myself, it's a bit tarty, you know, red, and it's not really me'. It is interesting to consider how women use material culture to help to formulate who the 'real me' is in contrast to the 'me' that might emanate from their discussions of material culture.

Cieraad's chapter further explores the subjective operation of gender in material culture by looking at the various ways in which gender identities are produced at an early age through commercial representations of gender in home design catalogues and

magazines. Of particular interest is the lack of parallel between the various legislative developments to extend women's rights and the increasing development of gender iconography in children's bedrooms. This moves on from McRobbie's influential work on girls and bedroom culture (1991) and, more recently, Lincoln (2005) by focusing on the ways in which gendered aesthetics are created by adults (designers, social planners, magazine editors and marketers) for other adults (parents) and children. The chapter shows how gender operates and is formed not simply through material culture *per se*, but also through 'visibility and display'. Importantly, there was a slippage between the gender representations in the 'ideal' bedrooms of the catalogues and magazines, and the real bedrooms, which formulated the view that gender was often presented in a much more flexible and less one-dimensional way. This opens up fascinating possibilities for studies of material culture, to explore the relationship between socialisation, advertising and real and imagined gender display. It shows that a gendered aesthetics is constantly worked at, developed and negotiated and is rarely pre-determined, despite the increasingly ubiquitous nature of advertising.

It was certainly the case that the women of Pink and Wilson-Kovacs chapters were not seeking 'resistance' or protest through their material cultural behaviour, rather the research shows that the women were looking for ways of *enhancing* their existing positions. This fits with Bourdieuan theory, which suggests that the search for social status is less to do with betterment and 'social climbing', and more to do with acquiring the necessary capital and value as judged by certain distinctive social groups (Bourdieu 1984). The women of Wilson-Kovacs' chapter for example, could be seen to be conforming to dangerous stereotypes of heterosexual sexuality, however Wilson-Kovacs shows how the women manipulated and worked within sexual expectations and norms to maintain power and control. Of course, the extent to which the women were successful in achieving this is debatable, but the chapters add to developments in feminist theory, which have deconstructed traditional, rigid accounts of 'top down' power.

Conclusion

In capitalist market societies, the extent to which the desire for luxury, fantasy and dreaming are socially 'acceptable' facets of the consumption experience varies historically and culturally. In the UK, the period immediately after WWII was associated with the practical and utilitarian possibilities of consumer culture, as the goods and services used to fill working class homes make significant improvements to the everyday and domestic realities of a considerable number of people. The use of the products and inventions of modernity for this purpose had been advocated by women's interest groups well before the War, indicating how for a period of time women's interests coincided in relation to the promises which consumer culture were seen to hold for improving everyday life. In essence, this period is characterised by a process of including the working classes more completely into consumer culture, and it could be speculated that this was possible by addressing the rational and utilitarian

aspects of their needs, as this was socially the most acceptable side of consumerism. However, when young working class women started to have the wherewithal to dress themselves like ladies and consumer culture started to cater for their desires by making cheaper, mass produced goods available, it became apparent that working class consumerism could also move into the realm of the luxurious. It was then that consumerism became a topic of disgruntlement within middle class circles and domestic consumption came to be sketched as the antinomy of women's liberation in accounts of early second wave feminists.

Following Johnson and Lloyd (2004), who question the stubborn dichotomy between home and work in the feminist vision of women's liberation, the question may be raised whether it is not only domestic life that should be reappraised in terms of the opportunities it offers for the betterment of everyday life, but whether the same holds true for the place of the market in domestic and intimate life. There may be intimations that this is happening, for instance, in the changed manner of thinking about the commercialisation of everyday life in feminist inspired research, like that of Hochschild (2002; 2005) and Clarke (in this collection). Whilst we would agree with the traditional feminist viewpoint that it is pertinent to investigate and conceptualise the commercialisation of domestic life, we would emphasise that there is a need to move away from the overtly moralistic and, to our mind, simplistic ways of thinking about the relationship between the market and intimate/domestic life, in preference for more rigorous investigations into the varying ways in which these areas of our life come to intermingle, and the specific social and economic conditions which give rise to the ways in which commercial opportunities successfully find a user base in domestic communities.

