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ProQuest Number: 10700967

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Reconsidering the superstore workplace: a Sheffield case study of segmentation and technology

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of
Sheffield Hallam University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2002

Collaborating organisation: The University of Sheffield

Abstract

Retailing is back on the research agenda and the analysis of consumption processes is providing a fertile source of insightful geographical literature. Yet despite this interest, the retail workplace remains on the margins of disciplinary concerns. Given this situation, it is time that the retail workplace was reconsidered.

The reconsideration within this thesis concentrates on the superstore workplace and attempts to challenge existing applications of labour market segmentation theory. This challenge is driven by an interest in information and communication technology (ICT) and a realisation that these technologies must be understood with reference to human interaction.

The empirical analysis centres on one case study, a food-selling superstore in Sheffield. As an empirical link between theory and qualitative analysis, secondary human resource statistics are analysed to provide a guide to segmentation within the store. Qualitative research techniques are used to build an in-depth understanding of different employees activities and experiences.

The secondary data suggests that segmentation remains an important framework for organisation within the retail superstore. However, qualitative research illustrates how existing theoretical conceptualisations of the segmented superstore might be problematised by a series of power relationships (dictation, delegation and authority) that are, in part, facilitated by the use of ICTs.

These power relationships are in turn reinterpreted within individual worker strategies of manipulation and resistance. Here, workers regularly use ICTs in different ways than the remote head office might have originally intended. It is also suggested that the consent to work for many disadvantaged workers has to be understood by reference to a series of social concerns from outside the workplace (childcare, other domestic relationships, financial survival, lifestyle choice, social experience and self-esteem).

These findings suggest a rich vein for additional research and the retail workplace should be pushed to the centre of geographical debate for further analysis.

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1 Introduction

This brief chapter sets the research project within its context. The first section presents a synopsis of the research problem. This section is followed by a brief background to the existing literature. Attention is then expended upon the emerging research questions and the selected research methods. The final section of the chapter provides a brief thesis outline.

1.1 The research problem

This thesis concentrates upon the food-selling superstore and the geography of employment within this work-*place*. Within this geography of employment, particular attention is centred upon the division of labour and the segmentation of tasks within the retail superstore. It is suggested that this requires an understanding of a series of relationships across space. Rather than viewing the retail workplace as a pure economic space which is simply subject to the laws of supply and demand, it is asserted that particular attention should be given to the social relationships that make the economic space of the retail superstore *work*. These relationships are related to the company hierarchy, the internal segmentation of labour within the store, the power relations which emerge through the use of ICTs to transfer information across space and a series of external social forces from 'outside' the workplace.

It is anticipated that these combined elements represent a reconsideration of the retail superstore workplace. The desire to undertake this reconsideration was prompted through an interest in widespread claims over new working practices. A range of commentators, both from academic and non-academic backgrounds, have suggested that the late 1990s and the entrance into a new Millennium coincides with a shift towards a reported 'Information Age'. Packaged under various all-encompassing monikers (such as the 'Global Economy', the 'Knowledge Society' or the 'Information Revolution'), there is general consensus over the importance to advanced societies of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the belief that information and knowledge are a key determinant of economic success and social prosperity:

> Today the Internet is revolutionising our access to information - the way we communicate, educate, buy and sell - and from the acquisition and servicing of people to the management of stocks and supplies, the Internet is transforming the way we do business.
>
> Gordon Brown MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 6th March 2000[1]

The rhetoric produced through this continued social commentary pronounces that ICTs (such as e-mail and the Internet) allow global communication. Traditional geographical barriers are being 'broken down' by the power of business to consumer and business to business electronic commerce. Inevitably, in an 'Information Revolution' similar to the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, immense social and economic change is being allowed through the use of ICTs and the emergence of new working practices.

Following a series of theorists working within the social sciences, this research project was inspired by a sceptical approach to an 'Information Revolution'. Nevertheless, and despite a series of accounts which have challenged the deterministic model of an 'Information Revolution' (see Chapter 2), it was suggested that the retail sector remained poorly understood and research around the utilisation of ICTs within the retail workplace remained limited. However, retail researchers regularly asserted that a 'Retail Revolution' had occurred and that more recent changes to working practices had involved the use of ICTs. Given these proclamations, it was suggested that detailed research should attempt to understand how technology was *really* used within contemporary retail working practices. In short, it seemed an appropriate time to undertake a reconsideration of the retail superstore workplace.

As the sub-title to the thesis implies, this reconsideration was attempted through a Sheffield case study of segmentation and technology. The use of a particular case study in Sheffield provided the most appropriate means for answering an emerging set of research questions (see Section 1.3). Specific reference will be made to this case study subsequently (see Section 1.4). As the following section illustrates, segmentation theory was presented as a tool for analysing the retail workplace. Given the existence of previous work within the field, it was suggested that segmentation theory provided the most appropriate starting point for an analysis of contemporary employee relations within the superstore workplace, including the use of technology.

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[1] Taken from the UK Government's press release website - http://195.44.11.137/coi/coipress.nsf.

1.2   A brief background to the existing literature

In aiming for a geographical reconsideration of the retail work-*place*, an initial move was made into the new economic geographical literature of the 1990s. As a prominent strand of contemporary thought, new economic geography demonstrated the social nature of modern economies (Thrift and Olds, 1996). However, it was felt that new economic geography failed (for the most part) to acknowledge the importance of consumer services. In response to these failings, it was discovered that a series of researchers had attempted to combine varied interests in culture and economy to create a new retail geography (see Wrigley and Lowe, 1996). It was felt that this approach provided a useful theoretical approach from where to begin a reconsideration of the retail superstore workplace.

Through this new retail geography, researchers had covered a range of diverse topics including retail employment relations (see Wrigley and Lowe, 1996). Amongst other elements of interest, attention was directed towards retail power relations and the segmented nature of the superstore labour market. In its simplest terms, retail segmentation theory speculated on a dualist divide in the organisation of the superstore workplace. Here, different terms and work conditions were associated to a minority of permanent, full-time managers (the primary sector) and a vast majority of temporary, part-time shop-floor workers (the secondary sector) (see Bluestone et al, 1981).

However, segmentation theory had developed outside the confines of new retail geography across four complex generations of development from the early 1970s. The first two generations' interest in capitalist demand-side processes and a neglect of the motivations of the worker (Rubery, 1978) was redressed by third generation segmentation theory. Third generation theorists still traced the segmentation of the workforce to capitalist control strategies. However, social reproduction, state action and trade unionism were also viewed as contributory factors.

A range of researchers had addressed a series of broad retail workplace issues from both sides of the dualist management/shop-floor segmentation. To this end, Freathy (1993; 1997) and Freathy and Sparks (1994; 1995; 1995a; 1996) provided a selection of papers in an attempt to move towards a segmented framework for the retail superstore workplace. Freathy's (1993) original classificatory framework suggested that the retail superstore labour market of Manchester was highly segmented into a primary and secondary sector. He stated that the primary sector could be sub-divided into a series of senior management, department management and supervisory tiers. In

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addition, he asserted that further sub-divisions could also be identified in the secondary sector based on the working conditions of the clerical and sales assistant staff.

The reported segmentation of the retail workforce was related to a series of factors. Earlier reference was made to capitalist control strategies and consideration was also given to different working practices and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). However, reconsideration and a return to original theoretical conceptualisations has shown that a broader theoretical approach is required.

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First, it is suggested that attempts to understand the retail workplace cannot be understood without a comprehensive understanding of space, spatiality and power relations. This is set within the context of wider geographical thinking, provided by Lefebvre, Soja, Pickles and Harvey. Rather than being a simple 'container' within which processes are enacted, it is recognised that space cannot be understood independently of the human actors that shape it. Given this background, Peck's attempt to 'reassert space' into segmentation theory is forwarded

Building from third generation segmentation theory's turn to the supply-side, it is shown how Peck believes that external social forces, and inevitably labour market functioning, varies across space, with specific results in different places. Whilst useful in itself, Peck's work draws heavily on Massey's (1995) realist account of power, an account which John Allen (1997) suggests (like much of human geography) is under-theorised. Given these fears, attempts are thus made to analyse different conceptions of power. Realism and networked conceptions of power are discussed before a lengthy analysis of Foucault's diagrammatic conception of power. This, it is suggested, helps us to understand how power is exercised and individuals self-regulated through the institutional organisation of space.

Yet despite the inherent strengths of the diagrammatic approach, Foucault's (1977) diagrammatic conception of power (the Panopticon) is restricted to embedded spatial arrangements of power (after Allen, 1997). We show how the extension of power over distance problematises its reach – and how Allen believes we need to rethink theories of power to include a conceptualisation of the different modes power takes when the spatiality of social relations are considered. These modes of power can include authority, coercion, seduction, manipulation, inducement, negotiation,

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persuasion, incitement, constraint and resistance. Given our interest in spatiality and social relations, Allen's approach is particularly pertinent. We take this approach forward into an analysis of the literature surrounding ICTs, social relations and the transfer of information and knowledge across space.

Against a general dearth of understanding concerning contemporary retail employment relations, it is recognised that Freathy and Sparks' (1994) attempts to comprehend the 'impact' of ICTs form a useful reference point for contemporary fieldwork. However, reading from across the social sciences suggests that Freathy and Sparks' (1994) choice of language (and most other retail researchers) is inherently problematic. The word 'impact' is deterministic and suggests that technology will, without any doubt, have an effect upon the retail workplace.

In an attempt to break away from pre-judgmental language, it is noted that Webster (1995) suggests that social theory provides a rich source for understanding recent trends in the information domain. Through political economy, it is suggested that if ICTs are to bring about significant economic changes, they will be shaped by the preceding orders of capitalist accumulation and will favour the interests of already dominant capitalists. However, political economy's concentration upon capitalism means that the intervention of social relations on the deployment of ICTs is unrecognised. At the same time, social constructionism (SCOT), an alternative theoretical approach, concentrates solely on the role of human processes. An appropriate balance is therefore required. Network society, virtualism and soft capitalism approaches help to explain the disputed nature of capitalism in information-intensive contemporary Western societies. And theories around the discursive production of space and the electronic market hypothesis help us to appreciate how the nature of a firm is ever-changing and always contested.

Against this backdrop, we conceptualise actor-network theory (ANT). Through this wholly relational conceptualisation, technologies can only become understood through their context of use. ANT helps us to understand how despite powerful retail capitalists attempts to control space, networks of socio-technical relations fail. And as Murdoch (1998) and Allen (1997) suggest, there is some scope for negotiation in network spaces.

One such networked space is the retail workplace and this scope for negotiation is particularly vivid in the roles that workers perform in the service work-space. While powerful capitalists set many roles, the individual actor can also perform workplace

roles in individual coping strategies. We show how various authors have shown that service workers will go to great lengths to enact gender to create a positive view of their work. For example, male workers construct an interpretation of their work as 'honourable' so they can create a positive interpretation of their work (Leidner, 1991). Other men masculinise 'feminised' service work through lads' night outs or sexual metaphors (Morgan and Knights, 1991; McDowell and Court, 1994). We show how individual performers stage a display to hide from the management gaze or perform different roles depending upon the nature of the social encounter (Crang, 1994). And that given the demands of their work and the need to 'go out and show the real you' (Crang, 1994: 696), there was often no clear divide between the service worker's self, labour and product (Hochschild, 1983). Therefore, the performances of service staff are of socially embodied selves.

Following Peck (1996: 34), it is necessary to 'look over the factory gate' to consider the relations which help fuse this embodied self. Social relations are constructed in the wider relation between home and work (after Massey, 1984). Following Gregson and Lowe (1995), we call for an extension of spatiality to include the multiple meanings of home space. More than that, we consider how these multiple meanings interact with the multiple meanings of the workplace. Access to childcare facilities and the 'informal' care provided by family and friends is essential (Holloway, 1998; Dyck, 1990). And time away from children allows mothers to develop social networks outside the home (Holloway, 1998).

In addition to gender and the home space, ageism has significant implications for research (Pain, 1997). So given Harper and Laws (1995) dismay that few geographers have unravelled the meaning and spatial representations of age, we show how a political economy approach can be used to highlight some of the issues around the use of an increasingly aged and temporary workforce. Beyond this, we draw upon postmodernism to show how thinkers such as Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) have deconstructed the universal life cycle. Rather than follow a set of stage posts such as 'young, middle-aged and old', the postmodernist life course teaches us that age actually varies between individuals, and between time and place. To this end, we draw upon work by Mansvelt (1997), Pain et al (2000) and Mowl et al (2000), who show that stereotypical representations of old age can be resisted.

1.3   Research questions

Having delved back into 'the theory' (as the previous section has shown), I have developed a broader ontological framework. The research originally made full use of retail theory, drawing heavily on Paul Freathy, Jamie Peck and segmentation theory. This work is now set within a much broader technological, economic and geographical context. The specific research questions (questions b-e, below) remain - but it is suggested that they are set within this more comprehensive theoretical framework. For this reason, I have added a further question to encapsulate this additional theoretical material (question a).

Chapters 4-7 present the findings of the research and each chapter provides an answer to the four remaining questions (questions b, c, d and e). However, it is also suggested that these questions are themselves contained within the broader context of the first question (question a). It is hoped that the reader will pay regard to this question as they consider the other four questions (Chapters 4-7):

a) Given the social production of the retail workplace, what are the relations of technology, power, performance, display, gender and age that make this economic space work? (additional question)

b) How does the organisation of labour within the store correspond to Freathy's (1993) application of segmentation theory? (see Chapter 4)

c) How do the store workers' activities correspond to Freathy's (1993) application of segmentation theory? (see Chapter 5)

d) Given specific case study evidence, in what ways might existing theoretical conceptualisations of the retail superstore workplace be reconsidered? (see Chapter 6)

e) How can the structure of superstore employment relations also be the outcome of supply-side determinants? (see Chapter 7)

Through the final summary to each chapter, it is suggested that specific concerns emerge. Each subsequent analytical chapter then attempts to address these concerns more comprehensively. Using the additional question (question a) as an epistemological

base, the conclusion to the research attempts to summarise these findings within the broader context of the extended theoretical literature.

1.4   Research methods

In an attempt to answer these questions, relevant theoretical conceptualisations were contrasted to particular analytical evidence. This analytical evidence was collected through a series of different research techniques.

An initial stage involved interviews with a series of senior retail managers within Sheffield. A questionnaire was constructed in order to ascertain information about each senior manager's store across employment, organisation and technology variables. In total, fourteen senior managers were interviewed and their responses recorded. Through selective transcription, key responses were detailed and conclusions drawn. From this information, a specific Sheffield superstore was selected for further in-depth case study research. The case study store was selected because it was believed that the store was at the cutting-edge of retail practices (including ICTs) and the senior management encouraged access. Locally-based research was selected because it was acknowledged that there would be a regular requirement to return to the case over a prolonged period of time and it was hoped that prior knowledge of the Sheffield labour market would assist case study interpretation.

Following Stake's (1994) instrumental approach, the case study played a supportive role to facilitate an understanding of the individual workers, the embedded units of analysis (after Yin, 1989), within the store. In-depth analysis then compared the different activities and experiences of the workers across the different segmentations of the superstore. This analysis required careful sampling to ensure a coverage of segmentations and worker roles within the case study store. To assist the process, the store's personnel manager provided a plethora of statistical human resource information. This data covered areas such as job title, hours worked, gender and remuneration.

The method selected for the analysis of the individual workers experiences and activities was qualitative interviewing. Above all else, it was suggested that the majority of labour market research often relied upon quantitative research and it was hoped that qualitative analysis would provide a new layer of comprehension. Inevitably, a prolonged period of 36 interviews with various staff members presented the multiple realities of the segmented superstore. This was attempted through the careful

construction of a semi-structured interview schedule. Given the wide range of theoretical concerns within the thesis, and an associated desire to maintain some control over the interview process, semi-structured open-ended questions (with a series of prompts and probes) were utilised. A set of closed questions were also used to provide contextual information, such as personal characteristics and individual career histories.

On the completion of these interviews, there followed a sustained period of analysis. Through this period of analysis, it became apparent that the use of secondary evidence could provide a further level of interpretation. It was identified that the human resource data, used previously within the construction of a sampling matrix for potential interviewees, could provide a detailed description of in-store segmentation.

1.5   Thesis outline

The following chapter provides an extended literature review and reports on attempts to move towards a theoretical understanding. Given this conceptualisation, the third chapter presents a series of research questions and appropriate research methods. The subsequent four chapters present the study's empirical findings. Chapter Four presents a description of the case and concentrates upon secondary evidence in an attempt to allude towards the segmented nature of the store. Chapter Five provides a further layer of understanding and searches for evidence of segmentation in employee activities from qualitative data. Given these findings, Chapter Six attempts to detail grounds for a reconsideration of the retail superstore workplace. As a final level of interpretation, Chapter Seven considers a series of external social concerns that highlight a fragile balance between company control and worker consent. Finally, Chapter Eight provides a series of conclusions. As stated earlier, these conclusions are set within the broader context of the extended theoretical literature.

2 Towards a theoretical understanding

This chapter reviews relevant literature in an effort to provide a theoretical framework for analytical research. This survey commences from the position of retail geography and debates disciplinary attempts to move towards a new retail geography of employment. The reported presence of a dualist segmentation within the retail labour market prompts an explanation and guide to three generations of segmentation theory. Following the completion of this guide, evidence of segmentation within the retail labour market and a detailed consideration of Freathy's (1993) application of segmentation theory are considered. The subsequent development of Peck's (1996) fourth generation segmentation theory is then contemplated within the context of wider debates around space, spatiality and power. This is followed by a consideration of the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the retail workplace. Concerns over deterministic 'impact' driven approaches to ICT analysis are raised before a search for alternative approaches, including political economy, are presented. Inevitably, actor-network theory is conceptualised as an approach to analyse the use of ICTs in the retail workplace. Next, we consider theory around work as performance and as an embodied practice in an attempt to provide a broader understanding of the social space of the retail workplace. This is followed by a discussion of geographies of the home and age. Finally, the emerging theoretical framework is outlined in a concluding synopsis.

2.1 Movement towards a new retail geography of employment

At the end of the 1980s, it would not have been overly-dramatic to declare that retail geography had not received the significant disciplinary attention it required. Michelle Lowe (1991) paid regard to this deficiency by way of a comparison to economic geography's considerable research effort within the 'more masculine' subject areas of business and manufacturing. Against the dominant interest in production and business, Lowe (1991) stated that it was essential to distinguish the contribution made by consumer services, like retailing, to the national economy.

Williams (1997: 218) extended considerable support suggesting that, rather than existing as a 'parasitic' activity relying on the so-called more productive sectors of industry for its survival, retailing generated vast income and provided work for over 1 in 10 (10.7 per cent) of all labourers in employment in the UK. Nicholas Blomley (1996) also agreed whole-heatedly with Lowe's (1991) preceding proposition and held an attacking stance suggesting that:

I have often been struck that retail geography could be - should be - one of the most interesting of sub-disciplines, given the subtlety and importance of retail capital, consumption and space. Unfortunately, it had been made into one of the most boring of fields.

(Blomley, 1996: 256)

The inadequate analysis of retailing, that had characterised the literature (Ducatel and Blomley, 1990), stretched to the research interests of new economic geography (Lee and Wills, 1997; Thrift and Olds, 1996). Notwithstanding its many strengths, and despite the shift from production to service industries in employment terms (Sparks, 1982), Lowe and Wrigley (1996: 3) suggested that new economic geography followed a production-centric lead, offering 'relatively few insights into the innovatory aspects of 'consumption work''. It is within this context that attempts to forge a 'new' retail geography emerged (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996; Hallsworth and Taylor, 1996). Given the aforementioned lack of coverage within new economic geography, attention shifted towards a reconstructed retail geography. This reconstruction endeavoured to situate retailing within the wider context of socio-economic change (Hallsworth and Taylor, 1996) and the new retail geography was characterised, above all else, by theoretical engagement (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996).

Lowe and Wrigley (1996: 4) argued that the early 1990s represented a period when, at last, 'retail geography began to take its economic geographies seriously'. An enhanced recognition of the role of the service economy (Dunham, 1997; Williams, 1997) spurred a new interest in the many facets of retail capital (Wrigley, 1991; Ducatel and Blomley, 1990). However, as welcome as this interest was, these new economic geographies of retailing coincided with a profound 'cultural turn' within critical human geography (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996; Blomley, 1996; Crang, 1996; Jackson and Thrift, 1995). This emerging cultural perspective demanded new elaborations within retail

research and, in parallel to the remainder of the social sciences (Miller, 1995: 1), there was 'a considerable and relatively sudden explosion of interest in the topic of consumption'. Therefore, with the cultural turn, the emerging desire to study the economic geographies of retailing production had inevitably required a balanced awareness of the logic of consumption.

Ducatel and Blomley's (1990) seminal text attempted to incorporate a recognition of the specificity of retail capital into theoretical accounts of overall accumulation. They advised that theoretically informed investigations should have the concept of 'separation in unity' at their centre; whereby, retail capital (although driven by a separate logic) was viewed as part of a larger circuit of capital. They contended that within this circuit, retail capital held a unique locus between production and consumption. Sayer and Walker (1992: 85) also referred to the mediation between consumption and production. They declared that the majority of retailing activity was akin to post-production labour, thereby simply extending production across space and time towards the sites of consumption:

> As the mass of consumption has grown, the division of labour has shifted more towards work done in support of the immense social process of selling.
>
> (Sayer and Walker, 1992: 85)

Freathy and Sparks (1996) similarly referred to retail's central role as a link between production and consumption and Townsend, Sadler and Hudson (1996) acquiesced, viewing retail as a link between global production and local sites of consumption. Inevitably, stated Blomley (1996: 238), the mediation between production and consumption represented a 'shattering' of economy and culture. As a result, he declared that this 'multiple implication' had to be inherent within reconstructed retail geographies:

> A retail geography worthy of its name must take both its economic and cultural geographies seriously.
>
> (Blomley, 1996: 238)

Wrigley and Lowe's (1996: 5) collected volume highlighted movement within this direction and suggested a reconstructed retail geography where the economic and

cultural were 'enmeshed and mutually constituted'. Inherently, demanded Crewe and Gregson (1998: 41), it was necessary to understand the complexity of contemporary retail geographies through a recognition of consumption as, 'a social experience as well as an economic transaction'.

Wrigley and Lowe (1996) suggested that a plethora of new retail geographers had covered a broad range of issues such as corporate restructuring, regulatory state relations, gender and retail capital. Retail employment relations had also received increased attention but Kirby (1993) suggested that this area of investigation remained under-researched. In offering such an opinion, Kirby was not alone. Christopherson (1996) suggested that whilst the culture of consumption had received increased research attention, consumption workplaces remained relatively neglected. Lowe and Wrigley (1996: 22) concurred, suggesting that employees at work within these consumption landscapes had been, 'hidden from geographical enquiry'. Sparks (1987) found this anomaly perplexing, particularly given the 2 million people working within the distributive trades. Employment concerns were inevitably critical because efficiencies were viewed by the retail companies as vital (Freathy and Sparks, 1996). However, as Lowe and Crewe dejectedly declared:

> Despite the fact that the largest retailers are now amongst the biggest companies in the UK, the retail trade is typically seen as an insignificant backwater, a sector which is somewhat tangential to the 'real' world of production.
>
> (Lowe and Crewe, 1991: 345)

Nevertheless, this ignorance also provides the researcher with a 'gamut of work opportunities' (Lowe and Crewe, 1991). To successfully embrace these opportunities, and to follow the lead of new retail geography, potential research requires sound theoretical grounding. This obligates an understanding of other work within the field.

To fully comprehend the socio-economic trends and associated effects of the service industries, it has been suggested that due regard must be given to the retail labour market (Christopherson, 1989; Lowe and Crewe, 1991). Movement towards this comprehension was achieved through a consideration of the social relations, as well as the economic transactions, of consumption work (see Lowe and Wrigley, 1996: 23-24; Wrigley and Lowe, 1996: Chapters 8-11). This consideration, as opposed to a simple concentration upon the number of jobs provided, attempted to re-inject culture into the

lexicon of retail geography (Lowe and Wrigley, 1996). Central to this project was an explicit recognition of the inherent power relationships which allow the consumption workplace to function. Hallsworth and Taylor (1996) suggested that it was only through an understanding, of the different forms that power assumed, that a researcher would be able to successfully interpret contemporary retail geographies.

Towards this end, Crang (1994) proffered a number of geographies (namely surveillance, display and location), which he suggested helped to constitute the character of employment within one specific retail environment. In another case, Bonamy and May (1997) suggested that the traditional form of retail efficiency through operations has been replaced by efficiency through relationships. With regards to such relationships, they referred to the importance of interactivity and the division between subordination and autonomy. Bonamy and May's desire to emphasise a dual relationship squared neatly with Sparks' (1992) proposition that contemporary retail employment was characterised by a series of dichotomies. Most notably, suggested Bluestone et al (1981), there existed a dualist segmentation in the retail labour market between a minority of permanent, full-time managers and a vast majority of temporary, part-time shop-floor workers. Freathy (1993; 1997) and Freathy and Sparks (1994; 1995; 1995a; 1996) upheld the utilisation of segmentation theory as a framework to interpret the retail labour market. Given their suggestions, the following section provides an overview of the major theoretical components of segmentation theory.

2.2   Understanding segmentation theory

As with Freathy's (1993) original classificatory framework for the superstore labour market, this section does not provide a comprehensive segmentation theory literature review (for an extensive survey, see Peck, 1989a; 1996). Instead, the intention is to chart the development of the theory in an attempt to provide a guide to some of the key concepts of segmentation.