Becoming aware of the fact that moralities of consumption connect with the class status of female consumers also opens our eyes to the diverse ways in which consumer culture may be seen as beneficial in everyday life situations. It inspires scepticism of the view that there is one uniform way in which we can improve the quality of our lives. Moreover, it demands a realisation that the life histories of individual women are quite different, rendering the feminist project of self-realisation through engagement in a career outside the domestic sphere meaningless and problematic for scores of women. Instead, it is important to agree that what constitutes betterment in women's lives varies significantly depending on class, age and ethnicity (though this volume has been silent on this aspect of lived subjectivity). Moreover, what the place of consumerism is in women's attempts to make their lives 'that little bit better' is something that requires careful investigation, commentary and recommendation. What it does suggest is that the improvements on offer here may be piecemeal and small-scale. Nevertheless, in terms of everyday life, it may offer the right combination of exercising a rational disposition and letting go in terms of dream like experiences that make everyday life more than has frequently been supposed by commentators of modernity.

This then means rejecting the theoretical truisms that are so often repeated in cultural theory. Postulations such as that rationalism in life creates betterment and stability, but that such stability induces boredom that then needs remedied through

romantic fantasising (see the earlier quotation from Giles 2004: 101), create unnecessary and unhelpful dualities in ways of thinking about betterment. As verified by UK poverty statistics, not everyone has yet managed to realise domestic 'order and stability' through a rational approach to consumer culture. The greatest problem in those sections of the community are not boredom *per sé*, but as outlined in the answers and comments of some of the women accounted in this collection, hardship with its own associated difficulties. What exactly induces boredom and stultification in everyday life is an issue that moves beyond our concerns here. We might draw on Simmel for one suggestion, which is that the massification of culture induces the blasé attitude, or on Campbell, who suggests that modern hedonism itself brings with it the experience of disappointment. This would suggest that boredom as associated with consumer culture is a condition most likely experienced by those who have too much 'of it'. In between these extremes are those who may wield a mixed disposition of rationality and fantasy, and which, one might suggest, offers the best tactic to incorporate excitement in everyday life, as both may be argued to provide satisfaction and pleasures, though in different ways. In stating all this, we are not of the opinion that consumerism is necessary to create happiness in life. Far from it! Whilst we must not dismiss the fact that in today's market societies, we are all consumers, it is clear that the enthusiasm with which we seek diversion and entertainment in this sphere still varies. In addition, and as pointed out by Hochschild (2005), commerce often mediates in the experiences of entertainment and diversion we seek with others; members of our family and friends.

References

- Bauman, Z. (1998). *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*. Buckingham, Open University Press.
- Benson, J. (1994). *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1980*. London, Longman.
- Benson, S. P. (1996). 'Living on the Margin: Working-class Marriages and Family Survival Strategies in the United States, 1919-1941'. In V. de Grazia and E. Furlough (eds) *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*. Berkeley, University of California Press, pp. 212-243.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Campbell, C. (1987). *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Campbell, C. (1995). 'The Sociology of Consumption'. In D. Miller (ed.) *Acknowledging Consumption*. London, Routledge, pp. 96-126.
- Casey, E. (2003). 'Gambling and Consumption: Working Class Women and UK National Lottery Play'. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 3(1): 109-127.

- Casey, E. (2003b). "How Do You Get a PhD in That?!" Using Feminist Epistemologies to Research the Lives of Working Class Women'. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 23(1): 107-123.
- Chin, E. (2001). *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Cieraad, I. (2002). "Out of my kitchen!" Architecture, Gender and Domestic Efficiency'. *Journal of Architecture* 7: 263-279.
- Cowan, R. S. (1983). *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. New York, Basic Books.
- Cross, G. (2000). *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- de Beauvoir, S. (1953). *The Second Sex*. London, Jonathan Cape.
- de Grazia, V. and E. Furlough, eds (1996). *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- DeVault, M. (1991). *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. Chicago, CUP.
- Felski, R. (1995). *The Gender of Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Giard, L. (1998). 'Doing Cooking'. In M. de Certeau, L. Giard and P. Mayol (eds) *The Practice of Everyday Life. Volume 2: Living and Cooking*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, pp. 149-247.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Giles, J. (2002). 'Narratives of Gender, Class, and Modernity in Women's Memories of Mid-Twentieth Century Britain'. *SIGNS* 28(1): 21-41.
- Giles, J. (2004). *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*. Oxford, Berg.
- Greer, G. (1970). *The Female Eunuch*. London, MacGibbon and Kee.
- Hilton, M. (2002). 'The Female Consumer and the Politics of Consumption in Twentieth-Century Britain'. *The Historical Journal* 45(1): 103-128.
- Hilton, M. (2004). 'The Legacy of Luxury: Moralities of Consumption Since the Eighteenth Century'. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4(1): 101-123.
- Hochschild, A. (2002). *The Commodity Frontier: Essay in Honour of Neil Smelser*. Berkeley, Center for Working Families, University of California.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2005). "Rent a Mom" and Other Services: Markets, Meanings and Emotions'. *International Journal of Work, Organisations and Emotion* 1(1): 74-86.
- Horsfield, M. (1998). *Biting the Dust: The Joys of Housework*. London, Fourth Estate.
- Johnson, L. and J. Lloyd (2004). *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife*. Oxford, Berg.
- Lawler, S. (2005). 'Disgusted Subjects: The Making of Middle-Class Identities'. *The Sociological Review* 3(3): 429-446.