Morrison (1990) commenced his evaluation by proclaiming that the term 'segmentation' was commonly used within the wide, multidisciplinary literature on labour markets. However, he also suggested that the term usually carried a series of different meanings within this literature. Rubery (1978), in her attempts to form an understanding of segmentation, traced the origins of the theory to the persistence of low paid sectors within advanced economic societies and she suggested that the

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segmentation of the labour market had long been considered a cause of inequality and low wages (she referred to Mill, 1849; Cairnes, 1874). Within the 1970s, Rubery (1978) stated that key advances to the theory analysed the relationship between the development of economic structures and the emergence of segmented labour markets. Peck (1989a) affirmed that the maturity of the theory, emphasising class struggle, institutional forms and the sphere of reproduction, provided a credible alternative to orthodox (or neo-classical) theorisation of the labour market. Peck (1996) suggested that the evolution towards this theoretical maturity could be presented through four generations of development.

First generation segmentation theory had its origins in Doeringer and Piore's (1971) dual notion (dualism) of the labour market. Freathy (1993) suggested that their concept of dualism built from the work of Slichter (1950), Lester (1952) and Kerr (1954) and their assertions surrounding the development of internal labour markets under modern capitalism. Doeringer and Piore defined the internal labour market as:

> an administrative unit, such as a manufacturing plant, within which the pricing and allocation of labour is governed by a set of administrative rules and procedures.
>
> (Doeringer and Piore, 1971: 1-2).

Summarising previous work, Freathy (1993) explained how entry to an internal labour market was defined by the organisation. He stated that the internal labour market was distinguished from the external labour market once labour was no longer controlled by economic variables. Access to the internal labour market was achieved via a 'port of entry' and entry at specific ports provided an opening to higher status through an internal promotion ladder. Freathy (1993) stated that it was perceived that internal labour markets, and progression up the career ladder, placed a voluntary tie upon the individual because switching to another company could obligate relegation to a lower port of entry. Doeringer and Piore (1971) expanded segmentation theory and, within their dualist model, the internal labour market was the defining feature of the *primary* sector. They extended segmentation theory and considered those excluded from the internal labour market (the *secondary* sector) (Peck, 1989a). Therefore, this dualist approach identified a dichotomy of primary sector and secondary sector labour markets (Peck, 1996). Here, the secondary sector was viewed as a residual of the primary sector

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and it was suggested that this sector provided a degree of flexibility for the employer (Rubery, 1978). Peck (1996) conferred that the primary sector had better jobs, higher wages, secure status, higher skill, the possibility of career progression and was the domain of white, prime-aged males. Alternatively, secondary sector work was less desirable, had poor wages, there was the constant threat of unemployment and it was dominated by the marginalised (ethnic minorities, women, the disabled and the young).

Within subsequent work by a series of radical theorists (summarised by Peck's (1996) second generation of segmentation theory), the dualist structuring of Doeringer and Piore's (1971) model was retained. However, the radical theorists added an additional determinant of stratification (Rubery, 1978). Peck (1996) suggested that these theorists saw segmentation as part of a capitalist control strategy which became necessary with the advent of routinised production and the rise of deskilling. To prevent the labour force uniting against them, it was asserted that stratification allowed the capitalists to 'divide and rule' the labour force (Rubery, 1978). Therefore, it was suggested that these subdivisions were introduced to undermine class-consciousness and solidarity and to induce worker motivation within an increasingly inhumane work system (Peck (1989a; 1996) referred to the work of Gordon, 1972). Rubery (1978) asserted that radical theorists also extended the analysis of segmentation to emphasise differences between workers within internal (primary) labour markets as well as between the secondary and primary sectors. Here, Peck (1989a) suggested that capitalist firms formed hierarchies within the primary sector itself, as more routine work formed a *subordinate* primary sector and those jobs requiring a greater degree of initiative formed an *independent* primary sector (Peck referred to the work of Reich, Gordon and Edwards, 1973). Where possible, declared Peck, these divides were deepened by the exploitation of racial and gender differences within the labour force.

In summarising the contribution of these aforementioned (first and second generation) dualist approaches, Peck (1989a; 1996) believed that there were two key areas where dualism represented a break from previous theorisations. First, Peck saw these approaches as a shift towards a focus on the characteristics of jobs, rather than the workers. He stated that dualist approaches suggested that jobs and job structures qualitatively differed, contrary to the assumptions of homogeneity made in orthodox theory. Secondly, Peck asserted that dualism brought an understanding of institutional processes to the forefront of labour market theory. In contrast, he suggested that the orthodox model of the labour market saw allocation and pricing as directly controlled by

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economic variables. Summarising the emergent approach, Peck (1996) stated that dualism suggested that the economy generated a number of jobs which were then rationed out amongst the work force. Access to primary sector employment was conditioned by employer discrimination, union constraints on the labour-supply, information shortages and a series of feedback mechanisms. This access was based upon ascribed, rather than achieved characteristics (such as education), and the marginalised (women, the young, racial minorities and the handicapped) bore the brunt of apparent labour market disadvantages. However, Rubery (1978) suggested that these theories suffered from a general lack of applicability. Peck (1996) concurred and stated that dualism was rightly criticised for its descriptive nature. Rubery (1978) implied that this deficiency could be traced to the exclusive attention paid to the actions and motivations of the capitalists in structuring the labour market and the consequent neglect of the role of the worker in this process.

Bearing this neglect in mind, Peck (1996) commenced his presentation of third generation segmentation theory. Despite being inspired by dualism, Peck stated that this tradition represented an attempt to move away from the 'crude' nature of first and second generation segmentation theory. As a starting point, Freathy (1993) asserted that traditional theoretical analysis viewed labour market allocation as a wholly demand-side process. However, Rubery (1978) recognised that supply-side influences were also integral to understanding labour market structure. Peck (1996) agreed and bemoaned the inadequate conceptualisation of the supply-side of the labour market within the dualist model. To these ends, he suggested that third generation theorists provided a more specific recognition of the mechanisms underpinning segmentation. Segmentation, stated Peck, was still traced to labour market vulnerability, market conditions, technological requirements and labour-process control strategies. However, social reproduction, state action, and the collective struggles of trade unions were also viewed as contributory factors. This recognition was not monocausal (like dualism) but multi-causal and in analysing the development of contemporary segmentation theory, Peck referred to Rubery who asserted that:

> there is now no single 'model' of segmentation but more a cluster of models or theoretical approaches which have arisen out of labour market research in the 1970s and 1980s.

(Rubery, 1992: 246)

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Fichtenbaum, Gyimah-Brempong and Olson (1994) provided a summary of some of the more recent developments in support of the existence of a segmented labour market. Peck (1989a; 1996) also reviewed recent literature on labour market segmentation theory and forwarded a three-fold classification of factors affecting the structure and segmentation of labour markets. This classification suggested that there were a series of labour demand factors that were intertwined with the role of the state (for example, the structure of welfare provision and differentiation within the education system) and a series of supply-side factors.

Given these developments, the following section presents reported evidence of segmentation in the retail labour market from a variety of sources. It is intended that this section will provide context for some of the subsequent analytical discussions.

2.3   Evidence of segmentation within the retail labour market

Sparks (1992: 18) suggested that the key process in operation over the last thirty years had been, 'the gradual adjustment of the workforce to the demands of the employers'. This, asserted Reynolds (1997), had required the dismantling of the full-time model of working. As a replacement, firms had constructed a flexible, part-time model (Gregory, 1991). Here, employers specified their labour requirements in line with product demands and labour was purchased in a 'just in time' fashion (Walsh, 1991). Townsend, Sadler and Hudson (1996) proclaimed that this reliance upon a flexible, part-time workforce was liable to prevail in the immediate future. This dependence upon numerical (as in the number of workers and the number of hours) flexibility could also be supported by an associated operation of functional flexibilisation strategies (Freathy and Sparks, 1996; Penn and Wirth, 1993; Atkinson and Meager, 1986). Within these strategies, workers were multi-skilled to perform a number of tasks, although Marchington and Harrison (1991) suggested that evidence of functional flexibility within retail was limited. In agreement, Sparks (1992) affirmed that the majority of secondary job-roles were reasonably straightforward, essentially repetitive and required a low level of skill. As reported earlier (see Section 2.1), it was implied that the majority of these workers were employed on a part-time basis (Bluestone et al, 1981). However, Robinson (1993) suspected that further segmentation of labour markets, through the increased utilisation of part-time staff, created problems in the long-run. These workers received few benefits and responded negatively to increased part-time

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demands. Robinson (1990) had also analysed retail training within part-time employment. She asserted that training provision increased the differential treatment of part-time employees in Britain and, if unimproved, was likely to deprive the industry of the expected advantages from the deployment of such labour. Training, she suggested, was not sufficiently central to the business and when it was considered, the needs of part-time workers were rarely contemplated. In such circumstances, 'formal training beyond induction procedures and instruction in basic jobs skills was limited' (Robinson, 1990: 85).

Broadbridge (1991), having undertaken research into the perceptions of female shop-assistants, concurred and suggested that the sales assistant position had lost its status. Shop-floor work had become associated to the female workforce as skill labels were stripped away (Sparks, 1987; Broadbridge, 1991; 1995). The contemporary position for shop-floor females was, Broadbridge (1991) stated, 'Victorian'; they represented cheap labour, worked long trading hours and received little union protection. However, as a preponderance of the secondary workforce, retail organisations were increasingly reliant upon shop-floor females (Reynolds, 1997). With regards to this structuring, Walsh (1991) contended that the whip-hand lay with the female labour-supply, as opposed to with management demands. Flexible hours, it was proposed, suited women (Sparks, 1987); Gregory (1991) illustrated how evening work satisfied women with pre-school children and Couch (1992) portrayed how women with domestic responsibilities could readily work a varied and flexible number of hours. Especial attention has been concentrated upon the preparedness of secondary employees to work non-standard hours, particularly Sundays. Freathy and Sparks (1995) suggested that the financial benefits were satisfactory to encourage workers to restructure their work/domestic time relationship. Kirby (1993) assumed a different position and asserted that British retail was dependent upon female, part-time workers who were, in turn, expected to work during Sundays. He suggested (Kirby, 1992) that a large proportion of these employees (particularly those with children) were reluctant to work unsociable hours. Unfortunately, many of these workers were vulnerable and dependent on the income this work provided. Additional work analysed retail shop-floor image and perceptions. Lowe and Crewe (1996) addressed this issue through a reference to the marketing perception that consumers wished to be served by people like themselves. This, they suggested, explained the importance of youth employees to the retail workplace. At a similar level, Hogarth and Barth (1991) undertook a study of B&Q's

company policy of the employment of elderly workers and Broadbridge (1991) stated that female shop-assistants, through their characteristics, had become an essential ingredient of the consumer package.

Freathy and Sparks (1996) submitted that the majority of retail employment research had focused upon the shop-floor workers rather than with store or head office management. Where management investigation had been attempted, a number of concerns emanated (Couch, 1992). Sparks (1992) contended that the store manager was often required to be a generalist rather than a specialist, fulfilling an operational as opposed to a strategic role (Freathy and Sparks, 1995a). This necessitated the, 'need for good quality implementation staff rather than strategic decision-making staff' (Freathy and Sparks, 1996: 192), as many of the control and management issues were handled away from the store at head office (Sparks, 1992). This division of labour required specialist functions to be executed centrally at company headquarters (Jennison, 1997), the majority of which were concentrated within the south-east. However, Freathy and Sparks (1996) proposed that many retailers appreciated the importance of the retained presence of the store management to organise affairs that could not be controlled centrally. This, proffered Jennison (1997), was related to the recently recognised new professionalism within retailing. He declared that there was a recognition, on the retailers behalf, that they needed to attract high-quality, graduate appointments. However, Penn and Wirth (1993) suggested that these policies were more company-specific than had been imagined. Sparks (1992: 17) concurred and asserted that, 'Only the more forward-looking companies are taking up the call for more professionalism'.

As in the case of the shop-floor positions, issues surrounding gender and employment had also engendered specific research interest within the retail management arena. As early as 1982, Sparks suggested that women were under-represented within the management category. Broadbridge (1991: 42) proposed that this under-representation was related to the hierarchical organisation of retail work, 'with the highest positions traditionally being filled by men and the lower positions being occupied by women'. Through subsequent qualitative analysis, Broadbridge (1998) stated that women perceived that they faced more barriers, and were required to work harder, to procure promotion. Here, she was supported by Tomlinson, Brockbank and Traves (1997). They illustrated how, despite equal numbers at entry points, women remained poorly represented at senior levels. They asserted that because management was inherently a process enacted by individual managers within a social context, 'the

extent to which it can be conceived in gender neutral terms is questioned since individuals are inevitably discussed and identified in terms of their gender' (Tomlinson, Brockbank and Traves, 1997: 218).

The aforementioned work began to detail prevalent social relations within the contemporary retail workplace and attention was directed to a dualist segmentation between the management and shop-floor workers. Inevitably, asserted Freathy and Sparks:

> The suggestion above is that the retail sector has polarized in employment terms. On the one hand are the bulk of shop-floor workers who are overwhelmingly female, part-time and lowly paid. On the other hand, there is a cadre of management which is male, full-time and rewarded extensively.
>
> (Freathy and Sparks, 1996: 190)

This segmented dichotomy, they affirmed, was of particular relevance when attempting to provide an understanding of the retail superstore. The following section details their application of segmentation theory to the superstore labour market.

2.4   Applying segmentation theory to the superstore labour market

Paul Freathy and Leigh Sparks produced a succession of papers that can be utilised in attempts to comprehend employment relations within the retail labour market (Freathy, 1993 and 1997; Freathy and Sparks, 1994; 1995; 1995a and 1996). As has been previously alluded to (Section 2.1), Freathy and Sparks demanded that contemporary retail employment relations had to be interpreted through a theoretical framework. In establishing their framework, they proposed the adoption of segmentation theory. Their adoption and adaptation of this conceptual framework will be presented subsequently. First, in following their lead, we need to refer to the sectoral context and the wheel of retailing.

Freathy and Sparks (1994: 185) asserted that it was vital, within any endeavour to understand retail employment, that the sectoral context was, 'sufficiently apparent and understood'. With regards to the sectoral context, Davies, Jones and Pal (1992: 35) suggested that change was often seen as, 'one of the few constants in retailing'. In elaborating his cognition, Freathy (1997) stated that events within the social world were

the consequence of various evolving interrelationships. This relational dynamism, declared Freathy, was a central tenet within social science research. However, in the case of labour market theory, this crucial axiom had been largely ignored. Consequently, researchers had often failed to relate employment relationships to the structural changes occurring within the retail sector. Freathy attempted to adjust this anomaly through an identification of the principal transformations that had occurred in retailing and a placing of retail employment relations within the context of sectoral change. Here, he utilised the simple and dynamic (Brown, 1992) concept of the wheel of retailing. With regards to the wheel's conception, Freathy (1997) referred to McNair (1958) and the challenges presented to this work by Hollander in 1960.

The original hypothesis suggested that the majority of new retailers entered the market as low-status, low-gain and low-price operators. As they continued trading, they developed increasingly elaborate establishments and facilities, extended their product range, the service they offered and their cost structure. Finally, operators moved into a mature phase becoming high-cost, top-heavy organisations that experienced declining returns on investment. Freathy (1997) presented a synopsis of the wheel via a series of phases and corresponding employment structures. He suggested that this synopsis provided historical depth and evolutionary context to contemporary research. Brown (1990) agreed, proposing that the wheel described a frequently observed phenomenon whilst maintaining a real sense of the past. Others were not as supportive. McGoldrick (1990) illustrated concern over the general applicability of the wheel and Savitt (1988) was not convinced that the wheel was as important as many marketing scholars believed. The concern here is not to dwell upon such a debate. Freathy's (1997) adaptation of the wheel provides a simple method for comprehending sectoral change. His attempts to contextualise the sector through the wheel of retailing are presented in Table 2.1.

Given this sectoral context, Freathy's (1993) research analysed retail superstores in Manchester (in total seventeen, of which six were food-selling) and within his analysis, he began to elucidate upon the possible structure of segmentation within the contemporary retail workplace. Freathy's (1993) analysis suggested a highly segmented labour market that broadly represented the primary/secondary divide of Doeringer and Piore (1971). Freathy (1993) declared that the superstore managerial and supervisory staff were the workers who enjoyed terms and conditions which most closely corresponded to primary sector employment. Positions here were secure and there was a

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Table 2.1: Notes adapted from Freathy's (1997) 'wheel' of retailing

Post-war to late 1950s
1950, 551,000 retail outlets in the UK and roughly 128,000 in the grocery sector.   - Most were small retailers and multiple outlets accounted for just 20% of sales.   - The resale price maintenance (RSP) protected the independent sector.   - Employment in retail remained at 2.5 million through the 1950s and into the 1960s.   - However, the number employed part-time rose from 20% in 1950 to 26% in 1957.   - Women employed - 820,000 in 1930, 1.15 million in 1951 and 1.4 million in 1959.   - Use of labour driven by economic not organisational (segmentation) imperatives.
1960s to early 1970s: entry phase
- End of RSP and movement towards affordable and mass-produced merchandise.   - Privately owned, multiple-outlet retailers which played a key facilitating role.   - Multiples reduced prices and increased the number and size of their outlets.   1957 to 1966, the total sales of the multiples increased from 29% to 43%.   - The supermarket flourished and by 1963 there were 1,366 such stores operating.   - Concentration - 1961 to 1971, 54% decline in the total number of multiples.   - Use of self-service - 1957 to 1961, the number of outlets trebled to 9,000.   - To compete, independents began a series of initiatives (such as trading stamps).
Early 1970s to early 1980s: trading-up phase
- Increasing domination of multiples - 57% market share by the mid-1970s.   - Reasons included large product range and economies of scale (e.g. bulk buying).   1975 - 4,000 supermarkets, with 45% having over 4,000 sq. feet net selling space.   - Drivers included technological developments and the need for economies of scale.   - Multiples develop marketing & seek to trade-up operations from discount market.   - Superstores increase average number of workers per site - 7 in 1957 to 20 by 1971.   - Superstore format altered selling techniques (e.g. self-service and pre-packaging).   - Big store size = economical to have dedicated buyers, accountants & staff trainers.   - More part-time work = functional flexibility and primary/secondary divide.
1980s: maturity phase
- Concentration -1982 to 1990, top five multiples share of sales from 25% to 61%.   - Reasons - technology, increased store size, greater range & better customer service.   - Situated the multiples as quality-based, as opposed to price-orientated, retailers.   - Labour productivity improved via use of part-time workers and technology.   - Only 36% of superstore employees full-time (most managerial and supervisory).   - Internal labour market formalised with distinction between primary and secondary.   - Store managers begin to enter the organisation through recognised ports of entry.   - But more centralised control so (primary) store managers had less responsibility.
1990s: vulnerability phase
- Widely argued that the UK grocery market has reached a level of saturation.   - Sustainability of expansion questioned - multiples threatened by discount retailers.   - Towards cyclicality in retailing - discount retailers are at entry stage of wheel.   - Discounters have low labour costs, aggressive pricing and low margins.   - Support from consumers with reduced confidence due to economic recession.   - Multiples continue changes: cutting labour costs, managerial delayering, management need academic qualifications and movement between sectors rare.   - And 45% sales assistants part-time in 1991 to offset vulnerability from discounters.

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low turnover. He stated that one limitation of the dualist approach was that it only provided a distinction between two tiers of primary workers. Freathy suggested that in his example, the upper tier was sub-divided between the senior management (the store manager, the deputy manager and the personnel office) and the department managers. This tallied with his later reservations (alongside Leigh Sparks, 1995a: 380), where it was suggested that, 'The notion that the labour market may be simply divided into primary and secondary employment remains too crude'. Bonamy and May (1997) also illustrated the potential problems in interpreting current changes in employment relationships in terms of labour market dualism and Walsh (1991) pointed to the dangerous over-simplifications which developed through the acceptance of such a model. Freathy's (1993) multi-tiered structure is presented below with these reservations in mind.

Primary, upper-tier: senior managers

The senior store management, proclaimed Freathy (1993), were viewed as the top tier of the superstore hierarchy, where individuals moved along a structured career path and were expected to be mobile and to relocate when necessary. They were not subjected to elaborate work rules and possessed a degree of autonomy and responsibility within their work. However, the level of privilege within this position had to be viewed within the context of:

> an industry that experiences a high degree of centralised control over both strategic and operational functions
>
> (Freathy, 1993: 112)

Freathy suggested, for example, that senior managers held responsibility for recruitment and selection but at the same time, wage bargaining and personnel policy were likely to be controlled directly at head office.

Primary sector, middle-tier: department managers

Within Freathy's (1993) conceptualisation, one level below the senior management were the department managers. They came under the direct control of an assistant or deputy manager. They were differentiated from the supervisory staff and were empowered within their positions through the duties they held, usually via the responsibility for

specific areas of the store. However, and unlike senior managers, their duties were highly defined and they worked to a formal set of procedures. More generally, these departmental heads held little or no control over space allocation, product placement, merchandising or promotion.

Primary sector, lower-tier: supervisors

Freathy (1993) asserted that the role of supervisor closely matched Piore's (1975) conception of lower tier primary employment. As with the managerial positions, conditions of employment were relatively secure and contracts were usually full-time. Supervisors were primarily in charge of sales floor and checkout areas. Their work tended to be repetitious and revolved around ensuring that work schedules were maintained, checkout areas co-ordinated and they were the first line for customer enquiries. Freathy discovered that the preponderance of supervisory staff had prior experience through work on the sales floor and that this progression was viewed as the traditional promotional path for the sales force. At a related level, Freathy stated that retailing was still viewed as 'experience led' and performance within the job was viewed as an equally valid indicator of potential (as formal qualifications) for middle management. While movement from the lower (supervisory) to mid-primary (departmental head) tier was limited, transferring to another company tended to exclude an individual from promotion altogether. He asserted that, as a rule, supervisory skills were not company-specific and that it would have been possible for an individual to transfer between jobs without difficulty. However, this would have probably limited an individual's ability to progress through the lower managerial positions and a transfer between companies would have incurred a potential loss of status and earnings. Finally, Freathy referred to a distinct gender bias in the composition of the supervisory labour force as all such positions within his Manchester case study superstores were occupied by females.

Secondary sector

Freathy (1993) referred to Doeringer and Piore's (1971) contention that the secondary sector was segmented, with different terms and conditions for different jobs. Freathy suggested that this assertion was reaffirmed in the division between clerical and sales staff in superstores. Despite the fact that structured career progression did not exist and that remuneration was lower than in the case of the supervisory staff, the majority of

clerical workers enjoyed greater job security than sales assistants, were employed full-time and turnover was low. Alternatively, sales assistants experienced many of the conditions identified by Doeringer and Piore (1971) as characteristic of the secondary sector; the skill level required was low, there was a low level of training given to sales assistants, the priority was to ensure that workers reached a minimum level of competence to undertake their tasks and additional training was not integral and was only provided in relation to specific operational changes. Furthermore, Freathy declared that the concept of the secondary labour market within retailing was reinforced by the low level of demarcation between jobs. There was regularly no strict definition of job title and individuals were expected to undertake a range of duties and to be flexibly deployed, where required, in response to changes in customer flow. Finally, and with regards to segmentation, a range of other factors surrounding the secondary sector were pertinent; turnover varied, a significant number of sales assistants were part-time, shift lengths corresponded to the peaks and troughs of the business, part-timers were paid by the hour, women formed the largest proportion of the secondary workforce and males, on the other hand, tended to be confined to specialist areas, such as the warehouse and the butchery.

In summary, Freathy's (1993) contextual and theoretical approach provides a classificatory framework from which to understand the segmented activities of the contemporary retail workplace. Yet whilst undoubtedly useful, Freathy's (1993) conceptualisation of space, spatiality and power is somewhat limited. Building from previous third generation developments to segmentation theory, Jamie Peck suggested a further theoretical reconceptualisation. Calling for a reconsideration of the role of space within segmentation theory, Peck (1989; 1996) forwarded a possible framework for a fourth generation segmentation theory.

The following section presents this reconsideration – but it is set within a comprehensive understanding of space and spatiality in an attempt to understand what it means to 'reassert space into theory'. Beyond this, the subsequent sub-section attempts to construct a more comprehensive understanding of power relations – drawing first on realism and networked conceptions of power, before then considering Michel Foucault's diagrammatic conception of power and the need, after John Allen (1997) to widen our understanding of the different modes of power.

2.5   Space, spatiality and power

'Space', however defined, has been at the heart of geographical enquiry since antiquity. More recently there has been an explosion in the 'jargon of space' and one finds talk of cyberspace, simulated space and virtual space (Smith, 1997: 305). Geographers in the 1980s and 1990s have also rapidly adopted the concept that space is socially produced. Geographers use the term 'spatiality' to capture the ways in which the social and spatial are inextricably realised in on another (Keith and Pile, 1993; Massey, 1999). And the social character of economic activity has become an equally important focus of interest in economic geography (Lee, 1998). This conceptualisation of the spatiality of social life has become one of the foundations of contemporary human geography (Unwin, 2000). But despite these foundations, few geographers articulate their understanding of this concept (Gregson and Lowe, 1995). As Crang and Thrift (2000: 1) suggest, the problem is not just that the concept of space means different things to different people – but that 'it is used with such abandon that its meanings run into each other before they have properly been interrogated'. Like Gregson and Lowe (1995), the interpretation of spatiality used here is in the tradition of Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1989) – and the concern is with the production of space and with the degree to which ideology is inscribed in space rather than acted on it.