- Lincoln, S. (2005). 'Feeling the Noise: Teenagers, Bedrooms and Music'. *Leisure Studies* 24(4): 399-414.
- McRobbie, A. (1991). *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen*. London: Macmillan.
- Martens, L. (2001). *Don't Talk To Me About Consumption! A Comment on the Absence of Consumption in Feminist Research*. Annual BSA Conference, Manchester.
- Martens, L. and S. Scott (2004). *Domestic Kitchen Practices: Routines, Risks and Reflexivity – End of Award Report*. Swindon (UK), Economic and Social Research Council: 1-28.
- Martens, L. and S. Scott (2005). 'The Unbearable Lightness of Cleaning: Representations of Domestic Practice and Products in *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (UK) 1951-2001'. *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 8(3) (December 2005): 371-409.
- Martens, L. and S. Scott (2006). 'Under the Kitchen Surface: Conflicting Constructions of Home'. *Home Cultures* 3(1): 39-62.
- McFeeley, M. D. (2001). *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie? American Women and the Kitchen in the Twentieth Century*. Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press.
- Myrdal, A. and V. Klein (1956). *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Pahl, J. (1989). *Money and Marriage*. London, Macmillan.
- Pankhurst-Ferguson, P. (1994). 'The Flaneur On and Off the Streets of Paris'. In K. Tester (ed.) *The Flaneur*. London, Routledge, pp. 22-42.
- Reith, G. (1999). *The Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture*. London, Routledge.
- Short, F. (2003). 'Domestic Cooking Skills – What Are They?' *Journal of the HEIA* 10(3): 13-22.
- Short, F. (2006). *Kitchen Secrets: The Meaning of Cooking in Everyday Life*. Oxford, Berg.
- Simmel, G. (1978). *The Philosophy of Money*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London, Sage.
- Tomes, N. (1998). *The Gospel of Germs. Men, Women and the Microbe in American Life*. London, Harvard University Press.
- Walkerdine, V. (1997). *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*. London, Macmillan.
- Warde, A. (1997). *Consumption, Food and Taste: Culinary Antinomies and Commodity Culture*. London, Sage.
- Warde, A. and L. Martens (2000). *Eating Out: Social Differentiation, Consumption and Pleasure*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Winship, J. (1987). *Inside Women's Magazines*. London, Pandora.
- Wolff, J. (1985). 'The Invisible Flaneuse: Women in the Literature of Modernity'. *Theory, Culture and Society* 2(3): 37-46.

Index

aesthetics

accepted aesthetics of social groups 92,
228, 235

aestheticisation of everyday life 182

agent 192

of the body (*see also* beauty products) 5

of children's birthday parties 79-80, 89,
228

in department store 235

education 64, 68

experience 117, 192

of food 38, 43

gendered 238

of the home 5, 19, 21, 26, 66-68,
150-151, 154, 178, 191-194, 228

judgement 188

modernist aesthetics 52, 66-68

advertise

advertisement 22-23, 97, 223

personal 97-98, 103-106, 229

advertisers 16-17, 20-21, 29, 52, 104,
236

passive victims of advertisers 150

advertising 18, 20, 98, 165, 169, 238

in lifestyle magazines 207

in a socialist economy 52-53, 57

in women's magazines 23-26

affluence 15, 25-26, 90, 220, 224

Ang, I. 3

Appadurai, A. 1

Baudrillard, J. 142, 181

Bauman, Z. 97, 101, 142

beauty parlours or salons 4, 59, 61

products 15, 21, 23, 28, 232

Beck, U. 40-43, 100, 110-111

Bennett, T. 39

Benson, S.P. 3, 221

binary oppositions (*see also* discursive

binary oppositions) 2, 233

Bourdieu, P. 1, 3, 5, 16, 38, 137, 143-145,
152, 155, 181, 187, 198, 238

Bowlby, R. 3-4, 19, 36-37

Brunsdon, C. 34-37

Campbell, C. 1-2, 119, 26, 240

Carter, E. 16-17

Charles, N. 2-3, 35, 41

Clarke, A. 80, 88, 166, 168, 178, 184-185,
227-230

commercialisation 80, 86

of children's worlds 87

of domestic life 7-8, 34, 38, 226, 227,
239

of domestic work 80

of everyday life 239

of mothering 92

commodification 18, 87, 97, 106-107, 120

commodities 15, 17-18, 20-21, 26-27, 49,
115, 118, 120, 150, 169, 182, 234

commodity frontier, the 5-6, 235, 237,

culture 48, 74

market 97

consumer, the 1, 15, 50-51, 53, 56, 61, 98,
152, 155, 165, 202

the female consumer 5

the passive consumer 170

consumer culture (*see also* cultures of

consumption) 1, 4-5, 17, 38, 45, 51,

97, 106, 117, 123, 126-127, 141,

156, 165, 182, 219, 226, 230,

233-234, 238-240

emerging 16, 21, 28-9

in North-America 220

Russian/Soviet 50, 70

consumption practices 4, 6, 8, 17, 26, 28,
35-36, 45, 112, 141-143, 151-152,

154, 156, 164, 166, 172, 174, 230,
232

consumption studies 1-5, 29, 35, 141-142,
152, 225, 236

cultural capital 17, 19, 137, 144-145, 151,
153, 156, 187, 237

cultures of consumption 1, 15

- Dant, T. 1, 156, 181
 de Beauvoir, S. 222
 de Certeau, M. 1, 182, 191-192
 de Grazia, V. 3, 15-17
 DeVault, M. 2, 35, 41, 45, 79, 85, 130, 136, 143, 226, 236
 Deem, R. 126
 department store 3, 17-9, 21, 23, 28, 35, 53, 56-57, 60, 89, 136, 165, 222, 233, 235
 and new employment opportunities 19
 discursive binary oppositions 2, 233
 domestic
 aesthetics (*see* aesthetics of the home)
 consumption 5-7, 15-31, 33-35, 37-39, 44-45, 48, 109, 142-3, 164, 168, 170, 172, 174, 176-178, 181-182, 191-192, 198, 214-215, 222, 230, 236, 239.
 practice 37, 44, 226
 practices 3, 6, 141, 164-168, 177-178, 223, 226
 service 7, 15, 17, 19-20, 24, 26, 28, 169, 176, 221
 space (*see* domestic sphere and private sphere)
 sphere, the (*see* the private sphere)
 technology (*see* labour saving domestic technology)
 domesticity 7, 15, 18, 20, 22, 30, 34-35, 37, 39, 44-47, 65-68, 82, 85-86, 92, 125-126, 149, 178, 205, 221-222, 224
 Douglas, M. 1, 142, 181, 185, 188
 dreams and dreaming 8, 19-20, 24-29, 57, 64, 68, 81, 116, 119, 123-124, 134-137, 186, 197, 209, 211, 213, 220, 224, 230-231, 233-234, 238-239
 perceived as silly 24
 Durkheim, E. 184
 economic
 capital 137, 144
 investment 54, 109
 emotions 142, 144-145, 155
 emotional 7, 8, 24-26, 53, 82, 85, 102-103, 105, 111-114, 117-120, 143-145, 152, 171, 181, 185, 190, 225, 227
 emotional capital 5, 8, 141, 144-145, 151-154, 156
 emotional investment 109, 141, 43
 emotional labour 141, 145, 151
 emotional safety 25
 emotionalisation 21
 everyday life (*see also* aestheticisation of everyday life) 8, 15, 17, 30, 34, 39, 51, 56, 66, 68, 118, 123, 127, 136, 142, 146, 150-151, 155, 164-165, 181-182, 187, 223, 225, 227, 230, 234, 238-240
 experience of 17
 material culture of 54
 privatised (*see also* commercialisation of everyday life) 15
 fairytale 115, 117
 family, the
 children 125-126, 129, 133-136, 146, 151, 155, 171-172, 197
 nuclear 15, 65, 110
 relationships with 26, 147
 responsibility 88, 200-201
 fantasy 112-116, 136, 142, 184, 187, 199, 230, 233-234, 238, 240
 Featherstone, M. 1, 142, 152, 182
 Felski, R. 16, 18, 34, 39
 feminism, second wave 33-35, 37, 43-45, 222-223
 academic feminism 16, 184, 230
 feminist, the v, 7, 33-37, 39-47, 239
 reticence on consumption 3, 4, 222
 food preparation 3, 23, 27, 35, 38-39, 41-43, 84-85, 90, 134, 151
 Foucault, M. 182
 Friedan, B. 36-44, 222-223, 226
 Friedman, J. 142
 Geer, G. 33, 222
 Geertz, C. 166-167
 gender
 in consumption research 1-2, 150-151
 gender-informed ways of thinking about consumption 2-5
 gender relations 3, 6, 97, 123
 identity 2, 15, 33, 36-38, 112-114, 133, 141-142, 164, 174-175, 185, 235
 gender roles 17, 110, 113, 198, 210, 216
 historical construction of 4, 6-7, 16-17, 24-25, 27, 35, 49-51, 110, 169, 222-226