Space and spatiality

First of all, it seems necessary (following Soja, 1989) to make a clear distinction between space, space as a 'contextual given' and socially-based spatiality. Using Soja's definitions, space in the general or abstract sense represents the objective form of matter. Time, space and matter are inextricably connected with the relationship being a central theme in the history and philosophy of time. Space as a physically contextual given can be characterised as an environmental 'container' of human life. However, this is a 'misleading epistemological foundation' (Soja, 1989: 79) upon which to analyse the meaning of human spatiality:

> Space in itself may be primordially given, but the organisation, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience.
>
> (Soja, 1989: 80)

To this end, socially-produced space is a structure comparable to other social constructions. It results from the transformation of space - as in the same way that human history represents a social transformation of time. While space has been shaped by historical and natural elements, this is a political process that is literally filled with ideologies (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre (1991) suggested that there were two key implications of space being a social product. First, he said that natural physical space is disappearing. While it is still the background to the picture and persists everywhere, nature is becoming lost to view. For as Lefebvre (1991: 31) asks, 'How can we form a picture of it as it was before the intervention of humans with their ravaging tools?' Secondly, every society produces a space – its own space. By example, Lefebvre suggested that the city of the ancient world was more than just a collection of people and things in space. Instead, the ancient city had its own spatial practice and it forged its own appropriated space (such as the temple and stadium). Each society then, or mode of production, offers up its own peculiar use of space.

Lefebvre (1991) sought to offer an exposition of the production of space. More particularly, Unwin (2000) suggested that Lefebvre attempted to make complex the taken-for-granted, and to force the reader to question their understandings of space. Lefebvre stated that the foundation of social space *is* natural or physical space. And upon this space are superimposed successive stratified and tangled networks. Each network serves a purpose and is used in specific ways. Commodities such as sugar and coffee cannot be used without the use of such networked spaces. The stores and warehouses where these things are kept and the ships, trains and trucks that transport them also have to be taken into account: 'The world of commodities would have no reality without such moorings or points of insertion' (Lefebvre, 1991: 403). Ultimately these processes produce a network of layers, networks and links which is the space of the world market. Social relations are reproduced at that level and via all kinds of interactions. And the world market, suggested Lefebvre (1991), changes spaces on the surface of the earth:

> Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. *Their underpinning is spatial.* In each particular case, the connection between this underpinning and the relations it supports calls for analysis.
>
> (Lefebvre, 1991: 404)

Edward Soja (1989) made further strides towards this analysis in his attempts to call for a reassertion of space in contemporary social theory. Soja stated that for at least the past century, time and history have occupied a privileged position within Marxism and critical social science. The onset of empire and corporate oligopoly occluded, devalued and depoliticised space and understanding how history had 'been made' became paramount. However, Soja suggested that it was time for a reassessment. To this end, he welcomed post-1960s fragmentation in the critical social science and the descriptions of contemporary cultural, political and economic restructuring inherent within postmodernism. Soja (1989) believed that postmodernism could provide a suitable approach for highlighting the reassertion of space in critical social theory. While not constructing 'a radical postmodern political programme', Soja was keen to ensure that his project was spatialised from the outset:

We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology

(Soja, 1989: 6)

Soja's work traced the emergent reassertion of space in critical social theory. He believed that two illusions (the Cartesian cartography of social science and the dematerialisation of space) had dominated Western views of space - and then blocked further critical interrogation. He stated that most philosophers and geographers had tended to bounce back and forth between these illusions for centuries, obscuring the power-filled spatialisation of society. Soja stated that breaking this double illusion would require an ontological struggle, 'to compose a social ontology in which space matters from the very beginning' (Soja, 1989: 7).

Drawing upon phenomenology and the writing of Heidegger and Husserl, Pickles (1985) forwarded his own ontological concerns. Pickles (1985: 155) sought 'an ontological, existential understanding of the universal structures characteristic of man's spatiality as the precondition for any understanding of places and spaces'. He suggested that this necessarily entailed a critique of the conception of 'space' that had been generally accepted and had resulted in the genuine meaning of space being physical space. Pickles questioned how there could *only* be one sole genuine 'space'. While we

think like this, suggested Pickles (1985: 158), 'we will remain within the sort of thinking that accepts space as the kind of 'thing' that encloses volume'. In its place, he urged a recovery of human experiences. Pickles (1985: 160) highlighted that in everyday activities, humans encounter equipment that is 'ready-to-hand'. Such a perspective reveals the human significance of contextuality (Gregory, 2000). For Pickles, spatiality was not pre-defined but was related to how humans organised equipment in particular contexts:

> Concurrently human spatiality, in being related to several concurrent and non-current equipment contexts … cannot be understood independently of the beings that organise it. Man does not discover space, but space is given form in the form of places which equipment, in its equipment context, creates.
>
> (Pickles, 1985: 162)

Soja too called for a more creative geography – but one which recognised spatiality as *simultaneously* a social product (or outcome) and a shaping force (medium). His postmodern approach contextualised social being in a multi-layered geography of socially created regions and scales around the mobile personal spaces of the human body and the more fixed locales of human settlements. To hammer his point home, Soja analysed Los Angeles from a myriad of postmodern views and the perspectives explored were purposefully eclectic, fragmented and contradictory:

> Totalizing visions, attractive though they may be, can never capture all the meanings and significations of the urban when the landscape is critically read and envisioned as a fulsome geographical text.
>
> (Soja, 1989: 247)

David Harvey (1989) was similarly troubled by the lack of definition of space in many contemporary accounts. His postmodern account of space and time in social life highlighted the material links between political-economic and cultural processes. Harvey challenged the idea of a single and objective sense of time and space. Instead, he argued for a recognition of the multiplicity of objective qualities expressed by space and time and the role of human practices in their construction. He concluded that

neither time nor space could be assigned objective meanings independent of material processes:

> From this materialist perspective we can argue that objective conceptions of time and space are necessarily created through material processes which serve to reproduce social life.
>
> (Harvey, 1989: 204)

Whilst time and space are inextricably linked (Massey, 1999), Crang and Thrift (2000) suggested that it is now very clear that space is not a poorer relation to time. To the same extent, it is also very clear that space should not be considered outside the realm of social practice. Geography's definition of space has moved from 'the container', to space as a socially produced set of manifolds (Crang and Thrift, 2000). Within the discipline, it has become an established theme that 'geography matters' and there is a reciprocity between 'the social' and 'the spatial' (Massey et al: 1999: 6). And how space gets to be made as a set of social relations constituted through social action remains an ongoing concern (Hetherington and Law, 2000). This was a major theme within Jamie Peck's fourth generation segmentation theory – and his attempts to reassert space into segmentation theory.

Fourth generation segmentation theory

Jamie Peck (1996) decried the aspatial nature of traditional, economic-based analyses of the labour market. In undertaking his analysis, Peck (1996: 86) suggested that, 'labour markets *operate* in different ways in different places'. However, Peck believed that, for the most part, geographers had been slow to recognise the importance of labour markets. He asserted that labour markets were complex and that the traditional tools of neo-classical economics ('curves and equations') were inappropriate when attempting to comprehend this complexity. He declared that their premise, that labour, like a commodity, was dependent on laws of demand and supply, denied the social nature of labour relations. Instead, within Peck's reading, social context was integral. He suggested that labour markets were structured by power relations and that theory had to attempt to explain this structuring. He referred to Marx (1976), who suggested that it was not actual human beings that were input into the labour system but their capacity to

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do work. As such, concurred Peck, capitalists did not buy workers per se but their capacity to do work. Consequently, for this system to function, workers had to be willing to work and this led Peck to visualise a fragile balance between control (from the capitalists) and consent (from the workers). Labour control, then, depended upon worker consent and the social context in which employment relations were embedded:

> In order to understand labour control, then, it is necessary to look over the factory gate, to consider the social production and reproduction of work forces and the values which unite and divide them.
>
> (Peck, 1996: 34)

In looking over the factory gate, Peck (1989; 1996) considered the local labour market. He stated that the concept of the local labour market was often deployed by geographers, and other academics, in an uncritical way. Peck placed stress upon the ambiguity of local labour markets and declared that, despite differing in their occupational and industrial composition, little was understood with regards to how these markets operated in locally specific ways. In attempting to provide a theoretical justification for the operation of the local labour market, Peck suggested the utilisation of segmentation theory. Peck stated that to understand how segmentation could offer a more suitable explanation of the processes occurring within the local labour market, the concept of the travel-to-work area required further examination.

Peck suggested that the travel-to-work area (TTWA), defined in terms of daily commuting behaviour, was widely accepted and utilised as the basis for the notion of the local labour market. However, Peck suggested that TTWAs were continually defined without due regard to the processes operating within them:

> Travel-to-work-areas and local labour markets, it would seem are merely 'containers', within which a set of generalized labour market processes operate, largely unaffected by their spatial context.
>
> (Peck, 1989: 44)

Additionally, Peck conferred that, through the use of TTWAs, there was an assumption that spatial proximity played a central role in the process of labour market competition. Therein, workers within each local labour market catchment area competed with one

another for jobs and did not compete in other areas because of daily time budgets. In opposition, Peck stated that spatial proximity was not a suitable explanation for labour competition. By example, Peck illustrated how inner-city residents, through their close proximity to city-centre job markets, were not offered preferential access to employment. They were structurally disqualified from these jobs which, instead, became the domain of commuters from the suburbs. As Peck (1989: 44) dryly retorted, 'What role is spatial proximity performing here?'

Peck instead suggested that, rather than existing as a self-contained and competitive space (as through TTWAs), the local labour market could be best understood through segmentation theory. He affirmed that segmentation theory did not, unlike the TTWAs, have a clear spatial expression. Here, space was not self-contained and processes operated generally. The workers were effectively divided into two sectors and the processes which allowed this division had no regard for space. Therefore, the internal coherence of the orthodox view of the local labour market was undermined because workers from the same local labour market were not necessarily competing for the same jobs. For example, Peck asserted that workers occupying completely different segments of the labour market could be found in the same workplace (for example, shop manager and till-worker). However, these workers could also be living in the same house (for example, husband and wife).

Although favouring the segmentation approach, Peck (1989) was wary of its treatment of space. He believed that traditional segmentation theory failed to recognise how these general processes were reconciled within specific localities. Peck asserted that there should not have been an assumption that local labour markets all operated in the same way. Instead, the detailed way labour demand meshed with labour supply and state institutions had to be understood at the local level. There was, therefore, a need to explore labour market segmentation as a locally articulated process, such that:

> A more careful specification of the diversity which exists *within* local labour markets need not undermine the role of space in labour market research but rather constitutes the basis for a more sensitive appreciation of its role
>
> (Peck, 1989: 54).

Peck (1996) suggested that Doreen Massey's (1984: 1995) work provided a particularly suitable entry-point for some of these concerns. He suggested that Massey's

spatial division of labour illustrated how the same general processes led to different effects in different places. Massey (1995; 1997) asserted that economic space was also a social space and she suggested that what made economic space relational was the social relationships upon which jobs depended. Moreover, the variation in jobs across the country was witness to the geography of social relationships in the economy. Massey's (1995), therefore, was not a geography of jobs but of power relations which affected people of different places in different ways.

Space and power

Massey's realist (1984) account is used by John Allen to exemplify the characteristics of a realist conception of power. Power, or the ability to achieve certain ends (Johnston, 2000), has become a central topic for debate within economic and cultural geography. However, it is often under-theorised, and Allen (1997; 1999) attempts to right that wrong with a presentation of three key conceptions of power: realism, networked and diagrammatic.

In realism, objects and social relations have causal powers which may or may not become apparent under certain conditions (for a full definition of realism see: Sayer, 1992: 4-5). The inscribed capacity of an individual, therefore, is always in potential (Bhaskar, 1975). For realists, the possession of power is different to the exercise of power – 'We do not have to calculate the number of winners and losers ... to know that multinationals are potentially powerful' (Allen, 1997: 60). Potentiality is all- important, and it is only under certain conditions that an inscribed capacity to dominate will be realised. Of particular importance to this conception is the asymmetrical nature of power. Here, one side of the relationship holds power over the other (domination), leading to an inequality of outcomes, where one side gains at the other's expense. Allen (1997) affirmed that this realist conception of power could be directly traced to Massey's (1984; 1995) work around the spatial division of labour. Relations of domination and subordination, inscribed within firms, led to an asymmetrical construction of economic space, whereby certain regions attracted headquarters at the expense of others, effectively constructing these latter regions as less developed areas.

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Massey suggested that the spatial distribution of employment had to be interpreted as the way that production was organised over space. The geography of employment, she continued, had to be understood in terms of the social relations of employment, which she referred to as the interregional relations, the structures of domination and subordination between economic activity in different places. These interregional relations took a variety of spatial forms but it was Massey's cloning example which provided the most useful backdrop for retail research. In the cloning spatial structure, there was a headquarters (which was responsible for administration and control) and a series of branch plants (where the whole process of production took place). There was only one hierarchy of management but the production process itself was geographically undifferentiated, with a similar production process taking place at every site.

However, it should be noted that Massey did not view her structures (for example, cloning) as unproblematic categories. Inevitably, Massey insisted that the researcher had to conceptualise the relations which actually produced the structure and not just attempt to conceptualise the structure itself as a simple object. Each spatial structure was the interrelation of a new spatial combination of layers and, because areas had different histories, each case had distinct social and economic results. In addition to this, at any one time, there would be more than one spatial structure being established within a region. Here, Massey stated that emphasis needed to be placed on the fact that it was not the regions which interrelated but the social relations of production which took place across space. At issue then was the way that different places were incorporated into the developing relations of capitalist production. What became apparent were national processes in combination with particular local conditions to produce the uniqueness of economic and social structures in particular places.

Massey concluded that the old spatial division of labour had gone into decline and a division based upon the interregional spatial structuring of production had emerged. Inevitably, relations of economic activity, in different parts of the economy, were less a function of the market relations *between* firms and more of the planned relations *within* firms. Here, the use of space required and produced spatial inequality. This new layer of disparities was superimposed upon areas still suffering from the

inequalities of the old, dominant divisions of labour. As such, the subordination of the regions was maintained but its form and social effects were changed.

Massey drew attention to the industrial periphery of the UK (such as Sheffield), and suggested that the effects of the combination of a continued decline of the old, dominant spatial division of labour and the insertion of a new division were that: individual managers saw the job (and the region) as only one step in a career structure; there was an increased separation of functions and an increased centralisation of capital, away from the regions; and the social hierarchy of administration was more developed and extended within the contemporary incoming industries. Moreover, Massey suggested that the biggest effect was upon the working class, whereby: coherence was undermined; the relations of production began to include the previously un-waged (e.g. women); men faced the prospect of not working again; the jobs created had low pay, little interest and little control; if jobs were kept, they were de-skilled and there was a loss of autonomy; with new jobs, there were problems of attitudes, absenteeism, turnover and acclimatisation; and union organisation possibilities were reduced by the increased number of women (and their lack of experience and their need to fill a dual work/domestic role).

Despite its strengths, Allen (1997: 62) criticised Massey's work for a 'rather limited spatial vocabulary, especially in relation to power' (Allen, 1997: 62). What was missing from Massey's account of space and power, he suggested, was:

> a more nuanced conception of power which recognised that the extension of power over space-time involved relationships other than just domination-subordination.
>
> (Allen, 1997: 62)

As an alternative, Allen (1997) considered a networked conception of power. Rather than placing emphasis upon how power constrains social action (as in a realist account), power is seen as a resource that can be used to achieve diverse ends (such as the opening of new markets and the use of modern technologies). The ability to mobilise and use resources lies at the heart of the networked conception. Following Giddens (1979: 91), 'resources are the media through which power is exercised.' And in a networked conception, companies utilise resources and produce power as they move towards diverse ends. For example, power might be produced by mobilisation when

struggling firms reflect upon their own resources to pool resources with like-minded companies (Allen, 1997). Joint ventures between multinational and local firms may then be successful at the expense of less collective-minded rivals. Allen (1997: 62) suggested that this example illustrates how power can be more than just a game of 'winners and losers'. In a networked conception, power is a fluid mechanism that can expand in line with collective ventures or diminish once short-term gains have been realised. As such, the amount of power in circulation is always variable and bound by its context.

The networked conception of power can be traced in Michael Mann's (1986; 1993) history of organisational power. Across two volumes, and from early settled societies to twentieth century modernity, Mann highlighted the differing scope and intensities of social power. Through over-lapping networks, Mann showed how power is generated by the mobilisation of resources. Mann illustrated that through the eighteenth century to 1815, a diffused network of economic and authoritative power relations dominated Western societies – and the resulting commercial capitalism and military revolution enabled Europeans to dominate the globe. Mann suggested that capitalism increased the collective ability of humans to exploit natural resources as its population expanded. At the same time, militarism politicised civil societies and different linguistic communities around common issues of national representation. This militarism strengthened large states and wiped out small ones. Post-1815, the remaining nation states became major authoritative powers in their own right. Nineteenth century capitalism became more reliant on diffused industrial capitalism between states. And militarism also became more marked among states. For Mann, change is complex and produces a complex network of collective agents:

> in both phases the ... principal transformers were not colliding billiard balls but [they were] entwined, and ... they generated emergent, interpenetrating collective actors – classes, nations, and modern states
>
> (Mann, 1993: 737)

Traces of Mann's networked conception of power are evident within the geographical discipline (Allen, 1997). Dicken (1992), for example, analysed the increasingly international and global nature of post-war economic activity. He pointed to the growing interconnections between all parts of the world and suggested that

national boundaries are no longer 'watertight' containers for the production process. Fewer industries are oriented towards local, regional or national markets and a large number of economic activities only have meaning in a global context. In consequence, few industries now have protection from international competition. Therefore, action needs to be taken and Dicken pointed to the collective aspects of power that can arise from networks of externalised relationships when firms engage in alliances, joint ventures or subcontracts (Allen, 1997). The amount of power generated through such collaboration remains so long as financial gains can be realised. It is a networked system that Dicken expected to flourish:

> the tendency towards an increasingly highly interconnected and interdependent global economy will intensify. The fortunes of nations, regions, cities, neighbourhoods, families and individuals will continue to be strongly influenced by their position in the global network. In a rapidly shrinking and interconnected world there is no hiding place.
>
> (Dicken, 1992: 460)

Despite its interconnected nature, a networked conception of power still tells us little about how power can be achieved and sustained in a variety of different ways (including force, manipulation, authority and persuasion) (Allen, 1997; Johnston, 2000).

As one final alternative model, Allen (1997) presents Michel Foucault's (1977) 'diagrammatic' conception of power. To Foucault, power was not an ascribed capacity but a series of strategies, techniques and practices. Talk of power being held by an individual was misleading. Using a diagrammatic conception (the Panopticon, see later), power was exercised, and individuals self-regulated and trained, through the institutional organisation of space. Power worked on subjects not over them (as in realism) or as a resource to meet their needs (as in a networked conception). In this conception, Allen (1997: 63) suggested that 'power is a more elusive phenomenon than say, realists would have us believe.'

Although not from a geographical background, Michel Foucault engaged with spatiality throughout his work. This provided a series of concepts that the human geographer can utilise when attempting to analyse society:

It's up to you, who are directly involved with what goes on in geography, faced with all the conflicts of power which traverse it, to confront them and construct the instruments which will enable you to fight on that terrain ... If one or two of these 'gadgets' of approach or method that I've tried to employ ... can be of service to you, then I shall be delighted.

(Foucault, 1980: 65)

To this end, we turn to Foucault's work around the disciplined body. He suggested that a successful division of labour required control of the body. Foucault (1977) referred to a body that could be subjected and used as docile – and suggested (1980) that control of a docile body could be acquired through an investment of power into the body. More specifically, Foucault asked:

What mode of investment of the body is necessary and adequate for the functioning of a capitalist society like ours?

(Foucault, 1980: 57-58)

Foucault (1980) referred to Western Medieval societies and illustrated how royal power provided the focus around which the functioning of society was based. However, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a new mechanism of power emerged. This new, non-sovereign mechanism, suggested Foucault, was disciplinary power. Exercised by means of constant surveillance, discipline attempted to make the body more useful and could be viewed as a mechanics of power through which the human body was explored and used to aid capitalist exploitation.

Foucault (1977) asserted that discipline proceeded from the effective surveillance of individuals in space. To maintain the perfect disciplinary apparatus, Foucault (1977) declared that a single gaze should be sufficient to see everything. In other words, there should be a 'perfect eye' (1977: 173), a central locus within the disciplinary space, where surveillance was possible at all times. This desire for the 'perfect eye' was given a spatial form by Foucault's (1977) use of Bentham's Panopticon; 'a technology of power designed to solve the problems of surveillance' (Foucault, 1980: 148). Although a utopian system (the Panopticon was never actually constructed), Foucault declared that the Panopticon illustrated particular disciplinary mechanisms which actually existed.

The Panopticon takes the form of a central tower, around which lies a peripheral ring of cells. From the central tower, all cells, and all their occupants are constantly visible. The ultimate effect of the Panopticon (a structure that keeps the central tower constant in the inmate's view) is a state of permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. Inmates will never know whether they are being watched but must assume that they are:

> in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.
>
> (Foucault, 1977: 201-202)

Under this arrangement, power is not held by a person but is instead caught up within a distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights and gazes. The Panopticon, therefore, is an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. And the mechanics of the Panopticon allow the subtle exercising of power because power is inherent *within* its spatial structure, as opposed to being imposed from the outside.

> The Panopticon is a marvellous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogenous effects of power.
>
> (Foucault, 1977: 202)

Foucault suggested that the Panopticon functioned as a laboratory of power. This laboratory could be used as a machine to carry out workplace experiments - to note the aptitudes of each worker, compare the time taken to perform a task and to calculate the value of workers' wages. So unlike enclosed institutions established at the edges of society, the disciplinary mechanism (Panopticism) aimed to improve through the exercise of power. Its design subtly coerced (examined, trained) individuals for the future. This laboratory, however, wasn't just be viewed as a 'dream building' (Foucault, 1977: 205). Detached from any particular use, the Panopticon represented a pure architectural technology that could be used in a broad range of circumstances. Foucault suggested the Panopticon was polyvalent in its applications:

Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the Panoptic schema may be used ... It is - necessary modifications apart - applicable to all establishments.

(Foucault, 1977: 205)

Geographers have been keen to illustrate the importance of Foucault's Panoptic conception (Allen, 1997). Valentine (1998), for example, suggested that Foucault's work was particularly influential in shaping our understanding of how the body was produced and how it had been disciplined and subdued. She detailed his work around discipline and Panopticism and forwarded a corporeal geography of consumption. Valentine considered the extent to which individuals produced the space of their body in accordance with the disciplinary gaze of others. She gave the example of a slim body, which she said was particularly prized in many workplaces because it was associated with self-control, discipline, conformity and success. The fat body, on the other hand, was perceived to be undisciplined, self-indulgent, lazy, untrustworthy, unproductive and out of control.

Phil Crang's (1994) analysis of workplace geographies, on the other hand, illustrated the Panoptical organisation of one specific restaurant space. Crang worked for two years at a South American theme-style restaurant and during his period of employment, he found that the managerial surveillance of service work was complexly engineered. Being a waiter or waitress in the restaurant allowed necessary autonomy from direct managerial control. Therefore, the management needed to provide some surveillance of that autonomy and the company used an 'order of service' (with 23 specific operations) that waiting staff were expected to perform for every customer. Rather than just provide a guide for serving staff, the order of service was used by management as a check-list for surveillance and intervention. By Panoptical gazing from vantage points in the restaurant, managers could monitor waiters' and waitresses' performance (for example, checking whether dirty glasses were left on a table or whether hot food was being left to go cold on the counter).

The modes of power

Inspired by Foucault's Panopticon, Crang (1994) illustrated that power, rather than just being an endless play of subordination and domination, could also involve autonomy.

Foucault too had previously stated that power was much more than an exercise of repression.

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it?
>
> (Foucault, 1980: 119)

Foucault's space of the Panopticon showed that rather than being trapped within the negative effects of power, the disciplined individual was the product of power relations exercised over the body. And to this end, Foucault (1980) suggested that one should not just assume that there existed a massive primal condition of 'dominators' on one side and 'dominated' on the other. Allen claimed, therefore, that power for Foucault was best understood as a form of 'government' that worked through a multiplicity of actions and reactions, rather than a simple domination/resistance binary.

However, although Foucault distanced himself from 'power as unmediated domination' (Allen, 1999: 203), it is worth considering that the only mediations at play in Foucault's analysis were site-specific. In the Panopticon, power relationships were transformed *at one site* as opposed to being transmitted intact from one site to another. Allen believed that this made it difficult to conceive how power was transformed across (rather than in) space. He therefore suggested that as a spatial vocabulary of power, the Panopticon would appear to be restricted to embedded spatial arrangements of power. How far this embedded form of analysis could be extended to include distanciated forms of 'government' was unclear, suggested Allen.

As such, the extension of power over distance problematised its reach. However, Allen said that it was insufficient to merely point out the complex ways in which power could be practised within space. He suggested that we needed to rethink theories of power to include a conceptualisation of the different modes power takes when the spatiality of social relations forms an integral part of the picture.