- Giddens, A. 99, 110-111, 124, 142, 152-153, 182, 228
- Giles, J. 7, 15, 17-18, 23, 29, 34, 37, 43, 221-224, 230-240
- Goffman, E. 185, 190
- Gronow, J. 1, 141, 219
- Hall, S. 16, 35, 39
- Hochschild, A. 5-6, 145, 190, 225, 227-228, 239-240
- Hollows, J. 35-39, 44, 221-224, 226
- home
 commodification of the 18
 the privatised 20, 34-35, 154, 199, 207, 215
 the sensory home 164-165, 168-173, 236-237
- Horsfield, M. 33, 222
- housewife 7, 10, 18, 20-24, 27-30, 33-48, 57, 61, 66-68, 85, 158, 163-164, 172-173, 175, 177, 206, 212, 221-224, 226, 241
- Ideal Home Exhibition 17, 20, 28
- idealism 80-82, 92, 113, 117, 136, 151, 172-173, 227-228
- Ilmonen, K. 1, 155
- income 24, 82, 91, 110, 123, 127, 131, 136, 146, 231, 237
- individualism 2-3, 40, 53, 66-67, 99, 105, 111, 150, 153-154, 166-168, 190-191, 209, 236, 239
- intimacy 109, 145, 147, 151, 154, 156, 181-193, 236
- Jackson, S. 2-3, 6, 44, 80, 143, 154
- 'just looking' 19
- Kerr, M. 2-3, 35, 41
- kitchen practices 33, 38-39, 43-44, 55-57, 61, 146-156, 176, 215, 233
- Kuhn, A. 136
- labour saving domestic technology 19-21, 40, 222, 255
- leisure ix, 2, 11, 19, 34, 47, 72, 93, 124-126, 131, 138-139, 188, 242
- Leonard, D. 98-99, 113
- lifestyles 35, 60, 65, 97, 135, 182-183, 228, 231
- longing 24-28, 137
- love 184, 228
- Lovell, T. 3, 144
- Lury, C. 4, 20
- McKendrick, J.H. 80
- McRobbie, A. 3, 16, 182-183
- magazines, women's (*see* women's magazines)
- manipulation 17, 52, 120
- markets 144-145, 223, 225
- Marx, K. 54
- material culture 1, 4-5, 8, 51, 54, 67, 80, 88, 91, 164, 181, 185, 203, 220, 235-238
- mass production 61, 67
- media 99, 111, 164, 209, 211, 215
- middle class women 18-20, 24, 28-29, 37, 42, 191, 221, 223
- Miller, D. 1-2, 35, 44-45, 130, 142, 150, 152, 164, 166, 168, 172, 176
- modernity 3, 7, 16-17, 29, 34, 43, 61, 66, 99, 124, 182, 212-213, 220-239
- money management 125, 127, 130-134
- moralities of consumption 225, 229-230, 239
- Mort, F. 16, 35
- mundane 1-2, 8, 17, 34, 39, 45, 52, 109, 137, 143, 127, 181, 187-188, 219
- narratives 16-17, 25, 34, 99, 106, 146, 152, 153, 185, 192
- Nava, M. 3-4, 16, 29, 35, 106, 136
- Nixon, S. 4, 35
- normality 33, 179, 228, 240
- Oakley, A. 2-3, 36
- ordinary 1, 33-34, 45, 62, 109, 123, 131, 137, 141, 151, 187, 191, 219
- Pahl, J. 3, 85, 110, 236
- Parker, G. 2, 85
- performance and performativity 6, 42, 82, 112, 118-120, 145, 143, 170-171, 181, 187, 226, 235-236
- phantasmagoria 16