In short, geographers cannot discuss the mediation of power over space and time without recognising that 'distance, movement, mobility, and containment entail the adoption of different *modes* of power' (Allen, 1999: 205). These modes of power can include authority, coercion, seduction, manipulation, inducement, negotiation, persuasion, incitement, constraint and resistance. And these modes of power are

adopted by organisations, often in over-lapping spatial arrangements, when power relationships are constituted through space.

Allen (1999) stated that in simple binary (domination/resistance) models of power, domination of space was established by those with the greatest power, give or take a degree of resistance. He said that these models were theoretically flawed in two key respects. First, domination could be established close at hand or across great distances. But the means to maintain domination on an ongoing basis would require something more. Quoting Weber (1978), Allen stated that the means was an authoritarian form of organisation, where domination was conceded rather than imposed. Allen suggested that authority was an instrumental mode of power that was used selectively in combination with other modes (such as coercion, manipulation or seduction) to secure and maintain a structure of domination. Secondly, Allen suggested that the extension of power over space-time not only involved modes of power other than domination, it required their interaction. Rather than power being modified from a central location, it was modified by institutions employing different modes of power to realise their defined goals. And because modes of power varied in their spatial reach and intensity, Allen contended that specific modes would be employed in overlapping and co-existing arrangements (depending on the ends sought). Allen suggested that a consideration of these modes would provide the geographer with a more critically informed sense of power and space. Looking back after his analysis, Allen (1997) encouraged geographers to take up the challenge:

> This, however, is only the starting point for an examination of modes of power which, either in separation or combination, go beyond simple constraint models in economic geography.
>
> (Allen, 1997: 69)

With this in mind, we begin a consideration of the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the retail workplace. ICTs transfer information and knowledge across space. But they are complex, contested and above all 'social' - and they are frequently misunderstood within the social science literature. Paul Freathy (with Leigh Sparks, 1994) built upon his original segmented superstore framework and provided an attempt to comprehend contemporary developments in employee relations in food retailing. Integral to this comprehension was an attempt to understand the

'impact' of ICTs. The following section provides a survey of other ICT research within the retail arena. A synopsis of Freathy and Sparks' (1994) work is provided within the latter half of the section. Beyond this, we begin to challenge 'impact'-driven conceptualisations of the ICT-utilising workplace.

2.6   The utilisation of ICTs within the retail workplace

The decision to introduce new technologies into a retail firm is almost always a corporate decision (Dawson and Sparks, 1986). The advent and introduction of such technologies clearly has a number of implications (Lowe and Crewe, 1991; Townsend, Sadler and Hudson, 1996) and it is suggested that, in the 1990s, 'technology is increasingly important as an agent for change.' (Fernie, 1997: 384). The information produced through the new technological systems plays a crucial role in the management of contemporary retail operations (Tomlinson, Brockbank and Traves, 1997).

However, Dawson and Sparks (1986) asserted that it should be remembered that the use of technology within retailing is not a new phenomenon. They pointed to the long history of technological application within the industry and McGoldrick (1990) asserted that the use of computers for basic accounting, personnel, warehousing and transport functions was firmly established by the early 1970s. However, he also stressed that the use of computers at store level had only become viable as they had become smaller, faster, more reliable and cheaper (McGoldrick, 1990). This investment had coincided with the retail firms' desire to increase productivity gains via capital substitution for labour (Reynolds, 1997). The leading chains had also actively pursued initiatives to remove inefficiencies from the supply chain (Wrigley, 1997). The 'rationalization of selling' increased as computer stock control and electronic point-of-sale systems drew a tighter rein between sales and orders (Sayer and Walker, 1992: 91). This permitted a shift in the balance of power from the manufacturer to the retailer. Firms now held the ability to respond swiftly to changes in the market environment (Fernie, 1997).

Despite these abilities, retail remains, 'primarily a user of tried and tested technology, rather than as a pioneer of state-of-the-art technologies' (Technology Foresight, 1997: 24). The technology in-use is not industry specific and back-offices usually contain standard database, communication and word-processing packages (Technology Foresight, 1997). However, the potential for increased efficiency could

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result in the justification of new applications in the future and, as such, 'the scope for IT investments is by no means exhausted' (Reynolds, 1997: 18).

Sparks (1987) suggested that the issue of technology introduction had clear implications with regards to retail employment. Nevertheless, Freathy and Sparks (1994) asserted that the implications of technology introduction for employment relationships remained an under-researched area. With allusion to employment relationships, Jarvis and Prais (1989) suggested that these technological developments had not affected the work of the majority of retailing employees. More expressly, Dawson et al (1987) contended that the introduction of new technology had had a differential impact upon different groups in the workforce. Penn (1995) specifically stated that the contemporary trend was for technological change which enhanced managerial and clerical roles. Broadbridge (1998) and Freathy and Sparks (1995a) also asserted that technical change had altered the nature of retail management work. Sparks (1987) agreed and stated that the introduction of technology had had an implication in the extension of power and control of management either at the store or head office level. With reference to the extension of head office control, Christopherson (1996) suggested that technological advances enabled the firm to control labour and merchandising in remote stores within a geographically dispersed system. These technological advances, suggested Dawson and Sparks (1986), necessitated a fresh approach to social relations and power structures within retail companies. Further research, suggested Penn (1995), had to establish whether more pervasive technology-sponsored change would envelop other retail positions. Sparks (1987: 253) concurred and encouraged work which analysed the, 'impact of new technology on work relationships, responsibilities, and types of job'. A number of issues were consequently raised such as the problems surrounding interaction and techno-phobia for the workers (Technology Foresight, 1997), technological innovation and concerns over the adequacy of skills (Stasz, 1997), technology adoption and the dominant trend of de-skilling (Townsend, Sadler and Hudson, 1996) and the use of ICT and specific management strategies to homogenise skill requirements and working conditions across retail employment sub-sectors (Christopherson, 1996).

However, Dawson et al (1987) argued that the employment implications of technological change were still in their infancy in 1987. Despite the aforementioned studies, the present-day situation remains substantially similar. With this deficiency in mind, greater attention is subsequently given to Freathy and Sparks' (1994) analysis of

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contemporary employee relations within food retailing. Within their work, structural changes at the managerial and shop-floor level within the food superstore sector were detailed and particular attention was expended to the role of technology.

The managerial level

Freathy and Sparks (1994) stated that one of the most influential mechanisms for change at the managerial level had been advances in technology. They suggested that for the large multiples, the information collected through electronic point of sale technology (EPOS) was used to measure, monitor and control both store, and individual worker performance, continuously and effectively. At the same time, an increased centralisation of control had defined the store as a cost centre and many decisions (over pricing, promotion, space allocation and budgeting) that would have been taken by the store manager were now assigned to head office. Freathy and Sparks (1994) stated that the effective utilisation of real-time data had resulted in the company being able to match performance to actual demand, so that control was vested in head office while the responsibility for meeting targets remained with the individual store manager:

> The separation of conception from execution has been a key element in retail restructuring but its implementation has raised a dilemma for both retailers and store managers.
>
> (Freathy and Sparks, 1994: 191)

So Freathy and Sparks (1994) reported that food retailing had become an increasingly technologically demanding industry and it was these demands, they suggested, that had led to the recruitment of graduates to manage superstores. The increased centralisation of control had meant that retailers had required a more professional, managerial workforce to cover a reduced number of store-based decisions. They suggested that this decline in responsibility and autonomy had had the potential to affect the morale of store management. Therefore, retailers had sought to rectify this anomaly through improved remuneration packages.

The shop-floor level

Freathy and Sparks (1994) stated that at the shop-floor level, food retailing had also undergone major structural changes. They suggested that the most visible trend had

been the increased level of part-time working. They asserted that the use of part-time labour had 'suited the industry well' (Freathy and Sparks, 1994: 193). Part-timers, they stated, were less likely to receive wage bonuses, commissions, shift allowances and overtime. Freathy and Sparks believed that a large proportion of this increase in part-time working had been made possible by technological advances. Technology had facilitated the rescheduling of labour deployment. EPOS was then used to identify peaks and troughs within the working day of the store and within individual departments. As such, staff scheduling, was increasingly based upon the improved flow of information available through technological advances:

> Employees can be tracked from till to till and their performance monitored closely throughout their working period.
>
> (Freathy and Sparks, 1994: 193)

In addition, a low level of demarcation existed between jobs, which meant that shop-floor workers could undertake a range of duties, and this then provided the superstore with the flexibility to respond to particular changes in customer demand. However, societal practices and pressures also affected the level of part-time working in retailing. Finally, the low level of skill required in combination with the requirement to be flexibly deployed had compounded the high rate of labour turnover within the shop-floor. They suggested that this had led many retailers to pay more attention to shop-floor recruitment, retention and training.

Assertions within the earlier parts of this section directed the readers' attention towards the dearth of work around the 'impact' of ICTs on retail employee relations. Freathy and Sparks' (1994) presentation provides the researcher with an introduction to some of the issues which become apparent within an analysis of the 'impact' of ICTs upon the retail workplace. Their considerations form a useful reference point for contemporary fieldwork. However, the subsequent section suggests that their understanding can be enhanced through an appreciation of a wider literature concerning the utilisation of technology. A survey of this literature is provided within the following three sections.

2.7   From determinism to where?

Regular proclamations, through the popular media and academia, assert that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are influencing social and economic possibilities within the contemporary age. Conjecture within this area is immense and the researcher is often forced to pick their way through varying degrees of utopian hyperbole. Such hyperbole is commonly referred to as technological determinism (Graham and Marvin, 1996). This ideal is based on the linear notion that innovation leads to new technologies which are then applied, used and have 'space transcending impacts' throughout society (Graham and Marvin, 1996). The determinist's inherent logic of inevitability suggests that technological change directly shapes society and the forces that stem from ICT innovations are seen to have autonomy from social and political processes (Graham and Marvin, 1996). As such, the social and the technical are viewed as two separate arenas, with the former being shaped by the latter (Graham, 1999; MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1985). Moreover, many theorists suggest that this shaping represents the defining characteristic of a novel historical era (Webster and Robins, 1989):

> [a] technological revolution, centred around information technologies, is reshaping, at accelerated pace, the material basis of society
>
> (Castells, 1996: 1)

Miles and Robins (1992) suggested that the inspiration for such thinking could be traced to Schumpter's work in the 1930s and the 1940s on Kondratiev waves (long cycles of faster and slower growth lasting around fifty years). Recent work on technological revolutions began in the context of efforts to account for these alleged cycles and was interpreted in terms of the succession of new technology systems (such as ICTs) associated with technological revolutions. Here, it was suggested that ICTs were leading the economy out of a recession and into the next long wave of economic growth (Graham and Marvin, 1996). To these ends, Freeman (1994) stated that the widespread use of ICTs had led some observers to characterise this era as a change in the economy comparable to the Industrial Revolution.

Given some of the exaggerated claims being made for the revolutionary significance of these technologies, Robins and Gillespie (1992) suggested that some

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preliminary and cautionary observations were in order. Despite the excitement and attention surrounding these technologies, Melody (1991) suggested that little critical insight into their long-term implications had been forwarded. Miles and Matthew (1992) concurred, suggesting that there was limited evidence from which to evaluate some of the sweeping claims that were being made. By way of a case study, Shields (1996) referred to the Internet and suggested that critics had tended to ignore the complexity of the issues involved - 'over-hyped and over-sensationalized', Shields (1996: 1) suggested, the Internet remained under-examined. Bombarded by rhetoric, what became manifest within such debates, suggested Graham (1997: 296), was the 'endless recycling of a series of received wisdoms'. Webster agreed and referred to the rash pronouncers of the 'Information Age':

> Far too much of this has come from 'practical' men (and a few women) who, impressed by the 'Information Revolution' or alerted to the prospect of 'information superhighways' by some report or other in Time magazine or Channel 4, have felt able to reel off social and economic consequences that are likely to follow, or that will even inevitably follow.
>
> (Webster, 1995: 3)

Within such accounts, Graham (1997a) suggested that there remained an explicit difficulty in moving beyond all-encompassing 'grand metaphors'. In earlier work, Graham (and Marvin, 1996) suggested that these futurist approaches highlighted a host of potential benefits through a technological panacea for all the social, economic and political ills of society. Lyon (1995) suggested that Daniel Bell's (1973) account of 'post-industrialism' was the strand on which such hopeful accounts often relied. Bell suggested that, just as agrarian society was replaced by industrial society, as the dominant economic emphasis shifted from the land to manufacturing, so post-industrial society developed as a result of the economic tilt towards the provision of services. Bell (1973) argued that the information society was developing in the context of post-industrialism, foreseeing a new social framework based on telecommunications. Lyon (1995) stated that this approach demanded academic critique. However, Miles and Robins (1992) suggested that disillusion with the post-industrial approach was probably accelerated as much by social and economic developments as by intellectual critique. Neo-conservative political economy swept to power in many Western countries,

showing contempt for many of the taken-for-granted features of post-industrialism, such as strong planning bodies, greater equality and the irrelevance of material wealth.

Nevertheless, Miles and Robins (1992) stated that many of the elements of the post-industrial account continued within a number of updated accounts. Instead of post-industrialism, a series of different terms and labels were used, including the 'Information Economy' (Hepworth, 1989), the 'Third Wave' (Toffler, 1980), the 'Information Age' and the 'Network Society' (Castells, 1996), the 'Information Society' (Webster, 1995) and the 'Information City' (Hepworth, 1987). Each held an inherent meaning and discussion and disagreement occurred within, and not only between, these accounts. Landabaso (1997) asserted that these discussions were often restricted, to a large extent, to academic 'experts', technologists and certain big multinational firms. The citizens, to whom (according to the literature) ICTs were to bring unmitigated benefits (Melody, 1991), were often excluded. Inevitably, affirmed Silverstone (1994), the supposedly dramatic transformations of ICTs failed to transform the lives of the majority of western citizens. Stanworth (1998) concurred and concluded that the predicted effects of the technology were wider than the adoption of the technology itself. However, and despite these reservations, McGuigan mournfully declared that determinist talk of a technological 'revolution' remained prominent:

> Technological utopianism has, in fact, become even more pronounced in the 1990s than it was in the preceding decade, and with no greater justification.
>
> (McGuigan, 1999: 2)

Within his analysis of cyberspace, Steve Graham (1998) made reference to the plethora of deterministic stories of information technology which remained within the popular media and some areas of academia:

> we need to be extremely wary of the dangers of adopting, even implicitly, deterministic technological models and metaphors of technological change. The choice of words here is important. For example, the very notion of a technological 'impact' ... is problematic, because of its attendant implications of simple, linear, technological cause and societal effect.
>
> (Graham, 1998: 180-181)

A similar euphoria (Dawson and Sparks, 1986) had become prevalent within retail research. Over the preceding thirty years, structural change (including through the adoption of new technology) within the industry had been regularly referred to as the 'retail revolution' (Brown, 1992a). Apparently, proclaimed Bromley and Thomas (1993: 4), this retail revolution had 'transformed retail operations'. Freathy and Sparks, in their overview of contemporary developments in employment relations, also referred to the 'impact' of retail technology:

> Much research has focused upon how technology has helped produce in-store productivity gains and more cost effective and responsive re-ordering and stock control systems. However, a concentration upon operational efficiency ignores the impact such changes have upon employment relationships.
>
> (Freathy and Sparks, 1994: 191)

However, Brown (1992a) suggested that the retail revolution was merely a widely used (and abused) metaphor.

Following Graham's (1998) advice, the retail researcher would be well-advised to be wary of these 'impact'-driven assertions. Inevitably, metaphors and deterministic language provide little assistance in attempts to understand technology utilisation. Whilst encouraging a move away from deterministic models, alternative but structured frameworks for analysis are required. In a discussion of alternative paradigms, Webster (1995) conferred that social theory, combined with empirical evidence, provided a rich method for understanding recent trends in the information domain. In sympathy with Webster's standpoint, the following section presents a combination of research around political economy and the social construction of technology (SCOT) in an attempt to provide an alternative framework for comprehending technology utilisation within the retail workplace. Other theories are then presented (virtualism, soft capitalism, electronic market hypothesis, network societies and debates on work talk) which it is suggested might be able to broaden existing understandings of ICTs.

2.8   Political economy and beyond

Miles and Matthew (1992) suggested that an important starting point for an alternative framework was to recognise that information had always been important for economic

affairs. Thrift (1996) was at pains to illustrate how, since the postal system and the electric telegraph, each major innovation surrounding the processing of information, had been celebrated by contemporary observers as 'a harbinger of a new order of the ages.' (John, 1994: 101; in Thrift, 1996: 1466-7). Thrift (1996) stated that historical change was, instead, a complex combination of different times. Webster (1995) suggested that this recognition began to highlight a key divide between those who endorsed the epochal shift of the 'information society' thesis and those who regarded 'informationisation' as the continuation of pre-established relations. Rather than seeing change in a linear fashion, Miles and Robins (1992: 16) asserted that the researcher should instead look towards cumulative developments in which new developments form as 'layers' across the old, with new and old 'always co-existing'. Through this context, Webster and Robins (1989) suggested that one could begin to understand some aspects of the current 'information revolution':

> Our argument is that what is commonly taken as innovation and 'revolution is, in fact no more - and no less - than the extension and intensification of processes set under way some seventy or so years ago.
>
> (Webster and Robins, 1989: 336)

Direct parallels could be drawn here between this argument and Massey's (1984; 1995) work on the spatial divisions of labour. Massey (as a political economist) argued that each spatial structure was the interrelation of a new combination of layers and because areas had different histories, each case had distinct social and economic results. At issue was the way that different places were then incorporated into the developing relations of capitalist production.

The political economy approach to ICTs also stressed that the development and application of technologies were fully inscribed into the political, economic and social relations of capitalism (Graham and Marvin, 1996). Rather than 'impacting' from outside society, the approach suggested that the driving forces shaping the application and development of technologies were the political, economic, social and cultural dynamics of capitalism itself (Graham and Marvin, 1996). Advances in ICTs were seen to help reproduce the political and social relations of capitalism, where more rapid systems of communication were the basis for an accelerated accumulation of capital (Graham and Marvin, 1996). The speed of flows, allowed through 'real-time'

communication, meant that global distances could, in theory, be transcended as easily as a corridor in a building (Graham, 1997a). Determinist thought suggested that these flows were transforming space-time and that geography was being reconfigured and its importance lessened (Kitchin, 1998). However, Graham (1997, 296) stated that this 'end of geography' thesis was, 'profoundly misleading and dangerously simplistic'. Instead, suggested Robins and Gillespie:

> Geographical transformation is not determined by technological innovations, but, rather, it is through the possibilities they offer that new spatial configurations might be elaborated.
>
> (Robins and Gillespie, 1992: 150)

Against the utopian scenarios of spatial transcendence, Robins and Gillespie (1992) declared that the role of space needed to be emphasised and that space and place were not transcended in an absolute sense. Alternatively, Goddard (1993) stated that researchers had to remind themselves that ICTs were about the communication of information *over* space. To these ends, new ICTs had to negotiate already complex spatial and temporal configurations. If ICTs were to bring about significant geographical transformations, they would be shaped by preceding orders of accumulation (Robins and Gillespie, 1992). Inevitably, ICTs were linked into the geographical division of labour between workplaces, both within and between organisations (Goddard, 1990). Here, Gillespie and Hepworth (1988) suggested that technology enabled head office management to control dispersed operations. However, Driver and Gillespie (1993) were at pains to illustrate that there was no necessary correlation between 'distance shrinking' technology and the decentralisation of economic power. In fact, they stated that ICTs were just as likely to be instrumental in the establishment of new or enhanced forms of inequality and uneven development. Instead of the dreams of equality that were forwarded by utopian theorists, Graham and Marvin (1996) suggested that political economy affirmed that space was re-worked in new ways to meet the needs of powerful capitalist organisations. Therefore, far from eliminating variances between places, Kitchin (1998) proclaimed that ICTs actually permitted the exploitation of differences between places by capitalising on cheap wages, cheap sites and reduced standards of working conditions. Inevitably, ICTs reshaped economic development but in ways that directly favoured those economic and political

interests who already dominated society (Graham and Marvin, 1996). The manner in which ICTs were developed and adopted frequently widened the gap between already divided social groups and nations, such that globalisation was in effect 'advanced capitalist globalisation' (Urry, 1996: 1979).

However, despite offering his support to political economy's shift away from technological determinism, Graham (1999; 1996 with Marvin) offered a critique of certain elements of the approach. He suggested that the paradigm could be totalising in predicting a bleak future and that political economy often overplayed the effects of the structure of capitalism in shaping technology. To this end, Graham (1999) asserted that political economy represented another form of determinism, which too often looked to the influence of the globalising structures of capitalism to verify ICT developments. Here, he suggested that dominant models (including political economy) operated to deny the very concept that local agency could shape technological innovation in diverse and contingent ways.

As an alternative approach, Graham and Marvin (1996) referred to the social construction of technology (SCOT). In a social constructionist approach, individuals, social groups and institutions were seen to have some degree of choice in shaping the design, development and application of technologies in specific cases (Graham and Marvin, 1996; Miles and Matthews, 1992):

> the compelling nature of much technological change is best explained by seeing technology not as outside society, as technological determinism would have it, but inextricably part of society
>
> (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1985: 14)

However, Kitchin (1998) suggested that social constructionism concentrated solely upon social processes, neglecting the wider political and economic forces that created power imbalances. Bingham (1996: 636) concurred, suggesting that this concentration upon social processes meant that, technological determinism and social constructionism were 'little more than two sides of the same coin.' Graham (1999) declared that the inevitable implication was that both technological and social determinism had to be rejected. Theoreticians had to be careful not to just reject technological determinism, only to replace it with some other form of social determinism (Hinchliffe, 1996; Bingham, 1996; Graham, 1996; 1998).

Struck by the rapid transformations brought about by ICTs, Manuel Castells was dissatisfied with social science's interpretation of this 'new world'. In an attempt to contribute to this understanding, Castells produced a three volume analysis of the new social structure, the network society (1996, 1997a, 1998). This dominant social structure, suggested Castells (1997), was characteristic of capitalism throughout the world. He believed that the network society had resulted from three independent processes: the information technology revolution; the 1980s restructuring of capitalism; and the cultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s (including feminism and ecologism). The resulting network society had several main features.

It was an economy in which sources of productivity for firms depended on knowledge, information and technology. This informational economy could solve problems – but it was potentially more exclusionary if social controls did not keep the market in check. This network society was also a global economy. This global economy had developed since the early 1980s on the basis of new ICTs. However, despite reaching out to the whole planet, this global economy was not planetary – it excluded more of the world's population than it included. At the centre of the global economy was the network enterprise, a new form of organisation.

The network enterprise was a specific set of linkages between different firms. It was set up for particular projects and dissolved on project completion. This 'ephemeral unit' had become the operating unit of the economy, generating profits and losses and deciding when and if workers were hired or laid off. The result was the individualisation of contracts between management and labour which weakened the social organisations and trade unions that represented and protected workers. As a result, workers were increasingly left to fight for themselves and there was an increasing trend towards social polarisation between a wealthy minority and a poor underclass.

The emergence of this new social structure (the network society) was linked to a redefinition of time and space. Castells suggested that the network society, as the dominant social structure of the information age, was organised around new forms of time and space: timeless time and the space of flows. Timeless time was the use of ICTs in a relentless effort to annihilate time and to compress years into seconds. Such tendencies, Castells suggested, could be found in split second financial transactions and the blurring of the life cycle allowed through new reproductive techniques. In addition, Castells stated that dominant processes of network societies operated through electronic circuits linking information systems in distant locations. Space remained vital because

these circuits did not operate in a territorial vacuum. In the network society though, there had become a prevalence of the logic of the space of flows over the space of places. An example, included when telecommunication systems linked up cities to an outlying suburbs' new office development, by-passing poor urban neighbourhoods. Castells (1997) concluded that the network society was a capitalist society. But it was a form of capitalism which was very different from industrial capitalism.

Driven by concerns over the nature of capitalism, virtualism was used by Miller (1998, 2001) to represent a more general theory of political economy. Stretched by 'decades of use and misuse', Miller (2001: 167) questioned whether a new term (virtualism) was needed to describe contemporary political economy. Miller (1998) suggested that capitalism had been tamed since the time of Marx. In this taming, consumption had played a conspicuous role.

An example of virtualism, said Miller (2001), was the rise of management consultancy. This practice contained the two major characteristics of virtualism: it created a fetishism of the consumer by replacing genuine knowledge with models and it had the power to change the practice of firms to make them conform more closely to these models. The result of a 'fad' in the business world, management consultants were paid huge amounts to take responsibility for the failure of the company they were supposed to be advising (Miller, 2001). Despite this 'fad', Miller (2001) reported that the 'cures' these companies took from firm to firm were formulaic.

Struggling low-cost retailer Kwik Save spent £9million on a programme with Andersen Consulting (Miller, 2001). The management consultancy suggested that Kwik Save should shut 107 stores, revamp the rest of its 872 shops and introduce a new own-label product range. However, shares in the Kwik Save Group fell by 25% as the costs of this restructuring plan became clear.

Miller (2001) believed that the term virtualism was justified because the push towards greater abstraction (as in management consultancy) turned out to be detrimental to actual working capitalism, either in the form of efficient business or profit making:

> What we see is not really a ratcheting up of the logic of capitalism towards greater profits but more a contradiction within capitalism in which new forms of modelling and abstraction establish their own agenda to which pre-existing capitalism is forced to conform even when against its interest to do so.
>
> (Miller, 2001: 174)

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Like Miller (1998; 2001), Thrift (1998) was concerned as to how we might understand capitalism after the cultural turn. It was an urgent task, he suggested, for while proponents of the cultural turn acknowledged the importance of capitalism, they tended to turn capitalism into an empty foil. 'Already accounted for' in accounts of the cultural turn, capitalism was allowed no life of its own. Thrift suggested that this situation had arisen because of three 'shocks' (political, theoretical and technological) that had made it more difficult to see capitalism. The political shock was the increasing stress on self and the politics of recognition that accompanied it. The technological shock was related to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the possibilities for learning and knowledge they allowed. The theoretical shock was a rise in new forms of theory that stressed decentredness, multiple times and spaces and the discursive realm. Thrift argued that these three combined shocks had obscured the importance of capitalism. However, he also believed that these shocks provided us with new ways with which to harness the cultural turn to understand capitalism.

Central to Thrift's discussion was the suggestion that capitalism had become more knowledgeable. He claimed that academics were deeply implicated in the origins of this more knowledgeable capitalism - and this more knowledgeable capitalism was in turn impinging on what were once thought of as traditional academic preserves. In an increasing interaction, the academic study of business increasingly emphasised the importance of information and knowledge: 'for in a sense, business has become more academic as academe has become more business orientated' (Thrift: 1998, 29). To exemplify this trend, Thrift referred to the rise in management qualifications and the increased responsiveness of business to outside ideas (such as from the Harvard Business School). Where theoretical developments leaked across boundaries, a new form of capitalism was being born – what Thrit (1998: 31) referred to as 'soft capitalism'.

Thrift's (1998) work illustrated that since the demise of the Bretton Woods agreement and the fall of the Berlin Wall, 'soft capitalism' had gone into overdrive. A permanent state of turbulence, including floating exchange rates and a general speed up in transport and communications, had meant that managers and business organisations were vulnerable to rapid change. Managers were expected to react more swiftly – 'and a new discourse has been formed which frames and forces them' (Thrift, 1998: 39). This discourse had become part of the 'background hum of business around the world' (Thrift, 1996: 38), soaking into the practical order and used more often to account for

decisions. This discourse depended upon new metaphors that attempted to capture this turbulent world. Based on the notion of constant adaptive movement (including 'dancing' and surfing'), these metaphors were used to refigure the business organisation's relationship with the world.

Like Miller (1998, 2001), Thrift suggested that key agents had been responsible for spreading this managerial discourse across the globe. Chief amongst these were three institutions: business schools, management consultants and management gurus. Thrift believed that these three were responsible for the bulk of management knowledge and, like Miller (1998, 2001), he believed that knowledge came in the form of a succession of 'business fads' (such as the paperless office and globalisation). Multiple channels, including business schools, the media and management seminars, distributed these ideas. In turn, the management 'audience' were better read (management books) and educated (MBA programmes):

> Managers clearly want and need new ideas. They need them to make their way in organizations, to solve a particular company problem, to act as an internal motivation device, to guard against their competitors' adoption of new ideas and simply to provide a career enhancer. In the latter case, the new idea demonstrates to others that the manager is creative, up-to-the minute and actively seeing improvements, thereby increasing that individual's visibility in the organization. Equally, the new idea can act as a defence, can provide a quick-fix solution in a difficult period, or even simply reduce boredom
>
> (Thrift, 1998: 50-51)

This newly 'reinvented' manager then had to find the means to steer a course in an uncertain world. So rather than aim to produce an overall business strategy, the good business manager produced an 'emergent' or 'learning' strategy. And through dedicated networking, the manager produced and sustained external relationships of trust with other firms. In short, the rational company man of the 1950s and 1960s that was skilled in bureaucracy, had become the corporate social persona of the contemporary age, skilled in social presentation and 'change management'. And the giant multidivisional corporation of the 1950s and 1960s had become a leaner, networked and virtual organisation. The managerial discourse, concluded Thrift, was undoubtedly an exaggeration that exaggerated its own importance:

But what seems clear is that this 'new managerialism' is becoming the hegemonic account, both of what the post-Bretton Woods business world is like, and of how best to exercise power within it, across the world

(Thrift, 1998: 56)

Thrift claimed that the hegemony of this new managerial discourse had a number of consequences. The discourse involved a 'super-exploitation' of managers (who were expected to commit their whole being to the company) and workers (who were expected to commit their embodied knowledge). Also with the increasing traffic between the business and academic worlds, there was now no intellectual community that could be separated off to decode the world.

Thrift suggested that we must learn to live with these consequences whilst striving to prevent them from being turned into a new capitalist orthodoxy. Here, he claimed we may be helped by soft capitalism itself. He stated that soft capitalism was shot through with tensions and contradictions. Soft capitalism brought the opportunity for new kinds of resistance and subversions in workforces, particularly with the rise of electronic communication technologies. In addition, managers who were schooled in the ethics of corporate responsibility and were expected to work long hours could become reluctant and even disillusioned.

To this end, O'Neill and Gibson-Graham (1999) presented an analysis of enterprise discourse and executive talk in an attempt to highlight some of the tensions and contradictions that were inherent within a modern business. They were frustrated that the traditional economic literature portrayed the firm as an ordered, autonomous and rational economic subject, whose discourse operated according to a central logic. Bewildered by the continued translation of field observations into prescribed norms and models, O'Neill and Gibson-Graham instead highlighted the performative nature of enterprise discourse. Their discussion centred upon Australia's largest company, Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited (BHP). In particular they concentrated upon BHP's Melbourne-based head office decision in the mid-1980s to close a steelworks in the industrial city of Newcastle, Australia.

Their concern was with the representation of BHP as a powerful and rational entity, driven by the logic of capital accumulation. O'Neill and Gibson-Graham deconstructed this single representation – and instead presented the multiple narratives and types of 'talk' that circulated within the company at this time. To this end, they

interviewed two former BHP executives and then created a 'conversation' between the executives and their competing enterprise discourses. A cacophony of voices emerged, concerned with how the company should operate and what the most beneficial course of action would be. The excerpts of executive talk illustrated the power of minority voices - and their inevitably successful attempts to save the Newcastle plant.

Given the conversational format of their story, the authors were keen for other academics to open up a similar forum to represent the discourse of a corporation. In particular, they were eager to hear from a wide proliferation of enterprise discourses:

No longer can the enterprise be represented as bounded and self-contained
(O'Neill and Gibson-Graham, 1999: 20)

They suggested that the particular nature of corporate narratives should encourage us to analyse the ways in which minority actors (including environmental groups, unemployed workers and women) are making their claims upon corporate resources. And by destabilising the traditional representation of the company in this way, O'Neill and Gibson-Graham (1999: 20) suggested that 'we potentially enable a very different politics of the enterprise to emerge'.

Malone et al (1987) analysed the form of the enterprise via a discussion of electronic hierarchies and marketplaces. They commenced their presentation by stating that innovations in ICT had radically reduced the time and cost of processing information. Underlying these changes, they suggested, were more fundamental alterations to the ways that firms and markets organised the flow of goods and services. In their paper, Malone et al (1987) suggested how ICTs were affecting firm and market structures. More specifically, they claimed that by reducing the costs of co-ordination, ICTs led firms to make more use of markets instead of hierarchies.

According to Malone et al, markets co-ordinated the flow of materials in economies through supply and demand forces. On the other hand, a relationship between supplier and buyer was hierarchical when the buyer chose to buy their supplies from a single supplier rather than a number of suppliers (Malone et al, 1987). Key factors favoured either markets or hierarchies. The pure market allowed the buyer to compare many different suppliers to select the one with the best characteristics (such as design and price). However, the market co-ordination costs of the market were high because the buyer had to analyse information from a wide source of suppliers.

Hierarchies, alternatively, restricted the buyer's choice of suppliers and co-ordination costs were consequently reduced. At the same time, however, reduced choice meant that production costs were generally greater in a hierarchy.

However, Malone et al (1987) recognised that the relative importance of production and co-ordination costs could be affected by ICTs. They stated that two other factors (asset specificity and complexity of product description) could also be influenced. Malone et al stated that an input used by a firm was asset specific when it could not be readily used by other firms because of site specificity, physical asset specificity, human asset specificity or time specificity. For example, a specialised tool that could not be readily used for another purpose was physically specific. Malone et al suggested that transactions involving asset specific products were often hierarchical because they involved detailed adjustments to the buyers needs. Complexity of product description, on the other hand, referred to the amount of information a buyer required making a purchase. While stocks and shares had simple descriptions, complicated computer systems were more complex (Malone et al, 1987). Malone et al suggested that because complex product descriptions required more information exchange, they increased the co-ordination cost advantage of hierarchies over markets. As a result, buyers of products with complex descriptions were more likely to work with a single supplier in a close, hierarchical relationship.

In short, Malone et al suggested that highly asset specific items with complex product descriptions were more likely to be purchased through a hierarchical relationship. On the other hand, not very asset specific items with simple product descriptions were more likely to be acquired through a market.

However, Malone et al believed that ICTs had reduced the time and cost of communication information. This electronic co-ordination could be used to take advantage of two other key effects, electronic brokerage and electronic integration. In the electronic brokerage effect, electronic computer-based markets could fulfil the same function as a traditional broker, by electronically connecting many different buyers and suppliers through a central database. The standards of the electronic market allowed the buyer to screen many different suppliers quickly, conveniently and inexpensively. The electronic integration effect occurred when ICTs were used to create a tighter coupling of business processes. One key example was a 'just in time' inventory system between a buyer and a supplier, which allowed the buyer to eliminate inventory holding costs.

To this end, Malone et al suggested that the electronic integration effect was usually captured in computer-based electronic hierarchies.

But despite this use of ICTs within hierarchies, Malone et al (1987) suggested that the overall effect of ICTs would be to increase the proportion of economic activity co-ordinated by markets. First, they believed the use of ICTs would reduce the costs involved in co-ordinating and processing supplier information. Secondly, and as a result of reduced co-ordination costs, ICTs would also reduce the cost of conducting the actual market transactions themselves. An additional argument was based upon asset specificity and the complexity of product description. ICTs could now communicate more complex product descriptions than before. In addition, flexible manufacturing technology allowed rapid changeover of production lines and the importance of asset specificity had been reduced. These two changes increased the possibilities for more market-based transactions.

Malone et al (1987) found that some of the initial providers of electronics markets had attempted to exploit the benefits in a system biased towards a particular supplier. However, they believed that in the long-run the potential benefits accrued from the electronic brokerage effect would lead most electronic markets towards an unbiased channels for multiple suppliers. Producers operating electronic markets would eventually be driven by competitive or legal forces to reduce the bias. Nevertheless, such unbiased electronic markets could lead buyers to be overwhelmed with too many supplier alternatives. In these cases, Malone et al believed a final stage of 'personalisation' would develop which would allow individual buyers to select from the available suppliers. To conclude:

> if our predictions are correct, we should not expect the electronically interconnected world of tomorrow to be simply a faster and more efficient version of the world we know today. Instead, we should expect fundamental changes in how firms and markets organise the flow of goods and services in our economy.

> (Malone et al, 1987: 497)

In summary, a political economy approach to the analysis of ICTs showed how technology helped to re-work space to the advantage of already powerful capitalists, denying the concept that local agency could shape the development of ICTs. As an

alternative, the social constructionist (SCOT) approach saw individuals as having some ability to shape the development of technology. However, its sole concentration on social agency was deterministic. The researcher was, therefore, forced to consider alternative theoretical sources. Manuel Castells (1997) showed how a new dominant social structure, the network society, had taken the form of a global economy on the basis of ICTs. Although essentially a capitalist society, it was different in form to industrial capitalism and it was a global economy that excluded more of the world's population than it included. Also driven by concerns over the nature of capitalism, Miller's (1998; 2001) virtualism described contemporary political economy. Virtualism replaced genuine knowledge with models and had the power to make firms conform more closely to these models. Nigel Thrift's (1998) work on soft capitalism also recognised the contested nature of contemporary capitalism. Thrift referred to the new discourse of the business world and the MBAs and post-graduate qualifications that were essential to becoming a 'successful' manager. Frustrated by the 'ordered and rational' portrayal of the firm in the economic literature, O'Neill and Gibson-Graham (1999) analysed the multiple identities and narratives of the contemporary capitalist business. Malone et al (1987), meanwhile, highlighted how access to ICTs led firms to make more use of electronic markets rather than hierarchies.

These approaches can help the researcher to understand contemporary changes in Western economies and they can be helpful in attempts to move towards an understanding of the relationship between space and technology. However, it is against this backdrop that we present actor-network theory (ANT). ANT's concentration on the interaction between space, social relations and technology provides a further and particularly thorough approach from which to analyse how ICTs are deployed, used and adapted in the social space of the retail workplace.

2.9 Actor-network theory

> The game of technology is never finished, and its ramifications are endless. But how should we think of technological change?
>
> (Callon, 1991: 132)

In response to this question, sociologists and economists spent the 1980s illustrating how the standard models of technological development were flawed (Callon, 1991).

Broadly referred to as actor-network theory (ANT) and produced by theorists such as Michel Serres and Bruno Latour (see 1995), the alternative models of ANT suggest that science and technology are a product of interaction between a large number of actors. Actor-network theory emphasises how specific social situations, and human actors, enrol technology (machines, documents, money) into 'actor-networks'. Nigel Thrift defines actor-network theory as:

> an attempt to refigure the relationship between people and machines that leaves neither term inside or outside the other one but brings both terms together in specific actor-networks .
>
> (Thrift, 1996: 1464)

The ANT perspective, asserts Graham (1998: 178), is wholly relational, whereby technologies have to be understood through the way that they become, 'linked into specific social contexts by linked human and technological agency'. So to speak of the 'impact' of a machine alone is futile; technologies have to be understood within the context of their use:

> no technology is ever found working in splendid isolation as though it is the central node in the social universe. It is linked - by the social purposes to which it is put - to humans and other technologies of different kinds. It is linked to a chain of different activities involving other technologies. And it is heavily contextualised. Thus the telephone, say, at someone's place of work had (and has) different meanings from the telephone in, say, their bedroom, and is often used in quite different ways.
>
> (Thrift, 1996: 1468)

Murdoch (1998) suggests this kind of 'relational view of space' has come to be seen as a dominant paradigm within human geography. Doreen Massey's (1991) 'power geometry' for example, shows how each place is tied into local to global networks of relations. Here, places are imagined as 'articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings' (Massey: 1991: 28). And Whatmore and Thorne's (1997) alternative geographies of food use the geographical imagination of ANT to elaborate an understanding of places in global networks. Like the supposed technological revolution

brought through space-transcending ICTs, they suggest that globalisation has become a hallmark of our spatial imagination. Whatmore and Thorne (1997) suggest that written accounts of globalisation aim for the eradication of social agency through the presentation of global reach as systematic, rather than a partial and contested process:

> [global] reach depends upon intricate interweavings of *situated* people, artefacts, codes, and living things and the maintenance of particular tapestries across the world.
>
> (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997: 288)

The issue then for studies of technology, suggests Hinchliffe, (1996), is not one of demonstrating social context alone but to think through how the social relates to the technical and vice versa. For ANT, this demonstration requires a heterogeneous approach to networks, where humans *and* non-humans (objects, materials) become entwined within complex associations. As such, studies of social relations (humans) or technologies (non-humans) in isolation count for little.

Callon (1991) attempts to illustrate the 'strange alchemy' that links humans and non-humans into heterogeneous networks. He argues that in practice it is not too difficult to describe the programs 'embodied' in technical objects, or the ways in which their socio-technical components act, communicate, issue orders, interrupt one another and follow protocols. At the design stage for instance, the character of an object will be endlessly debated. Heterogeneous questions concerning what an object will do and what it will look like will demand engineers to transform themselves into sociologists when they are most caught up with technical questions. Inevitably, suggests Callon, answers to questions about design are both technical *and* social – and the definition of an object is also the definition of its socio-technical context: 'there is no "inside" or "outside"' (Callon, 1991: 137).

Callon also gives the example of apprenticeship. Here, the instructor describes the operation of an object and the apprentice will play a particular role, pressing a lever or observing a screen and clicking a mouse. By the instructor and apprentice in turn, the machine is interpreted, deconstructed and inserted back into its context. However, the inevitable utilisation of the object may not equate with the original designer's intentions.

In practice, suggests Callon (1991), the world is filled with hybrids and it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between the human and non-human. 'Impurity,

then, is the rule,' says Callon (1991: 139) – and the most visible example of this is the service sector. The package holiday is a mixture of humans, non-humans, texts and financial products that have been put together in a precise sequence:

> Consider what it takes for Mr Smith to be able (and willing) to spend his holiday on the banks of Lake Ranguiroa, watching the barracudas mingle with his fellow-humans. Computers, alloys, jet engines, research departments, market studies, advertisements, welcoming hostesses, natives who have suppressed their desire for independence and learned to smile as they carry luggage, bank loans and currency exchanges – all of these and many more have been aligned.
>
> (Callon, 1991: 139)

Inevitably, ANT shows how spaces come to be connected in ways which permit certain actors (or centres) to determine the shape of others from afar (Murdoch 1998; after Latour, 1987). It provides a way for reconceptualising power relations in space (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997), such that the key concern is not *a priori* associations between global or local actors. Instead, the researcher's interest is directed towards degrees of connectivity within a network.

First, ANT problematises global reach by conceiving it as being a contested process of 'acting at a distance' (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). Law's (1986) illustrates this conception through the mechanics of Portuguese 15th and 16th century imperialism and the Europeans' attempts to expand the Indian spice route. To 'reap a fabulous reward', the Portuguese had to order a complex heterogeneous actor-network of people and things, including hulls, sails, winds, oceans, sailors, stores, navigators, stars, guns, Arabs, spices and money (Law and Mol, 2001). Moreover, the Portuguese had to manage long distance control over this network so that a small number of people in Lisbon could influence events on the other side of the world (Law, 1986). Law refers to this as 'remote control':

> Heterogeneous socio-technologies open up the possibility of ordering distant events from a centre … [in which] the centre is a place which monitors and represents the periphery and then calculates how to act on the periphery.
>
> (Law, 1994: 104; in, Whatmore and Thorne, 1997: 290)

However, Whatmore and Thorne (1997) believe that Law's concept of 'remote control' (with its bi-polarities of a Portuguese 'core' and Indian 'periphery') is enshrined within a geometric vocabulary (in a similar way to the binary divide of 'global' and 'local'). Latour's (1987) notion of 'network lengthening', on the other hand, provides an alternative theoretical framework. His is a geography of flows, where actor-networks are neither local or global, but only 'more or less connected':

> Is a railroad local or global? Neither. It is local at all points, since you always find sleepers and railroad workers, and you have stations and automatic ticket machines scattered along the way. Yet it is global, since it takes you from Madrid to Berlin of from Brest to Vladivostock. However, it is not universal enough to be able to take you just anywhere. It is impossible to reach the little Auvergnat village of Malpy by train, or the little Staffordshire village of Market Drayton.
>
> (Latour, 1993: 117)

Latour claims that his railroad example can be extended to cover all technological networks. Branch lines must be paid for if paths are to lead from the local to the global. As he suggests in another example, electromagnetic waves may be everywhere, but one still requires an antenna, a subscription and a decoder to receive CNN (Cable News Network). As such, gaps in the technological network appear. The network is a series of uncomprehensive lines - not the smooth surface and all-encompassing 'cyberspace' presented by the technological determinists. Rather than being all-encompassing, technological networks actually only include a few scattered elements:

> Between the lines of the network there is, strictly speaking, nothing at all
>
> (Latour, 1993: 118)

As such, the supposedly sleek surface of cyberspace is as patchy as all other technological networks:

> it is necessary to assert that 'the Net' is neither local nor global. It is local at all points since you always find terminals and modems. And yet it is global since it connects Sheffield and Sydney. However, it is not universal enough to take you

just anywhere. After all, I cannot e-mail my next-door-neighbour and between a third and a half of the world's population still lives more than two hours away from the nearest telephone.

<div align="right">(Bingham, 1999: 255)</div>

In attempting to understand the construction of networked space then, it is vital to consider the 'Others' – those actors that have slipped between the gaps of the sleek surface of cyberspace. To this end, Murdoch (1998) suggests that we need to investigate the various forms of remote 'control' which can allow actors (or centres) to dominate peripheries. Murdoch (after Latour, 1987) notes that 'translation' refers to the processes of negotiation, representation and displacement that establish relations between actors, entities and places. This translation, Murdoch suggests, redefines phenomenon so that they behave in accordance with the requirements of the network. Inevitably, the most durable and robust networks are where the assembled entities work in unison. Through this unity, these durable networks traverse space and tie in localised others:

> Once these others are tied in then they must (if the network is to be maintained and they are to be included) bend to the system of remote control that it employs

<div align="right">(Murdoch, 1998: 363)</div>

As control from afar becomes successful, the true relation between ICTs and social relations in networked space will become apparent. And rather than a pre-determined information revolution, Bingham (1999) suggests the challenge is to produce accounts of the world in which our analyses result from the various heterogeneous networks. Therefore, Bingham suggests the difference that computer-mediated communication makes cannot be specified in advance – as the difference computer-mediated communication makes is always different.

However, difference alone is not the full story. As has now been well-rehearsed, ANT accepts the poststructuralist critique of grand narratives and decries universal truths such as globalisation and cyberspace. Yet by suggesting we see everything – humans and non-humans – as part of the network, Lee and Brown (1994) state that ANT has assumed for itself a grand narrative around the notion of enfranchisement. ANT leaves no room for alterity (Otherness) and allows nothing to stand outside its description of the network (Hetherington and Law, 2000).

Latour (1997) recognises the complexity and flaws of ANT. However, he also states that social theorists cannot recall ideas as an automotive manufacturer might recall a badly conceived car. This unplanned and uncharted experiment in collective philosophy has been launched and 'there is no way to retreat and be modest again'. Abandonment of ANT is not the solution, suggests Latour (1997: 6). Instead theorists should be encouraged to develop its 'strange potential'.

If we are to continue with a relational approach, suggest Hetherington and Law (2000), we need to take into account the possibility of alterity (Otherness) within the relations that concern us:

> the outside space of alterity is always already inside and moving in ways that are indifferent to the relations of difference that we as writers on relational space have often tended to assume.
>
> (Hetherington and Law, 2000: 4)

To recognise Otherness as inside the network (rather than outside) requires different ways of thinking about space. In part, Hetherington and Law suggest this requires an understanding of how networks of socio-technical relations fail (rather than an analysis of successful networks only). Latour's (1996) study of the doomed 'Aramis' public transportation system in Paris represents multiple voices. It also illustrates how the researcher struggles to draw the network together in a single account (Hetherington and Law, 2000).

The point, suggests Murdoch (1998: 363), is that there is some scope for negotiation in formalised network spaces: 'that is, actors can carve out for themselves a degree of autonomy from the network prescriptions.' To this end, Murdoch (1998) states that the scope for negotiation will vary with the prescriptive actions (controls from a distance) employed in the network. As an example of this, Murdoch cites Leigh Star's (1991) encounter with McDonalds. Star is allergic to onions and discovers that asking for a burger without onions disrupts the flow along the network in a McDonald's restaurant. Rather than put up with long delays, Star orders a burger and then scrapes off the onions with a plastic knife. Murdoch (1998) says that this example shows that standard networks configure actions in particular locales (Star had to order a burger like anyone else) but this process was open to negotiation (she was able to remove the onions). He states that this example shows that spaces of domination and negotiation

can 'shade' into one another and, as such, different spaces (spaces of domination, negotiation and so on) can emerge from within the same network. Focusing on these spaces may allow us to address fundamental questions about network construction, while at the same time considering the 'other' actors who have slipped between the network (Murdoch, 1998).

To establish these connections, Murdoch follows the lead of Hetherington (1997) who suggests that viewing spaces with single identities overlooks the issue of order. Like Allen (1997, 1999), Hetherington recognises that power works across space in more subtle ways than through simple domination and resistance binaries. Rather than referring to 'spaces of resistance' or 'spaces of domination', Hetherington (1997: 51) believes spaces are established between complex 'modes of social ordering'.

As such, the role of agency and the individual's scope for negotiation in the production of space is always important. In the production of the workplace space, the individual can perform many different activities and roles. While many of these roles are set out by powerful capitalists, the actor can also perform workplace roles in individual coping strategies. The following section considers theory around work as performance and as an embodied practice in an attempt to provide a broader understanding of the social space of the retail workplace. After a general introduction to the concept of performance and the body in the retail workplace, key theories by authors, including Goffman, McDowell, Leidner, Hochschild and Crang are presented. Here we consider how male service workers enact gender in the workplace and how they re-interpret 'feminine' skills as masculine to create a positive interpretation of their jobs. We also note the particular masculinisation of service jobs, via sexual metaphors and special social events. Against this, we consider how women's strategies of resistance in these masculinised spaces are important for their particular senses of self. Beyond this, we discuss the tactics and manoeuvres that individual performers might use to resist control in the service workplace. We also consider the roles that service workers play - and the consequences performing such a role might have for one's sense of self.