- Pink, S. 5-8, 166, 168, 170-171, 235-236, 238
- pleasure v, ix, 6, 8-11, 16, 20, 23-24, 26, 28, 41, 48, 108, 109-121, 124, 126, 129, 136-138, 152, 156, 169, 182, 184, 187, 190, 192, 195, 230-231, 235-237, 240, 242
- popular culture 3, 16, 119, 137, 209, 211
- post-modernity 1, 97, 124, 170, 220
- poverty 17, 25-27, 63, 130-131, 240
- private sphere, the 6, 43, 110, 182
- public and private 6, 34-35, 42, 44, 68, 72, 235
- public sphere, the 4, 17, 34-36, 38, 80
- qualitative research 97-98, 135, 146, 183
- Radway, J. 3
- reality television 33
- Reay, D. 145
- reflexivity 152-153, 171
- Reith, G. 131, 229
- respectable 19, 23, 41, 123, 125, 131-134, 230-231, 233, 237
- retail 54, 142
- revolutions 16, 61, 65-66, 209
- Ribbens, J. 85-86, 91
- Ritzer, G. 126
- romance 7, 97, 111-120, 191, 230, 234, 240
- romantic fiction 3, 21-25
- Rubin, L.B. 2, 134
- Scanlon, J. 3
- Scott, S. 33, 45, 220, 223, 227
- self, the 6, 8, 97, 107-108, 113, 137, 142, 145, 151-153, 155, 193, 232
- self-development 53
- self-fashioning 19, 185
- self-realisation 17, 222, 224, 239
- sensory experiences 8, 176, 235-236
- sexualities 113, 184, 190, 219, 236, 238
- shopping vii-viii, 2-3, 5, 9-11, 17-20, 23, 30-31, 35, 38, 47, 49-50, 57-59, 68, 79-81, 86, 88, 89-90, 93, 138, 186, 194-195, 206, 232-233
- Shove, E. 164, 169-170, 176
- sign 44, 114, 120, 209, 220
- signifier 22, 37, 45, 60, 114
- Silva, E.B. 3, 5, 8, 143-144, 147, 152, 154-155, 164, 176
- Simmel, G. 240
- Skeggs, B. 3, 45, 92, 136, 145, 154, 237
- Slater, D. 6, 141-142, 155
- social change 98
- spectacular 18, 35, 111, 116
- Stacey, J. 18, 85
- stereotypes 97, 127, 189, 192, 238
- Storr, M. 240
- suburbia 7, 15, 17, 20-26, 44, 221-222, 224
- surveillance 7, 19, 53, 66, 235
- taste 15, 18-19, 21-24, 28, 40-41, 144, 147, 155-156, 163, 168, 224-225
- technologies 3, 25, 26, 56, 146, 170, 178, 204-215, 222, 226
- time squeeze 33, 40, 43, 57, 82, 85, 126-130, 222, 226, 237
- Tomes, N. 223
- transformation 6, 67, 203, 223-226
- twentieth century 15-18, 21, 136, 165-167, 198-201, 212, 220-224
- utopias 17, 42, 66
- Veblen, T. 3
- victims (women as) 16, 36, 131, 150
- Warde, A. 1, 6, 35, 43, 98, 106, 141, 152, 219, 227
- wastefulness 7-8, 24, 124, 127, 132
- Weber, M. 1
- weddings 5-8, 109-120, 234
- welfare 15, 25, 90
- Wilson, E. 16
- Winship, J. 21
- women's magazines (*see also* advertising in women's magazines) 3, 15, 18-29, 36, 98, 111-115, 204-206, 221, 227, 238
- working class women (*see also* respectable) 19-22, 24-25, 28-30, 124-125, 127, 130-131, 136-138, 221, 224, 229-234, 237, 239-241
- Zukin, S. 184