2.10 Work as performance and as an embodied practice

Goffman (1956) suggested that the performances of everyday life (work included) were not 'put on' in the sense that the individual knew in advance every part he or she would

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act. However, the inability to predict an eye or body movement in advance did not mean that the individual would not express themselves in a way that was dramatised or pre-formed in a repertoire of actions. The individual performer instead learnt enough pieces to be able to 'fill in' and manage any role they were given:

> life itself is a dramatically enacted thing. All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify
>
> (Goffman, 1956: 72)

In particular, the expansion of the commercial sphere into everyday contemporary life left Bowlby to conclude that the modern day service worker was indeed a constant performer:

> all the world's a showroom, every man or woman an advertisement for himself or herself, aiming to 'impress' and please his or her consumers
>
> (Bowlby, 1993: 95)

Given the apparent universality of our Western 'showroom' world, Thrift and Dewsbury (2000) suggested that the 'hold' of performance was becoming strong across the social sciences. However, despite representing one of the key theoretical concerns of social sciences in the 1990s, there was a deficiency of replicating empirical analysis (Gregson and Crewe, 1997). It was a situation, suggested Gregson and Crewe, that needed urgent attention. To this end, they asserted that theoretically sophisticated research needed to be grounded in the lives of ordinary people. In a movement towards this aim, Gregson and Crewe sited their own research at the marginal space of the car boot sale and showed that purchase could involve theatricality, performance, unpredictability, the unexpected, skill, thrift, pleasure and desire. Such findings led Gregson and Crewe to conclude that the act of purchase at the car boot sale (and out into conventional retail environments) was more complex than the existing consumption literature believed.

With regards to researching the conventional retail environment, Bell and Valentine (1997) suggested that it might have seemed that looking at a supermarket was no more than epistemological or methodological slackness. However, they suggested that unpacking the apparently mundane consumption practices of the retail store opened up rich theoretical insights. They were not alone. Lunt and Livingstone (1992: 96)

stated that the purchase of relatively cheap goods was what most of us meant by going shopping - and in the social sciences, 'analysis of the mundane is generally revealing of a culture'. Miller (1998a) too believed that analysis of shopping would lead towards a more thorough understanding of social relations. Alongside Jackson, Thrift and Holbrook, Miller explained how such an understanding might materialise itself:

> Shopping is about social relations. We take it as axiomatic that we live through others, in joint action with them. It is no surprise, then that shopping is as often about others as it is about self (and even when it is about self, it is often still about others).
>
> (Miller, Jackson, Thrift and Holbrook, 1998: 17)

As was shown earlier in this chapter (see Section 2.1), shop workers tended to be neglected in new retail geography's disparate field of action (Miller et al 1998). One way of addressing this neglect is via an understanding of gender in the workplace. Key authors, including McDowell, Leidner, Hochschild and Crang, produced a body of literature around work as performance and an embodied practice that can be used to understand social relations and the self in the service (and in our specific case, the retail) workplace.

The economic structure of the post-War Western world has changed fundamentally towards a service based economy, where two-thirds of all waged workers in the United States and United Kingdom are employed in the service economy (McDowell and Court, 1994). Across retail, leisure, food and finance, these service jobs involve particular gender characteristics:

> increasingly these 'new' occupations rely on the marketing of attributes conventionally associated with the 'natural' attributes of femininity – sociability, caring and indeed servicing – which are marketed as an integral part of the product for sale
>
> (McDowell and Court, 1994: 229)

However, McDowell and Court (1994) believed that, for the most part, geography had not explored the social construction of occupations themselves as gendered. The

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discipline tended to represent occupations as empty slots to be filled, and workers as already socially constituted men and women with already fixed gender attributes:

> We start the story, in other words, too late, by uncritically accepting a gendered category (the 'woman worker') that itself needs investigation because its meaning is relative to its history.
>
> (McDowell and Court, 1994: 233)

To this end, McDowell and Court (1994) undertook case study work in the financial services sector. Here, the focus turned to power and domination and the way in which assumptions about gender-appropriate behaviour influenced social relations between workers. In their study of the financial sector, McDowell and Court suggested that some women had to 'perform' like men to be successful:

> The idea of gender performance is particularly helpful in understanding the construction and maintenance of gender identities and power relations in the workplace.
>
> (McDowell and Court, 1994: 237)

However, McDowell and Court suggested that the idea of gender performance was not restricted to women. Leidner (1991), for example, suggested that one of the most important determinants of the satisfaction or honour of a job, was its association with a particular gender. Workers acceptance of the identity implied by the job was determined by how the employee could enact gender in a satisfying way. She argued that workers would therefore go to great lengths to enact gender, even when the job might be interpreted as being more suitable for the other gender.

Leidner's analysis drew on case study research of 'interactive service work' (jobs that involved direct interaction with customers). In these jobs, Leidner suggested that the quality of interaction could become part of the service offered and worker identities were therefore regularly integral to the task performed. To this end, and despite the low-public esteem of service work, the case study companies (McDonalds and Combined Insurance) took training very seriously. Door-to-door sales company Combined Insurance placed particular demands on its young, white male trainees.

Expected to respond to individual customer needs, agents were required to control the sale - and every detail of their routines was designed to help them:

> They were taught exactly how to stand while waiting for a door to be opened, how to position themselves and the potential customers (known as 'prospects'), when to make and break eye contact, how to deliver the Standard Joke, and so on.
>
> (Leidner, 1991: 161)

In short, this insurance work demanded employees adopt an eagerness to please and a careful monitoring of one's own behaviour. Leidner claimed that this could have struck some of Combined Insurance's wholly male workforce as incompatible with the proper enactment of gender, which associated masculinity with toughness and detachment. However, the agents at Combined Insurance defined their work as 'properly manly,' stressing that women wouldn't succeed in the job. This meant the 'feminine' skills of the agents' work were reinterpreted or de-emphasised:

> [the agents] assigned a heroic character to the job, framing interactions with customers as contests of will. To succeed, they emphasized, required determination, aggressiveness, persistence, and stoicism.
>
> (Leidner, 1991: 166)

Leidner found that most male agents needed to construct an interpretation of the work as honourable and fitting for a man if they were to maintain a positive attitude about their job. The agents could live with the knowledge that, as service workers, people would look down on them, so long as their work was compatible with manliness, social honour and there was a possibility of 'making it big'.

Therefore, whilst 'traditional' male attitudes might dictate that only physically demanding work can be considered manly, the actual gender designation of job tasks is quite plastic. Whilst this may be so, interpreting work as womanly has a different meaning. Jobs including nursing and teaching are understood to require valued female characteristics, such as sensitivity. Yet even when the form of employment is seen as expressive of femininity, it is not seen as offering proof of female identity. Leidner suggested this was because female identity was not achieved through paid work:

while women in traditionally female-defined jobs might well take pleasure in doing work that supports their self-identification as feminine, they are unlikely to think of such work as a necessary part of their gender identity.

(Leidner, 1991: 173)

Morgan and Knights (1991) argued that such gender characteristics were becoming explicit objects of management attention. In an attempt to efficiently use human resources, senior managers were extending the disciplinary 'gaze' to recognise the gendered characteristics of the workforce. Tasks that were unproblematically allocated to men or women were changed as companies considered their use of human resources.

To analyse this transition, Morgan and Knights undertook case study analysis of a medium-sized insurance company, set up buy its parent bank to sell insurance through sales representatives (reps). As in Leidner's (1991) research, the job of selling for the sales reps had become masculinised in a specific way. Although there was no formal bar to women being employed, the company culture, the expectations of the work and the social network all ensured that women were only employed in isolated cases. First, sales managers suggested that women were not cut-out for the work. Women would have to travel around on their own in the dark and managers presumed they would be less resilient to the bad patches and loneliness of selling. It was also stated that women would be too sympathetic to clients and would settle for lower premiums. Secondly, sales force teams were held together by a number of social events:

It is common for sales teams to go out drinking together in the evening, sharing times of relaxation in swapping stories about selling as well as indulging in the usual male sports which accompany bouts of communal drinking.

(Morgan and Knights, 1991: 186)

Finally, and as in Leidner's (1991) study, the self-identity subscribed to by male sales reps was crucial in blocking further female participation. Sales reps used a vocabulary which associated their work with masculine characteristics more usually associated with manual labour:

Thus they talked about the need to be 'aggressive' and 'high-performing'. As a sales-person, one could not afford to be 'weak' and over-emphathize with the

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financial difficulties of the client. One had to have 'bottle' to face the clients day after day. One had to have 'nerve' and a 'bit of cheek'

(Morgan and Knights, 1991: 187)

But in the mid-1980s on the back of rising-cost pressures, the insurance company's parent bank began to experiment by using its own female staff to sell insurance over the counter. Branch-level male management hierarchy welcomed the decision because this transition created a salesforce under the patriarchal gaze of professional bankers. The bank manager was able to maintain control of corporate accounts and ensure that the more interesting areas of the female staff's insurance selling work passed directly through him. At the same time, the work of the separate insurance reps was directly threatened.

Like Morgan and Knights, McDowell and Court (1994) suggested that management and corporate strategy played a central role in the construction of gendered identities in the workplace. They believed that companies invented cultural images of gender and then created occupations that embodied gendered images of the people who should occupy them. These images were sometimes challenged by excluded workers or reshaped by management as part of a human resource restructuring process, as in Morgan and Knights' (1991) example. McDowell and Court studied these practices through a case study analysis of merchant banking in the City of London. Their detailed analysis revealed that women were concentrated within the lower tier 'professional' and feminised occupations (clerical, secretarial). Almost half (48%) of McDowell and Court's 50 interviewees in the male-dominated professional occupations (directors, strategic managers) had been educated at Oxford, Cambridge or one of five other elite universities. Trading floor dealers were less likely to have degrees and usually entered banking at 18.

McDowell and Court suggested that their findings paralleled Morgan and Knights' (1991) earlier work. Top ranking positions in corporate finance reflected the sober paternalism of managers in Morgan and Knights' retail banking sector study. Like in sales, the male culture established in trading valued the macho masculinity of 'guts, irons balls and the killer instinct necessary to overcome clients resistance to make sales, and conclude deals' (McDowell and Court, 1994: 241).

Many respondents, both male and female, noted that the atmosphere was 'masculine'. Sexual metaphor (the 'thrill' or 'conquest') was used to describe deal

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closure and 'sleazy' lads' nights out were a prerogative. A significant number of male interviewees also referred to their work as performance. Aware that they were 'selling themselves as their product', male workers would keep within strict dress codes and never deviate.

For the majority of women, 'fitting in' meant working in feminised clerical roles. For women working in the 'professional occupations', 'fitting in' meant adopting masculinist norms and dress (wearing suits, posing as neutral bodies). McDowell and Court suggested that the relationship between a female body and a lack of power was a key reason why women had been forced to act as men to achieve success. However, they did note strategies of resistance. Depending on the circumstances, one woman used her appearance (executive bimbo or plain tailored suit) to challenge the view that clients or colleagues held of her as a woman. McDowell and Court suggested that these 'masquerades' (masculinised femininity of deliberate femininity) were important for a women's sense of self. They suggested, therefore, that important questions remained around embodiment and performance:

> the processes of being and becoming a woman (or a man) in the waged world of waged work should not be ignored by geographers, especially in the context of the shift toward service sector employment and a feminized labour force.
>
> (McDowell and Court, 1994: 247)

In a continued movement towards this aim, Nina Wakeford (1999) conducted case study analysis at an Internet café to analyse the way in which gender was produced, represented and consumed at the site. Wakeford discovered that the practice of doing gender alongside doing technology was complex. Representations of gender appeared to be achieved at least partially through the 'doing' of technology. But as the Café's daily activities unfolded, the Internet was translated as a place where new alliances for gender and technology were being interrupted by old stereotypes. For example, customers in the café generally expected female cyberhosts to serve coffee and men to fix machines. During Wakeford's time at the café however, female cyberhosts had longer average employment and had greater expertise in solving technical problems.

Wakeford's analysis drew heavily on the work of Phil Crang (1994), who suggested that geographical understandings of work should develop a comprehension of what a job is like and how it takes place. To allow this comprehension, Crang

undertook participant observation for two years at Smoky Joe's, a South American theme style restaurant. He found that workplace geographies (surveillance, display and location) helped constitute the character of employment.

Customer requests were given straight to staff without mediation by management, such that 'cast' waiters and waitresses became the embodiment of service. As a worker at the restaurant, Crang used this embodiment to his advantage:

> walking with a determinedly quick stride both expressed and maintained – by brushing off all but the most determined customer interruptions – that wonderful feeling of having my own direction, and at the same time tempered any frustration felt by customers with a notable performance of my dutiful work rate
>
> (Crang, 1994: 689)

As such, Crang suggested that waiting work in Smoky Joe's involved staging a display. In such situations, Goffman (1956) stated that an individual's performance would need to express the performer's claimed capacities successfully and quickly.

> The patient sees his nurse changing bandages, swinging orthopaedic frames into place, and can realize that these are purposeful activities. Even if she cannot be at his side, he can respect her purposeful activities
>
> (Goffman, 1956: 31)

In the case of Smoky Joe's, Crang referred to the performer's display as tactical manoeuvres, which combined processes such as hiding (finding places shielded from the management gaze) and masquerading (appearing to be doing what one is not). For the workers, these tactics were 'ways of getting by' and they combined strategies such as resistance to management control and the use of games to transform workplace social relations (Crang, 1994; after Burawoy, 1985). In attempting to further address the geographies of the workplace, Crang used Goffman's (1956) definition of front and back regions. The front region was:

> that part of an individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the situation
>
> (Goffman, 1956; in, Crang 1994: 694)

Whereas a back region was:

> a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course ... Very commonly the back region of a performance is located at one end of the place where the performance is presented

> (Goffman, 1956; in, Crang 1994: 695)

Rather than this simple divide, however, Crang found that regionalisations of 'frontness' and 'backness' were complex. The most obvious back region, the staff room, was locked for much of the day. As an alternative, staff gathered for temporary respite at the end of the bar. However, staff remained in full display of the restaurant here. As such, a back region was signified but never achieved.

Being in the back region could have complications though. Goffman (1956) suggested that the performative nature of the 'real' world was similar to a celebration. He claimed that to stay in the back region away from where the party was being given was to hide from where reality was being performed. 'The world, in truth, is a wedding,' said Goffman (1956: 36).

Goffman (1956: 49) also suggested that successful performers fostered the impression that their current performance and relationship to the audience was 'unique'. The routine character of the performance was obscured and the spontaneous aspects of the situation were stressed. In a similar way, Crang's (1994) service workplace experiences illustrated that 'putting on a performance' was inherent to the service workplace. The restaurant application form asked for dramatical experience and many staff used these stage skills as part of their work. Crang suggested that the social role played by an individual was not constant, but was dependent upon the character of that particular encounter. Rather than imposing themselves on customers, Smoky Joe's workers tried to imagine customer needs and classify their first impressions of customers (for example, students, lads or middle-class snobs). These classifications were then used to gauge what role staff should play.

The role the waiter and other service workers perform in the workplace draws on a specific sense of self. In her cyber café case study analysis, Wakeford (1999) found that cyberhosts saw themselves as producers of the café's 'vibe' - either through their bodily appearance or through the 'techno' music they played on the café's music system.

In this way, Wakeford found that local London genders were embedded within the café's product.

Hochschild (1983) referred to the difference between a service worker (flight attendant) and manual worker (wallpaper factory worker). Hochschild said that the wallpaper factory worker knew their work was finished when the good was produced. On the other hand, the flight attendant's job was finished when a service had been produced and the customer seemed content. Hochschild believed this difference was fundamental. For the flight attendant, the emotional style of offering the service ('emotional labour') was part of the worker's job – in a way that that loving the good was not inherent to producing wallpaper.

Hochschild (1983: 7) stated that emotional labour required service workers to use and suppress feeling in order to sustain the proper care of customers – and this labour sometimes drew 'on a sense of self that we honour as deep and integral to our individuality'. Problems arose, Hochschild suggested, because both manual and emotional labour workers could become alienated from the aspect of self that was used for employment. In the case of the wallpaper factory worker, the worker's arm functioned like a piece of machinery. After continual use in manual labour, Hochschild suggested that the wallpaper factory worker might become 'alienated' from their arm. The same was true for the flight attendant (of whom Hochschild undertook case study analysis at Delta Airlines):

> The workers I talked to often spoke of their smiles as being *on* them but not *of* them. They were seen as an extension of the make-up, the uniform, the recorded music, the soothing pastel colours of the airplane décor, and the daytime drinks, which taken together orchestrate the mood of the passengers
>
> (Hochschild, 1983: 8)

For the flight attendant, therefore, smiles were a part of their work. A part, suggested Hochschild, that required the service worker to co-ordinate self and feeling such that their work appeared effortless.

Crang (1994) presented similar findings in his analysis of workplace roles at Smoky Joe's restaurant. Crang suggested that the waiter or waitress was required to perform 'as oneself' – 'to go out there and show the real you'. This role left no clear break between one's workplace role and one's own self - 'no clear split of self, labour

and indeed product (service was the product, and being yourself was good service)' (Crang, 1994: 696). Therefore, the performances of the staff are of socially embodied selves. And paid labour, as such, is surrounded by and fused with a range of social relations, including gender and age. It is to these social relations that we turn now, as we look 'over the factory gate' (Peck, 1996), to consider geographies of the home (and the dual role of the female labour force) and geographies of age.

2.11 Looking over the factory gate

Geographies of the home

Before the development of industrial capitalism in Europe, commodity production and reproduction took place together and there was a separation of home and work spaces (Valentine, 2001). Industrial capitalism brought a separation of activities, with production taking place in large-scale factories. And when production moved out of the home, the house became a private place for the family. The privatisation of family life also brought a new ideology of gender difference - men were expected to go out and work in paid employment before returning to the home, whereas women were expected to look after the house and the family.

This gender division has continued through twenty and twenty-first century industrialism – but many women are now expected to perform these tasks in addition to a working role (Pain, 2001). The expansion of women in the labour force after 1945 meant that the home was no longer the primary space identified by women, rather 'one space amongst many' (Gregson and Lowe, 1995: 226). This dual role, and this division of urban space, influenced women's role in the family (McDowell, 1983). And inevitably gender relations were constructed in the relation between home and work – and these relations developed in different ways in different places, due to their distinct socio-economic history (Massey, 1984). What's more, as well being differentially developed in particular places, Simon Duncan (1991) found that gender divisions of labour were both marked and relatively fixed. Inevitably, suggested Pain (2001), experiences of the home were inextricably bound up with wider relations, particularly work.

Research examining this link continued at pace. Dyck (1990) suggested that an understanding of the linkages between different types of labour must emphasise *all*

aspects of women's participation in the labour process. To this end, Dyck presented an analysis of women's mothering work and investigated how mothering practices were organised to provide safe places for children in a network of relationships. These relationships were developed within the course of the daily routines of mothering work. The accounts of the women suggested that their actions were cast within a dominant understanding of family life and motherhood that was open to negotiation as women experienced the 'pulls' of both paid employment and domestic labour.

The ability of women to successfully negotiate this balance was partly dependent upon the provision of quality childcare. Rose (1993) found that the number of places in Canadian child day-care services had increased considerably. However, access to such services was restricted by finance – and most children were cared for 'informally' by family or friends. Rose's findings underlined the diversity of childcare needs among family with young school-aged and pre-school aged children. The research resonated with calls for greater flexibility in childcare options, so that parents could find quality care without having to take undesirable jobs at undesirable times. As McDowell (1997) recognised, this was particularly significant in the case of women. Whereas a minority of well-educated women were able to enter and hold professional occupations, the majority of women were in part-time jobs at the bottom end of the labour market. Women professionals would be more likely to return to the same occupation following childbirth – but for the large majority of women, their occupation would depend upon the work that they were willing to accept (McDowell, 1997). To this end, Rose concluded by suggesting that childcare research needed to be resituated within the larger context of the relationship between economic restructuring and the reshaping of reproductive work.

Gregson and Lowe (1995) took up this challenge and argued that the concept of spatiality should be extended to include analyses of the production of home space, the meaning of which had received only limited attention from geographers. They suggested that geographers' lack of interest in the home was apparent from any survey of the literature. Gregson and Lowe suggested it was time for a change and given the aforementioned dual home/work role of post-1945 woman, they suggested that we needed to think of the home in terms of a multiplicity of meanings and identities.

Gregson and Lowe illustrated how profound changes were occurring to the spatial form of domestic labour - at least in relation to the middle classes. They reported that 60% of households with a female partner, holding a higher education qualification

and in full-time employment were using either a childminder or nanny. In short, the daily tasks associated with the generational reproduction of the middle classes were being transferred into a substitute home. In the course of their interviews, Gregson and Lowe (1995) found that many middle-class households opted to employ a nanny rather than a childminder. For most households, the location of the nanny within the parental home proved to be critical, as the home was perceived to be the best place for the child. Gregson and Lowe (1995) found that many middle-class mothers found this spatially prescriptive component vital in negotiating the 'guilt' of being a working mother. And rather than rejecting the construct of 'mother' or 'homemaker' for that of professional worker, Gregson and Lowe found that women juggled both identities. For such women, home had multiple meanings:

> an expression of identity, of conspicuous consumption, a place associated with quality time and somewhere where it is important that domestic labour is still performed.
>
> (Gregson and Lowe, 1995: 231)

Holloway's (1998) later analysis suggested that local understandings of good mothering were sometimes reworked in ways that validated women's decisions to undertake paid employment (1998). Through case study analysis in Sheffield, she explored mothers' needs for relief childcare provision. Like Gregson and Lowe (1995), Holloway found that kin networks were a very important resource for relief care. Family babysitting was highly valued because the interviewees had confidence in their parents' abilities. For working class families, Holloway suggested that kin networks were also valued because they were free. In contrast, she found that middle class families used non-familial babysitting because of differences in material and cultural resources. First, they were able to pay for non-familial care. Secondly, they had greater access to cars and telephones and they maintained social networks that acted as a cultural resource for support and care.

For the most part, Holloway (1998) discovered that mothers found it difficult to discuss their need for a break from their children. She suggested that this was because it was still something of a taboo to admit to needing a break from your children. Despite this taboo, mothers keenly felt the need for relief care. Raising children was exhausting

and mothers worked long hours, engaging in relatively low-status work for little or no financial remuneration:

> As the home is a workplace, it is no haven from the constant demands on mothers' time and energy. Unsurprisingly, then, mothers need time off; in the words of one mother, 'just to give me some space'.
>
> (Holloway, 1998: 324)

Time away from the children also allowed mothers to develop networks outside the home. Some mothers found that 'real' work provided the break they needed from their children. So 'relief care' was highly valued because it allowed women to have some personal time and space.

Holloway's findings tallied with Jackson and Holbrook's (1995) field research of the social use of shopping centres of Wood Green and Brent Cross in North London. They suggested that shopping was a socially situated activity, with different meanings for different people. While shopping represented a highly complex, gendered activity, it was also seen as a source of pleasure for some respondents. Getting out of the home – and into the retail space – could be a form of escapism.

Geographies of age

As we have already seen, human geographers are taking a growing interest in the relationship between constructions of space and constructions of body. Alongside gender, ageism has significant implications for the research we do (Pain, 1997). However, it is little explored by human geographers (Mowl, et al 2000). This is surprising, given that age is important to understanding our social world (Valentine, 2001):

> subjective experiences are the vessels of knowledge. Knowledge and the knower cannot be separated. Thus if we are to learn anything of the geographies of ageing and the aged, we should listen to the voices of older people and attend to their concerns.
>
> (Harper and Laws, 1995: 202)

Despite this knowledge, some studies use 'old' as if it were an unproblematic category and the national retirement age of 60 or 65 is generally taken to define old age. But as gerontologists have long recognised (Harper and Laws, 1995), this has more to do with labour market structures than biological processes of ageing. Old age is an economic and cultural construct of western societies, and the images associated with elderliness are stereotypical 'of a diverse group who have little in common except for a number of birthdays' (Pain, 1997: 117). Given this, the medical model of 'age' is being challenged by a range of social scientists that recognise that age (like gender, race and disability) is a social rather than a biological category (Valentine, 2001).

However, few geographers have attempted to unravel the meaning and spatial representations of age that Harper and Laws (1995) suggest are crucial to understanding the social and spatial segregation of age. In efforts to map the subject, the meaning and consequences of age are seldom considered. Where they are, suggest Pain et al (2000), focus tends to be centred upon geographies of the young or women of middle years.

Harper and Laws (1995) critique of the geography of ageing suggests that the philosophical underpinnings to the sub-discipline require a more comprehensive approach. Their alternative approach includes debates from political economy and postmodernism. Harper and Laws (1995), for example, refer to how political economy has made its presence felt across many areas of human geography – apart from gerontology. However, one area which seems worthy of attention by geographers is labour struggle and the emergence of old age. Harper and Laws (1995) state that we need to be wary of the fact that restructuring is not equal throughout the space economy. In particular, increased attention needs to be paid to economies based upon temporary workers, many of whom will affect the ageing workforce (Harper and Laws, 1995).

Secondly, Harper and Laws (1995) suggest that postmodernism provides an alternative approach that can be used to deconstruct existing universal metanarratives. Under modernist claims for distinct universal stages in a modernist life cycle, people are expected to follow a linear sequence through the life cycle – 'spending their childhood and youth in education, adulthood in paid employment and old age in retirement' (Valentine, 2001: 49). However, Featherstone and Hepworth (amongst others) critique the modernist life cycle and suggest that:

> Theorists of the movement towards a postmodern society point to an emerging de-institutionalisation and de-differentiation of the life course, with less

emphasis than in the past being placed upon age-specific role transitions and scheduled identity development. Postmodern change, it is argued will lead to some blurring of what appeared previously as to be relatively clearly marked stages and the experiences and characteristic behaviour which were associated with these stages.

(Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991: 372)

The fluid postmodern life course means that stages in life, such as youth and old age, vary between time and spaces and between individuals. Recent work by Harper and Laws (see Harper and Laws, 1995; and Laws 1997) has asserted the importance of space in these constructions. Postmodernism points to a diversity of 'elderly' identities rather than a homogeneity of experience – and the need to explore how relations of age are lived out over time and space (Pain, 1997). So rather than just analysing spatial patterns of residence, human geographers are now examining the ways in which 'age relations are socially constructed, embodied, and mutually constitutive of space' (Pain et al, 2000).

Harper and Laws (1995) suggest that life course research could be fruitfully expanded. For example, they state that we need to know more about the ways that people's perceptions of places change as they move through their life course. For example, Harper and Laws (1995) suggest that the experience and meaning of a neighbourhood or community changes with the ebb and flow of different age groups over time.

In an attempt to throw further light upon the geography of ageing, Juliana Mansvelt (1997) analysed leisure and ageing through the experiences of old age residents in New Zealand. Respondents participated in leisure to 'achieve something' and while leisure generally involved some form of activity, idleness was frowned upon. The meaning of leisure was replete with 'the ensemble of social practices, narratives and concepts which encapsulated the "terrain" of work' (Mansvelt: 1997: 291). To this end, both men and women suggested that leisure was similar to work – they liked to keep themselves productive and busy. Such constructions of leisure as work resisted stereotypical representations of being old. Leisure and work provided a means of avoiding the stigma of being labelled as 'old'. In addition, Mansvelt discovered that the social interaction, associated with these practices of resistance, was often more satisfying than the leisure activity itself:

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Working at leisure for many participants provided a source of creativity and pleasure, a recreation which was a form of *re*creation, a means of *re*-establishing identity and purpose, and a key to finding a place for oneself in later years.

(Mansvelt, 1997: 296)

Pain et al (2000) are at a great pains to highlight how there is wide diversity with the identification of becoming 'old' (including people of different gender, class nationality, race and so on). However, old age is predominantly viewed as negative in Western societies because dominant discourses associate it with mental and physical decline and dependency. Such negative stereotypes can be resisted (Mansvelt, 1997). To prove this point, Pain et al (2000) concentrated on a number of leisure clubs that had been set up by locally retired people as a source of resistance to ageism. Pain et al (2000) found that the meanings associated with leisure spaces varied considerably. Rather than being associated with the dominant negative identity of 'old age' (inactivity, mental decline), some spaces can be seen as sites of resistances to these stereotypes as they embody different identities (involving independence, experience and mental ability). Pain et al (2000) believe, therefore, that people's use of space can be viewed as a measure of their resistance against ageist discourses – something they suggest is worthy of more attention in human geography.

Mowl et al (2000) explored how older people responded to the association of ageing with the space of the home. Common stereotypes, they suggested, asserted that older people spend more time in the home as they age, with progressive disengagement from the spaces frequented by younger people. Staying at home becomes an identifier of old age and the symbolic importance of this home space becomes especially potent after retirement (Mowl et al, 2000). Masculine roles are closely identified with paid work (Mowl et al, 2000), affording physical or social power outside the home, and are usually reduced on retirement. While some men pursue new leisure activities, Mowl et al found that masculinity and men's relationship with the home space were subject to renegotiation in old age. For male respondents in their research, spending more time at home was to be resisted because it accelerated old age.

Responsibility for keeping the body young, and especially for women, looking after one's appearance is linked to this responsibility for getting out of the house.

(Mowl et al, 2000: 194)

2.12 Summary

This summary provides an outline of the emerging theoretical understanding. New economic geography demonstrates the social nature of modern economies but fails to acknowledge the importance of retail. In response, we have shown how researchers have combined interests in culture and economy to create a new retail geography. Following three generations of theoretical development, this new retail geography directs attention to the segmented nature of superstore labour markets, where different terms and conditions are associated to a minority of permanent, full-time managers and a majority of temporary, part-time shop-floor workers (Bluestone et al, 1981). In particular, Freathy's (1993) adaptation of segmentation theory provides a classificatory framework for contemporary research within the superstore workplace. However, whilst undoubtedly helpful in our attempts to understand the working practices of the retail workplace, its is suggested that a broader theoretical conceptualisation is required.

First, the retail workplace cannot be understood without a comprehensive understanding of space, spatiality and power relations. Space is not a 'container' within which processes are enacted – and space cannot be understood independently of the human beings that shape it. Such an approach suggests how space can be reasserted into theory and Peck's (1996) fourth generation segmentation theory shows how external social forces and labour market functioning varies across space. Peck draws heavily upon Massey's 'under-theorised' (Allen, 1997) realist account of power and the consideration of Foucault's (1977) diagrammatic conception helps us to appreciate how power is exercised and individuals self-regulated through the institutional organisation of space. However, Foucault's diagrammatic conception can be restricted to embedded spatial arrangements and Allen (1997) shows how we need to rethink power to include different modes (including authority, manipulation, negotiation and resistance). Such an appreciation can be useful in our attempts to rethink the use of ICTs across space. Against determinist 'impact'-driven discourses, other sources of understanding are sought. Political economy's concentration upon capitalism means the intervention of social relations is unrecognised. At the same time, social constructionism concentrates solely on human agency. In a search for a balance, network society, virtualism and soft capitalism approaches help explain the disputed nature of capitalism in information-intensive societies. And theories around the discursive production of space and the electronic market hypothesis help us to appreciate how the nature of a firm is ever-

changing and always contested. Most specifically, the wholly-relational approach of actor-network theory shows how technologies can only be understood through their context of use. ANT shows how despite capitalist attempts to control space, there is room for negotiation in network spaces. And while capitalists set roles for actors to perform in the networked retail workplace, actors can also perform roles in individual coping strategies. Workers go to great lengths to create a positive view of their work and other workers stage displays to hide from the management gaze. Performances of service staff are, inevitably, of socially embodied selves, fused with social relations constituted in the wider relation between work and home. Access to childcare and 'relief' time away from children can be essential in individual female coping strategies. In addition to gender and home spaces, ageism has significant implications for our research. Rather than a universal life cycle of 'young, middle-aged and old', the postmodern life course teaches us that age varies between individuals, time, and place.

3 Methodology

The previous chapter provided a review of existing literature from the position of a retail geographer, who was essentially unhappy with current treatments of employment and information communication technology within the disciplinary area. By merging a number of different knowledges, it is hoped that movement towards a new theoretical understanding has been achieved. Building from this knowledge, and through an iterative research path, there was a subsequent attempt to combine this new theoretical conceptualisation with particular analytical evidence.

This chapter summarises the selected methodological approach. Qualitative case study research was completed within a food-selling superstore in Sheffield. The store was selected after an initial engagement with fourteen stores, where in-depth conversation suggested that the selected store would be the most appropriate for the research needs. The superstore itself was a large, modern supermarket employing over 300 workers. To assist in the selection of potential interviewees within this store, the gatekeeper provided a breakdown of worker names and the tasks they fulfilled within the store. Through this information, a matrix was constructed in an attempt to provide a wide coverage of task segmentations within the store. In all, thirty-six workers were interviewed over a two month period. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken using a brief interview schedule with probing where necessary. They were completed in one of four rooms at the store; the interview room, the personnel office, the petrol filling station back-office and the store manager's office. The interviews were tape recorded and analysis of the transcriptions was completed via a constant interaction with perceived theoretical understandings (see Chapter 2) and secondary human resource data. An iterative process of re-interpretation inevitably allowed the construction of the workplace readings.

3.1   Research questions

Yin insightfully suggested that:

> Budding investigators think that the purpose of a literature review is to determine the *answers* about what is known on a topic; in contrast, experienced investigators review previous research to develop sharper and more insightful *questions* about the topic.
>
> (Yin, 1989: 20).

Following Yin's (1989) lead, four key research questions emerged through a broad literature survey. Having delved back into 'the theory' (as Chapter 1 explained), I have developed a broader ontological framework. The original research questions remain - but it is suggested that they are set within a more comprehensive theoretical framework that has enabled me to explore the economic, geographical and technological context of the case. For this reason, I have added a further question to encapsulate this additional theoretical material (question a).

Chapters 4-7 present the analytical findings of the research and each of these chapters attempts to provide an answer to the four remaining questions (questions b, c, d and e). However, it is also suggested that these questions are themselves contained within the broader context of the first question (question a). It is hoped that the reader will pay regard to this question as they consider the other four questions and read through the existing analytical material (Chapters 4-7):

a) Given the social production of the retail workplace, what are the relations of technology, power, performance, display, gender and age that make this economic space work? (additional question)

b) How does the organisation of labour within the store correspond to Freathy's (1993) application of segmentation theory? (see Chapter 4)

c) How do the store workers' activities correspond to Freathy's (1993) application of segmentation theory? (see Chapter 5)

d) Given specific case study evidence, in what ways might existing theoretical conceptualisations of the retail superstore workplace be reconsidered? (see Chapter 6)

e) How can the structure of superstore employment relations also be the outcome of supply-side determinants? (see Chapter 7)

Through the final summary to each chapter, it is suggested that specific concerns emerge. Each subsequent analytical chapter then attempts to address these concerns more comprehensively. Using the additional question (question a) as an epistemological base, the conclusion to the research attempts to summarise these findings within the broader context of the extended theoretical literature.

3.2   A reflexive and intensive research design

Given the development of a specific set of research questions, the research design provided a set of guidelines for connecting theoretical paradigms with methods for collecting empirical results (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 24) believed that the research design should be 'a reflexive process' that operated throughout the project'. Hakim (1987) concurred and pointed to the requirement to revise the plan with study progression. This revision, suggested Hakim (1987: 1), was an essential part of the 'virtually invisible' design function of a social research project.

Following these methodological leads, there was an adoption of a flexible research design, with an inherent reflexivity. As a single researcher, operating within strict financial and temporal constraints, there was a requirement to utilise a design that was 'as simple and elegant as possible' (Hakim, 1987: 11). In recognising the limits of allowable research, there was no attempt to undertake an extensive multi-sectoral/multi-regional survey and instead, an intensive research design was forwarded (Sayer and Morgan, 1985). Here, there was an interest in exploratory penetration through a specific understanding of the retail industry. This understanding was partly formed through qualitative research.

3.3   Using a qualitative approach

With regards to the selection of specific research techniques, Allan declared that:

The way the research problem is formulated and the research agenda specified gradually makes it 'obvious' what approach is most suitable.

(Allan, 1991: 178)

In reference to this suitability, Hakim (1987) encouraged the researcher to specify their reasons for the utilisation of their particular research approach. Here, Bryman (1988) suggested that each research method was suitable for particular purposes. Of the many research techniques that were available, Allan (1991) believed that the qualitative/quantitative distinction was the most accurate reflection of method within the social sciences. Adopting a similar framework, Bryman (1988: 94) attempted to summarise the key differences between quantitative and qualitative research.

Essentially, quantitative research searches for the confirmation of theory, through structured research strategies, using 'hard', reliable data. Qualitative research searches for emerging relationships, through unstructured research strategies and rich, deep data. The qualitative researcher has a strong urge to get close to the subject and to try and become an insider, such that research occurs within a natural setting (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), rather than in an artificial arena, as in an experiment (Silverman, 1993).

Within this research project, there existed a desire to engage with theory and to explore, in depth, a series of pertinent research questions. The reflexive approach of the project would have sat extremely uncomfortably with quantitative research demands, where a narrow definition of a research problem and a strict adherence to a set of procedural rules was required. Alternatively, an interest in social relations, and a belief that social reality is socially constructed by actors, was wholly appropriate for qualitative research.

However, many commentators have recognised that qualitative techniques are traditionally viewed as subservient to quantitative method. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggested that qualitative research was regularly viewed as 'soft' in comparison to the quantitative sciences which, in turn, were represented as the crowning achievements of Western civilisation. Bryman (1988) suggested that qualitative research, when undertaken, was often used (not as an end in itself) but as a research tool for throwing up hunches for subsequent quantitative research. Despite this reticence, attention had been directed towards qualitative method in isolation. In developing this attention, Bryman (1988; adapted by Silverman, 1993) and Neuman (1994) attempted to

characterise qualitative research through six criteria. Bryman's criteria are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Characteristics of qualitative research

1	'Seeing through the eyes of...' or taking the subject's perspective
2	Describing the mundane detail of everyday settings
3	Understanding actions and meanings in their social context
4	Emphasising time and process
5	Favouring open and relatively unstructured research designs
6	Avoiding concepts and theories at an early stage

(Bryman, 1988: 61-69; adapted by Silverman, 1993: 24)

In presenting this table however, Silverman (1993) asserted that he believed that over-generalisations could be identified. Silverman specifically directed the reader's attention towards point six which, he suggested, was out-of-tune with the large proportion of contemporary qualitative fieldwork which had been undertaken after an extensive accumulation of knowledge.

Bryman (1988) suggested that 'point six' was presented via the commonly held perspective that qualitative research should not build upon theory and that the qualitative researcher should search, instead, for emergent relationships (discovery not verification). Here, as with grounded theory (detailed below), theoretical conceptualisation is avoided within the qualitative approach because the elaboration of theory prior to data collection can prejudice the researcher's findings (Bryman, 1988). Inevitably, in presenting their findings, 'Qualitative researchers tend to espouse an approach in which theory and empirical investigation are interwoven' (Bryman, 1988: 81).

The particularities of the 'interwoven' nature of the qualitative presentation have received considerable academic attention. Two of the most commonly cited techniques for approaching theory within qualitative research are grounded theory and analytical induction. Described simply, a grounded theory is 'one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 23). Theoretical conceptualisation is derived from the fieldwork process and gradually elaborated into higher levels of abstraction towards the end of the data collection and analysis phase (Bryman, 1988). Strauss and Corbin (1990: 23) asserted that, through the grounded

theory approach to qualitative research, 'One does not begin with a theory then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge'. In response to this approach, Bryman (1988) asked rhetorically whether the researcher was able to defer 'theory' until this late in the project. In agreement with Silverman (1993) (above), Bryman (1988) affirmed that much qualitative research relies upon the elucidation of a theoretical framework before the data collection period.

In the case of analytical induction, by comparison, a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the qualitative case (Yin, 1989). Here, results at the outset are to be viewed as no more than hunches to be revised and refined by the repeated checking of one's data (Eyles, 1988). The researcher has to take specific notice of the data that does not fit with the original research problem or its hypothetical explanation. If a negative result emerges after data analysis, either the hypothesis is reformulated or the problem is re-defined to exclude the negative cases (Bryman, 1988). The negative cases are re-formulated and the process continues until no further negative cases are encountered and a universal relationship can be forwarded (Bryman, 1988). Alan Bryman (1988) concluded that he believed that analytical induction and grounded theory provided the qualitative researcher with possible frameworks for attending to the connection between theory and empirical research. However, he stated that 'these approaches to theory are often honoured more in the breach than in the observance' (Bryman, 1988: 91).

In searching for alternative understandings, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) illustrated how they believed that a social research project always commenced with a set of issues. They declared that they believed that many of these stimuli were informed through theory and that, as such, it was a 'wise first step' for the researcher to explore the components of their project through the secondary literature (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 29). Yin (1989: 36) concurred and claimed that theory development, prior to data collection, was 'essential'. As Silverman (1993: 1) bluntly confirmed, 'without a theory there is nothing to research'. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) provided a synopsis of the stages of social research and illustrated how they believed that the researcher approached the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology), that specified a set of questions (epistemology), that were then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways. Inevitably, such social research, claimed Dey (1993), required a dual approach to theory; the researcher could not analyse the data without

ideas and the ideas must have been shaped and tested by the data the researcher analysed:

> In my view this dialectic informs qualitative analysis from the outset, making debates about whether to base analysis on ideas (through deduction) or on the data (through induction) rather sterile.

> (Dey, 1993: 7)

Inevitably, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) declared that it was vital that qualitative researchers recognised the fundamental reflexivity of the logic of social research. Allan concurred and posited the claim that, 'The point of qualitative methods is their flexibility' (Allan, 1991: 182). Allan (1991) also stated that this inherent flexibility problematised attempts to discuss the different stages of qualitative research. Grazino and Raulin agreed (1997), suggesting that this fluidity provided the qualitative researcher with the capacity to modify their research procedures during their project. Within such research, suggested Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 206), 'There is a long way to travel'.

Through his concept of the research path, Neuman (1994) proffered a useful analogy through which this qualitative travel route can be conceptualised. He suggested that researchers follow a path; where you're going and what you're doing next. In general, quantitative researchers follow a more linear path with a fixed sequence of steps. Qualitative research tends towards a cyclical pattern, whereby the researcher makes successive steps (some backwards, some sideways and some forwards). Within this iterative and flexible cycle, the researcher moves within a slowly moving, upward spiral. Once again, Neuman (1994) surmised that the qualitative approach is more flexible and he asserted that this allows the interaction of theory and data.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) insinuated that this flexibility stretched to qualitative research techniques. They declared that they believed that qualitative research did not privilege any set of techniques over any other or have a distinct set of methods which were entirely its own. Marshall and Rossman (1989) presented forty-one different qualitative techniques and these were grouped into four main methods by Silverman (1993), namely observation, analysing texts and documents, interviews, recording and transcribing. These, Silverman pointed out, were regularly used in combination and the

contemporary qualitative geographer, claimed Eyles (1988), should take advantage of this range and combination.

Geography, too, appears an important context for the qualitative researcher, for if Denzin and Lincoln (1994) are to believed, we are entering the 'fifth moment' (see pages 6-11 for the first 'four moments') of qualitative research, where scale is an increasingly important factor. Here, the search for grand narratives is being replaced by local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and situations. Hakim (1987: 5) concurred and claimed that 'a great deal of theoretical research is carried out with small local studies, the results of which cannot readily be generalised'. Inevitably, proffered Eyles (1988: 3), there is a 'need for theory-informed descriptions of specific places to enhance our understandings and explanations of the world'. We turn here to the case study, the qualitative researcher's study of real-life contexts (Yin, 1989).

3.4 Case study research

Defined simply, the case study is 'a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context' (Robson, 1993: 146). The case study, claimed Robson (1993), is defined more specifically through its concentration upon the specific case within its context:

> If, for example, the main purpose is *exploratory*, trying to get some feeling as to what is going on in a novel situation where there is little to guide what one should be looking for, then tight pre-structuring is just not possible.
>
> (Robson, 1993: 149)

This research project centred on an exploratory analysis of the contemporary retail workplace and it was undertaken through a specific configuration of theory and case study analysis. In reference to theory (and as was made clear during the previous section), Robson (1993) was at pains to illustrate how he believed that, even where pre-structuring was minimal, researchers unavoidably came to their fieldwork with certain orienting ideas. In moving along the research path within this project, this orientation was acknowledged. It was also recognised that within case study research, as a form of qualitative inquiry, there were no hard and fast rules to follow (Robson, 1993). Given

this basis, Rose asserted that the case researcher held a large degree of freedom when they selected the boundaries for their study:

> the methodological issues associated with the case study approach are as much matters of conduct as they are matters of principle. It is therefore left to the researcher who adopts the case study approach to do so in a spirit of self-critical endeavour
>
> (Rose, 1991: 201).

Stake (1994) concurred and declared that the case researcher was required to decide what they believed would be necessary to create a comprehensive understanding of the case. Subsequent choices were then needed to be made about the places, people and events to observe (Stake, 1994).

With reference to the places of observation, it was explained in an earlier section (see Section 1.1) that a decision was made to observe the contemporary retail workplace. This necessitated the selection and willing participation of a suitable venue. Prior to this selection process, it was decided that the project fieldwork would be completed within Sheffield. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggested that the case researcher commonly completed their study in close proximity to where they were based. Following this lead, it was concluded that locally based research would be convenient because it was assumed that there would be a requirement to return to the case study over a prolonged period of time. In addition, it was believed that the prior knowledge of this local labour market might assist case study interpretation.

From within the local labour market of Sheffield, a workplace was then selected for case study research. After a period of personal consternation and wider consultation (with the supervisory team), a decision was made to undertake in-depth analysis of a single store. There was an initial intention to study more than one store. However, because of the constrained research time, and the consequential limitations to the number of allowable interviews, it was decided that it would be sensible to concentrate the research within one case store. In addition, there remained an obligation to remember that the research was exploratory. After bringing together a number of disparate theoretical leads (the subject of the preceding chapter), there emerged a desire to explore these theoretical concerns through case study analysis. Interest, within this analysis, centred upon a comparison between different workers (see below) within the

store (and not between stores per se). Through this project, there was an intention to provide a 'snapshot' picture (Rose, 1991) and it was hoped that this strategy would allow for the comprehension of 'the complexity of a single case' (Stake, 1995: xi).

Therefore, it was established that this research project would take the form of an in-depth, case study analysis of a single retail outlet. In an attempt to establish some ground-rules, Yin (1989: 47-49) helpfully provided descriptions for a series of different case study types. However, Yin also stated that this list was not exhaustive. Concurring with this proclamation, the case study method within this project did not rest comfortably against any of these definitions. Instead, the research within this project closely followed Stake's (1994) instrumental case study approach. Here, a single case is examined to provide an insight into an issue. The case, in itself, is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, essentially facilitating the understanding of something else. The case is analysed in-depth and its ordinary activities detailed. This provides assistance in attempts to pursue an interest in understanding, in this research project, the correspondence between perceived theoretical understandings and superstore reality:

> The choice of case is made because it is expected to advance our understanding of that other interest.
>
> (Stake, 1994: 237)

In choosing a suitable case, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) asserted that the selection of a specific case was a matter of identifying a number of different sorts of settings and then choosing the most appropriate for investigation, given the current formulation of the research problem. Here, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) declared that it was advisable to 'case' possible research sites to assess the suitability and feasibility of potential research and to ascertain how access might be accomplished. The case was selected after an initial engagement with fourteen (food and non-food selling) superstores within Sheffield. Key members of the store management team were interviewed via a structured questionnaire (see Appendix 1). For the most part, these interviews were conducted in-person and tape-recorded. However, it should be noted that two of the stores were represented by the same manager, one manager opted to return the questionnaire by post and another respondent asked to have the tape-recorder turned off during the interview. It should also be noted that these interviews were

transcribed selectively. However, this lack of uniformity was unproblematic. It was clear from the outset that the interview data would not form an essential element of the research project. Instead, the key concern was to form contacts with local retail companies, to obtain a feel for the organisations in question and to ascertain the likelihood of entering the store for subsequent in-depth research (Appendix 2 highlights some of the store descriptions, contacts and data from which a case study store was selected).

The store in question was selected because of a number of important reasons. First, it was a large (predominantly) food-selling superstore and this was the sector of the retail market to which Freathy (1993) had directed particular attention. Secondly, the store had only been open for one and a half years and it was assumed that this would ensure that the business was at the cutting-edge of some of the trading practices (including the use of technology) within the retail industry. Thirdly, the senior management encouraged access and did not place temporal constraints upon presence. Fourth, the gatekeeper[1] provided a vast database of information from which it was possible to select potential interviewees. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) stated that it was vital to recognise that the sampling *within* the case was as vital as the selection of the case study itself. As was mentioned above, the project focused around an interest in a comparison between different worker experiences. Therefore, within the store (as the case study), consideration was given to embedded units of analysis.

Within an embedded case study, attention is given to sub-units within the case (Yin, 1989). In the case study within this research, the individual workers represented the sub-unit of analysis. These sub-units were not statistical samples but represented the principle of qualitative selection in the construction of a manageable research design (Rose, 1991). Within this research project, the logic of comparison compared the different activities and experiences of the workers across the different segmentations of the superstore.

In summary, an instrumental case study approach was used, where it was recognised that the case itself was of secondary interest. Instead the research interest became an in-depth, embedded analysis of the employees' activities and experiences. This, with adherence to Stake's (1994) methodological lead, was undertaken to facilitate

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[1] Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) refer to gatekeepers as actors with controls over key sources and avenues of opportunity.

the understanding of the correspondence between theoretical perception and workplace reality.

Given this research-interest, careful consideration of the sample for the embedded analysis needed to be undertaken. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggested that qualitative sampling occurred along three major dimensions (time, people and context). As was referred to earlier, the case study gatekeeper provided a large amount of information from which to select potential units for embedded analysis and this helped in the consideration of Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) three major dimensions. With regards to time, it was important, suggested Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), that there was an adequate coverage of the various temporal divisions within the case study; key temporal distinctions within the superstore included day-shift/night-shift and part-time/full-time. In reference to people, there was a utilisation (after Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) of member-identified categories. There were a collection of labels that were used within the situated vocabularies of the superstore. From these, it was ensured that there was a suitable coverage of the relevant workforce areas (for example, department management, stock control and checkout operation). Finally, with allusion to context, it was important, suggested Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), to consider different behaviours within specific spaces. Accordingly, there was a division drawn between worker labels and their likely space of action within the superstore. A vital distinction was then drawn between the shop-floor (sales assistants) and the back-office (clerical). Finally, after collating these distinctions and divisions, a matrix was constructed. This matrix (Appendix 3) provided the embedded units of analysis within the instrumental case.

3.5   Interviewing

Having constructed a sampling matrix, an appropriate method of data collection was then required. In reference to case study analysis, Stake referred to the different methods of data collection and highlighted the significance of the interview:

> The case will not be seen the same by everyone. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities.
>
> (Stake, 1995: 64).

Within this project, it was hoped that a prolonged period of interviewing, across the sampling matrix, would present the multiple realities of the segmented superstore. With further reference to these realities, Seidman (1991) suggested that the researcher completed interviews because they were interested in people's stories. Seidman (1991) declared that story-telling was a basic mode of inquiry and that, throughout recorded history, recounting narratives of experiences had been the central method through which humans had attempted to understand people's behaviour. Through a story-based understanding within the case, it was hoped that the comparisons between theoretical perception and workplace experiences would become apparent. In creating this understanding, it should be noted that other techniques could have been used either in combination with, or in isolation from, interviews. For example, observation was an additional method (Silverman, 1993) which could have been used by the researcher to discover Stake's (1995) multiple realities. However, within this research, interviewing was used in isolation for several key reasons. First, there was a determination to keep the project workable. In all, thirty-six staff were interviewed and there was concern that further fieldwork could have problematised tight, timetabled deadlines. Secondly, there was an awareness that the store had already granted considerable access. It would have been dangerous to have jeopardised this position through further intrusion. Finally, and most importantly, it was believed that the interview schedule covered all the major points of interest. Therefore, it was assumed that the interview transcripts would provide the required depth of information.

To provide this depth of information, a series of closed and open-ended questions were used within the interview schedule. The closed questions forced the interviewee to choose between a selection of fixed alternatives (Robson, 1993). These questions were used to provide contextual information, such as personal characteristics and individual career histories. Within the open-ended questions, there was an implicit interest in the experiences of the workers and the meanings that they made of those experiences (Seidman, 1993). The overall intention was to place limited restrictions upon the content of the respondents' replies (Robson, 1993). However, given the aforementioned wide range of theoretical concerns (see Chapter 2), and an associated desire to maintain some control over the interview process, a semi-structured approach was utilised within the open-ended questions. May (1993) suggested that the movement from unstructured to structured questioning represented the shift from an interview where the interviewee responded within their own terms to one where the researcher

attempted to control the situation. The semi-structured interview lay between these two poles and utilised techniques from both; questions were specified (as in a structured interview) but the interviewee was free to probe the respondent for further information (as in an unstructured interview) (May, 1993).[2] Therefore, in constructing the semi-structured interview schedule, a series of questions were comprised in advance. These open-ended questions were, in certain instances, guided by closed introductions or specific probes (see the italicised questions in Appendix 4). However, this questioning could be modified, as perception suggested was appropriate, during the course of each interview (Robson, 1993).

As Jones (1991) demanded, the construction of the semi-structured interview schedule involved a reflexive process. Jones (1991) referred to the importance of the early stages of schedule development and proclaimed that the researcher should reflect upon the questions asked, amending them if necessary. Considering Jones' advice, the interview schedule was sketched several times. Additional consideration was given to Robson's (1993) suggestion that there was a clear distinction between the different questions of an interview schedule: seeking to find out what people know (facts); what they do (behaviour); and what they feel (beliefs or attitudes). Bearing this distinction in mind, a preliminary schedule was constructed and tested through pilot research. Another Sheffield superstore (a smaller, food-selling store from within the same company as the case study store) allowed access for the purposes of a pilot study. Two interviews were completed and transcribed and the interview questions, and the subsequent quality of the data, were considered. After consultation with the supervisory team, a final schedule was accepted (see Appendix 4).

After completing these preparatory tasks, the case study was entered to undertake a prolonged period of interviewing:

> A situation where one person talks and another listens: what could be easier?
> We do it all the time.
>
> (Robson, 1993: 228)

Unfortunately, a series of issues emerged which complicated this arrangement and which inevitably required suitable action. First, qualitative research can be complicated

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[2] A probe, stated Robson (1993: 234), is 'a device to get the interviewee to expand on a response when you intuit that she or he has more to give'.

through the inability of the researcher to negotiate suitable access to the case. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 74) viewed this negotiation as 'a balancing act'. Within this research, the aforementioned gatekeeper (see Section 3.4) performed a key role within this balancing act. The gatekeeper's assistance was invaluable in both securing a safe area for interviewing and in encouraging the participation of her fellow staff members. With reference to the first of these two points, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) stated that the place of the interview was vital within qualitative research. They declared that it was important that the interview circumstances were held constant and that the interviews were conducted within comfortable surroundings. Following this lead, the initial intention was to conduct the case interviews externally, away from the pressure of the workplace environment. However, senior figures within the case study store objected to this idea because they did not wish their staff to be inconvenienced through a loss of private time. In appreciating these sentiments, and as a form of negotiation, it was stated that the provision of a secure, internal space would be an acceptable alternative. Agreeing to this negotiation, the gatekeeper provided access to the store's interview room. When unavailable (due to other store-based interviews), the personnel office was made available.[3] In addition, one interview was conducted in the filling station back-office and the store manager's interview was completed within her personal office space.[4] Fortunately, problems with this arrangement were minimal. Although undertaken in-store, most interviewees appeared comfortable with the interview environment and disturbance was minimal.

As alluded to above, the gatekeeper also encouraged the participation of fellow staff members. Before entering the store for the first round of interviews, a list of potential interviewees was presented to the gatekeeper. On entering the store, the list was consulted and certain staff members were called for interview. In consideration, it would have been desirable to contact the staff personally before each interview. However, the store management were unhappy with this situation and they opted, instead, for a form of access which was negotiated and controlled through the gatekeeper. Nevertheless, one should note that the staff were forthcoming without

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[3] The store management completed a series of on-going interviews, such as for staff appraisals and staff recruitment. It was agreed that I would enter the store when these interviews were not being undertaken. However, there were occasions when a conflict of interests arose. Having entered the store to complete my interviews, I would discover that the interview room had become unavailable. As an alternative, access to the personnel office was provided. Situated next door to the interview office, the personnel space was secure and the interviewees appeared to be comfortable in either environment.

[4] These interviews were completed within these spaces because it was suggested that the interviewee felt more comfortable within the selected environment.

coercion. First, the selected staff, on entrance to the interview room, were given a final opportunity to withdraw from the interview process. Secondly, most interviewees appeared comfortable and open during the interview process and, to this end, they provided a substantial pool of relevant information.[5] However, in analysing the research conclusions, one should remember the potential bias of this 'balancing act'.

As suggested above, the case study gatekeeper held a central role within this 'balancing act'. Although vital to this research project, it was important to consider, as Jones (1991) reported, the problems that can emerge through the use of a manager as a gatekeeper. When called for interview by the gatekeeper, it was inevitable that certain employees would become suspicious of manager interference. Therefore, one of the first tasks was to assure the respondents of the research aims and objectives and to state that all comments were in the strictest confidence. As Eyles (1988) had suggested, it was essential that the respondent was made to feel at ease. When comfortable, the interviewees spoke lucidly and were willing to proffer detailed information. In addition, all interviews were recorded and as May (1993) recognised, respondents can find the presence of a tape-recorder inhibiting. However, throughout the interview process, care was taken to talk to the respondent and not the tape-recorder, for as Sayer and Morgan (1985) stated, it was important to consciously interact with the interviewee to maximise the flow of information. Conscious interaction, and the flexibility allowed through a semi-structured approach, provided an opportunity to engage more personally with the respondents. This allowed the subject to believe that their information was valued and respondent-participation was enhanced and information-quality increased (May, 1993). To ensure a rapport with the respondent, it was important not to impose the world of academia upon the individual's perspective (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Establishing this rapport often required a chameleon-like approach (Sayer and Morgan, 1985), adapting the questioning style in relation to the responsiveness of the interviewee. Techniques varied with the group being interviewed (Fontana and Frey, 1994) and it was not possible to lay down blanket rules and procedures to cover each interview (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994). Even after the completion of a pilot study and a subsequent modification of the question schedule, certain misunderstandings arose. In this respect, the semi-structured approach was helpful because it provided an element of

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[5] I would suggest that there was only one interviewee (Appendix 5: 26) who deliberately gave limited responses.

negotiation around specific terminology and allowed for probing and prompting where necessary.

Finally, it should be remembered, as O'Connell Davidson and Layder (1994) declared, that the interview procedure was greatly affected by the research objectives. Seidman concurred and proclaimed that:

> Research is often done by people in relative positions of power in the guise of reform. All too often the only interests served are those of the researcher's personal advancement
>
> (Seidman, 1991: 7)

Bryman (1988) suggested that there was regularly a tangible degree of respondent 'reactivity' to the researcher and their instruments (Bryman, 1988). In every sense, the interview within this research project was obtrusive, particularly within the context of an in-store conversation. Interviewees regularly made comments like, 'I'm going to get done for this', despite prior assurances over confidentiality. There was also a degree of scepticism surrounding the aims of the research; why would anyone want to research a supermarket? Once again, there was an attempt to allay interviewee fears when appropriate. Inevitably, it was hoped and believed that all interviewee responses were accurate and truthful. Decisions here inevitably relied upon a subjective judgement (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994). In addition, judgement was often required within the interview process and as might have been expected (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994), it was sometimes difficult to focus the interview. Open-ended questions provided the opportunity for the respondent to talk in-depth. Unfortunately, this sometimes allowed movement away from the research interests. Such circumstances required a careful interjection, in an attempt to steer the interviewee back towards the research direction, whilst respecting the respondents construction of meaning (Mishler, 1986). Inevitably, therefore, the interview was a 'joint construction' between the interviewer and the respondent (Mishler, 1986). The interview was a two-way process and by entering the world of the respondent in an attempt to understand their actions (Seidman, 1991), the interviewer becomes part of the *interviewees* life history (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

3.6   Analysis

On the completion of these interviews, there followed a sustained period of analysis. This can be summarised within three areas, familiarity, categorisation and interpretation. First, familiarity and interview transcription. Interview transcription was a long-winded process. However, this familiarity with the respondents' views allowed an immediate understanding of the data to emerge (May, 1993). Each of the transcripts was then read in detail. During this process, specific issues of interest were noted within the margins of the transcripts. Here, there began a generation of loose concepts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) and, once more, reference was made to perceived theoretical understandings. This consideration formed the initial movement into the categorisation of the data.

Dealing with this unstructured data required careful categorisation. Initially, there was a consideration of the notes made during the familiarity process. From here, there was then an attempt to create broader analytical categories. Some of the information (for example, concerning interviewee profiles) was categorised quickly (see Appendix 5). It was also possible to categorise individual worker activities. However, the remaining data proved more problematic. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) had suggested, the qualitative data was not structured into finite categories. Accordingly, categorisation obligated a prolonged process of development in order to capture the relevant factors. Initial categorisation, within each interview, sectioned experiences around the wide areas of empowerment, interaction, surveillance and flexibility. Subsidiary sections within each interview categorised comments around gratification, on-the-job respect and future prospects. However, a return to the theoretical understandings suggested a mis-match between perceived theoretical conceptualisations and emerging analytical categories. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) illustrated how it was dangerous for the researcher to use theory to pre-judge data. Instead, they suggested that theoretical conceptualisation should be approached as a way of making sense of qualitative data. To follow their lead, this required a re-submergence within the qualitative data and then the perceived theoretical understandings in an attempt to match emerging analytical and conceptual categories. Inevitably, through this combined approach, a more novel and appropriate perspective on analysis and interpretation arose (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

When interpreting data, Hakim (1987) asserted that the qualitative researcher undoubtedly benefited from good writing skills. A good researcher, claimed Mishler

(1986), explored the importance of narrative and told the reader a story. The text was then analysed and interpreted through approaches that were 'more sensitive to actual human experience' (Smith, 1988: 266). Bryman (1988) agreed and asserted that good qualitative research displayed a devotion to the participant's perspective. However, Bryman also declared that the qualitative researcher could rarely be seen as a sponge that simply absorbed their subject's interpretations. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 21) proclaimed, as researchers 'we are part of the social world we study'. Smith concurred and in summary stated:

> That all the world is a stage and no person an island may be trite but goes to the heart of the interpretative approach, for we are part of and contributors to that which we seek to understand.
>
> (Smith, 1988: 258)

Stake (1994) expressed similar concerns and suggested that even within the most elaborate writing, qualitative researchers pass on to readers some of their personal meanings of events and relationships. Bryman (1998) concluded that the qualitative ethnographer's interpretation of the natives' point of view had three components:

> the way in which the natives view the world; the enthnographer's interpretation of how they view the world; and the ethnographer's construction of his or her interpretation of the natives' view of the world
>
> (Bryman, 1988: 80)

Scheurich (1997) considered research method and proposed that the mind frame of most researchers was deeply biased in a way that they did not question. To provide an understanding, Scheurich (1997) separated the interview into two components, doing the interview and interpreting the interview. In a modernist interpretation, the interviewer asked a series of questions and the text was analysed and categorised to support a theoretical conceptualisation. The research interview here, suggested Scheurich (1997), was unproblematic and in interpretation, the text became data (as in the quantitative sense) and was decontextualised. The decontextualised interview was subsequently transformed through categorisation and became the basis from which the researcher constructed their story. Here, the bricks of this construction were shaped by

both the researcher's conscious and unconscious assumptions. From this decontextualisation came generalisation. In a universalist (modernist and positivist) sense, these generalisations, bemoaned Scheurich (1997), were proclaimed to represent reality. He declared that this approach situated the researcher as a kind of god who could derive hidden meaning from interviews to provide a generalisation. However, Bryman (1988) believed that qualitative researchers were beginning to question the level at which their findings could be generalised. In line with these thoughts, Stake (1995) suggested that the case study was a poor basis for generalisation. Only a single case, or just a few cases, were likely to be analysed and Stake (1995) stated that the purpose of such research would be to represent the case (not the world):

> The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization
>
> (Stake, 1995: 8)

Following Scheurich (1997), Kitchin (1998) and a series of other commentators' (see Section 3.4), there was a rejection of the idea of forming grand narratives and universal truths from one case study. The instrumental case within this project represented *just* one particular example of a retail workplace. Therefore, drawing general conclusions from this case would have been inherently problematic. Instead, through an iterative research path, there was an attempt to combine a new theoretical conceptualisation with particular analytical evidence. From this combination, specific conclusions, emerging from this exploratory case, were drawn.

3.7 Secondary analysis

The preceding section referred to the project's combination of theory and qualitative analysis. Secondary analysis inevitably played a key facilitating role within this combination. Hakim (1987) referred to secondary analysis as any re-analysis of data collected by another researcher or organisation. Hakim (1987) proclaimed that the simplest approach to secondary analysis (and the one adopted by this study) was to use a single dataset. Hakim (1987) warned that the use of secondary material can constrain the scope and depth of a study. However, Hakim's (1987) wariness was directed towards the researchers who opt to analyse secondary material in isolation. With specific reference to this project, secondary quantitative data was used to provide

context for the subsequent qualitative analysis. Bryman (1988) detailed the relationship between qualitative and quantitative analysis and was adamant that the social scientist could usefully combine both approaches.

With specific reference to the approach used within this research, analysis and interpretation of the qualitative material suggested the emergence of a series of relationships. At this point, it became apparent that the use of secondary evidence could provide an increasingly sophisticated approach to interpretation. It was previously reported (see Section 3.4) that the gatekeeper provided a considerable database of human resource information. From this information, a sampling matrix was created. However, this rich source of quantitative information also highlighted employment patterns (departments, worker numbers, hours, and pay). By returning to this human resource data (see Section 3.4), it was identified that this information could provide a useful empirical bridge between theoretical conceptualisation and qualitative analysis. As a form of secondary analysis, this information was analysed and used to provide a description of segmentation within the store (see Chapter 4). Moreover, this secondary evidence provided methodological triangulation (Stake, 1995). The case researcher, stated Stake (1995), can be plagued by fears over authenticity of interpretation. The use of alternative evidence, in this research project, allowed increased confidence in interpretation. Inevitably, secondary evidence allowed a smooth transition between conceptualisation and qualitative analysis via the development of a detailed (quantitative) description of in-store segmentation.

3.8   Other qualitative methods

Despite this smooth transition, it is suggested that a series of other qualitative methods could have been used within the research. The case study gatekeeper was undoubtedly extremely helpful in allowing me to conduct in-depth, qualitative research. However, the store manager was concerned over my level of access and would not allow extensive research using different qualitative methods. For this reason, attempts to create a broader qualitative study were hampered. However, the following section summarises some of the additional qualitative methods which could have been used (focus groups, repeat interviews, longitudinal analysis of interviewees' career biographies, observation, field diaries and participant observation). This section also stresses how the research could have been undertaken if fuller access had been granted.

Bryman (2001) suggests that we are used to thinking of the interview as something that involves an interviewer and an interviewee. However, the focus group is a method of interviewing that involves more than one and at least four interviewees (Bryman, 2001). The focus group explores a specific theme in depth and Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) suggest there can be some value in conducting focus groups after conducting other qualitative research. Focus groups involve some form of collective activity to explore people's experiences and opinions against a specific set of issues. Through it's group discussion format, the method is particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions and pursue their own interests in their own vocabularies (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). One of the key reasons why Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) suggest focus groups are worthy of attention is that all data is context bound. They suggests that the same individuals are likely to answer the same questions differently depending upon on whether they are asked individually or through a group scenario. Bryman (2001) suggests that whilst interviewees in conventional one-to-one interviews are rarely challenged, respondents will often argue with each other in the context of a focus group. Therefore, the focus group should be helpful in the elucidation of a wide variety of different views (Bryman, 2001).

Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) suggest the appropriate number of focus groups (and the number within each focus group) will depend on the research question, the range of people the researcher wishes to include and resource limitations. They also add that focus group researchers usually make use of qualitative sampling, where sampling is guided by the research question rather than structured methods. Even in a study (such as ours), where it has been possible to recruit pre-existing groups of people that work together, Kitzinger and Barbour (1999) suggest the researcher might want to intervene to include other participants who might otherwise be muted from the research. Finally, pre-existing groups are likely to have established social hierarchies that may inhibit the contributions of certain members.

Focus groups could have provided a valuable source of comparative qualitative data in our research. By allowing the researcher to explore topics in depth, I might have completed my original quantitative and qualitative data comparison and then explored worker experiences in small study groups with the use of key emergent issues. Clearly time and access would have limited an extensive focus group study. However, with small focus group research I could have allowed the workers to reflect upon my research findings and then allowed them to generate their own questions, interests and

vocabularies (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). Alternatively, I could have attempted to use my existing qualitative interview schedule in a focus group setting. It would have been very interesting to note how the same questions were answered differently by respondents 'arguing' in a group scenario (after Bryman, 2001). The focus group setting might also have allowed me to include 'others' excluded from the original research. The case study store would have placed tight restrictions on bringing outsiders into the research setting. However, it would have been interesting to bring family members and shoppers into a group scenario situation, to see if their opinions on technology, power and external social relations tallied with the workers' experiences. When setting up such focus groups, it would have been vital to ensure that the 'segmentation' of the case study workforce did not mute the contribution of certain workers. Shop-floor workers, for example, would probably have been less likely to speak out in an interview scenario if they knew a senior manager was listening.

However, most surveys (like mine) are cross-sectional, where the idea is to measure some variables at a single time (Bernard, 2000). Despite this, attitudes and behaviours clearly change over time. For this reason, many surveys are repeated to monitor difference (Bernard, 2000). Bryman (2001) claims that re-interviewing in qualitative research is not unusual and can be carried out within a longitudinal research design. In contrast to cross-sectional studies, a longitudinal study allows the monitoring of change over an extended period. In a longitudinal research design, a sample is surveyed again on at least one further occasion (Bryman, 2001).

The case study store ran its own series of qualitative interviews at regular intervals and there was some concern that staff should not be 'tired of interviews'. Were it not for access problems, longitudinal interviewing might have provided a thorough basis for qualitative analysis. After all, the use of ICTs changes quickly. Workers in the retail space are subject to changes that can see electronic point-of-sale systems (EPOS) replaced by electronic data interchange (EDI) and customer relationship management (CRM) systems. Given enough time (perhaps six months to a year), repeat interviews might witness some change in retail ICT systems.

Yet heavy time and cost pressures mean that repeat interviews do not always provide a feasible means of studying processes that take place over time (Babbie, 2001; Bryman, 2001). In addition, the store had only recently opened. It was therefore unlikely to see fundamental changes in its technology base. However, technology is not the only area of potential change within the store. Staff might see continued changes in

their working activities, supply-side relations and internal social relations. Given access, a repeat interview, using the same question schedule (between six to twelve months later given research time pressures) might have provided interesting comparative results.

Whilst bearing this in mind, it is important to remember that longitudinal surveys can suffer from a respondent mortality problem (Bernard, 2000), where people drop-out through choice or circumstance. The danger is that that those who drop-out of the survey may not be typical, thereby distorting the research results (Babbie, 2001). This could be particularly important in the retail labour market. The inherent flexibility of the retail labour market (Freathy and Sparks, 1996; Penn and Wirth, 1993; Atkinson and Meager, 1986) means the researcher could have a large respondent mortality problem. Potential solutions might be to shorten the gap between interviews (affecting the quality of the results) or to interview more people in key positions at the outset (which would take more time). Such circumstances can constrict attempts to undertake prolonged longitudinal analysis.

However, drawing conclusions from biographical data is not always so difficult. Researchers can often draw similar conclusions from cross-sectional data and can make logical inferences when the time order of variables is clear. To this end, Babbie (2001) suggests that age differences discovered in cross-sectional data can form the basis for inferring longitudinal processes. As an example, Babbie says a researcher interested in the pattern of worsening health over a life course might study the results of annual check-ups in a large hospital. The researcher says Babbie, could also group health records according to age and by reading across the different age group categories, the researcher would have something approximating the health history of individuals. Qualitative interviewing can also be used as a further level of analysis. Here, Babbie says that asking people to recall their pasts is another common way of approximating observations over time. Bryman (2001) too suggests this can be a useful method and he makes reference to the life history interview, an unstructured interview covering the totality of an individual's life. Bryman says there has been a resurgence in interest in this type of narrative interview in recent years, particularly with regards to oral history interviews, where the interviewee is asked to reflect upon specific events of periods in their past.

To this end, we could have used longitudinal analysis of the workers' career biographies to add a further layer of analysis. Babbie (2001) suggested that it was

possible to make logical inferences from data once the time order of variables is clear. In constructing, my qualitative interview schedule, I obtained personal data that is presented in the Appendix (see Appendix 5). These interviewee profiles could have provided the basis for a longitudinal analysis of interviewees' career biographies. Most respondents provided references to when and where they had previously worked. With the case study company's permission and with a tighter structure at the beginning (comparing set variables such as the exact places and dates worked), this employment data could have been collected more thoroughly and used to create an employment history of retail workers. After Massey (1984; 1995), we could have noted to what extent the case study store was part of a new service-based division of labour in Sheffield. We could have also related our findings back to issues of gender and age, by making more use of workers' individual career histories.

Despite the promise of such techniques, Babbie (2001) warns the researcher that respondents have faulty memories - and that they sometimes lie. Bryman (2001) states that problems can be encountered when social survey techniques, such as the interview, are utilised to study respondents' behaviour. These include variable interpretations of a key question by respondents, inadvertent omission of key terms from respondent answers and the unwanted influence of the interviewer's character on the social survey process. Bryman (2001: 161) suggests that an 'obvious solution' to these problems is to directly observe people's behaviour, rather than to rely solely on research instruments such as the interview. In observation, actions and meanings are studied from the perspective of the people being studied, attention to detail is premium and actions can only be understood within a particular social context (Schwandt, 2000). In any observational study, the aim is to gather firsthand information (Weinberg, 2002) about social processes in a 'naturally occurring' context (Silverman, 2001).

When interviewing, the interviewee will include certain elements and dismiss other topics of conversation (Weinberg, 2002). However, the encounter with local meanings and practices in a direct observation is not mediated by respondents' personal judgements regarding what should and should not be discussed. Furthermore, suggests Weinberg, actions often speak louder than words – and what people do may indicate feelings better than what they can tell the researcher. This firsthand information, then, would provide a very different form of data to the qualitative interview.

Observational data could have been collected alongside the original qualitative data. Notes on worker performance, technology usage and employee interaction could have been taken. Once again, access arrangements militated against this. The store was keen for me to complete my interviews and leave with limited disturbance and fuss. One alternative would have been to complete covert observation, jotting down notes as I was inside the building. At the time, it was felt that I didn't want to jeopardise the level of access I had already been granted.

When these observational jottings are collected, Silverman (2001) believes that they rarely provide readers with anything more than brief data extracts. To alleviate this problem, Silverman suggests extended data extracts would allow the reader to create their own hunches about the people under observation. One possible source of extended data extracts is the field diary. The field diary is a bound notebook that researchers use to record observational notes. The contents of a diary is a matter of research purpose and individual style (Schwandt, 2000). First, many researchers use the field diary to record jotted notes which can be used as a memory aid in the subsequent writing up of full field notes (Schwandt, 2000). Field notes are observational raw data used to make claims about meaning and understanding (Schwandt, 2000). Secondly, other researchers note that the field diary itself can provide an excellent method for communicating ethnographic experiences and Tedlock (2000) suggests that diaries can reveal the inner thoughts and prejudices of their authors.

One example of the extended field diary is provided by Phil Crang's (1994) observational study of a restaurant workplace. Crang goes to great lengths to provide lengthy transcripts of his field diary – and through an interwoven theoretical approach, he allows the reader to try and imagine what it was like working at the restaurant. Following Crang's lead, I could have created lengthy diaries of field experiences. I might have told the reader what it was like to enter the store everyday, what it was like in the back-offices and on the shop-floor and what it was like interviewing the workers. Although not as thorough perhaps as Crang's account, it would have provided another form of data triangulation. Field diaries work best when the account is as full and as detailed as possible (Silverman, 2001). Crang's field diary is actually a series of notes from a particular form of unstructured observation called participant observation.

Unstructured observation does not involve a schedule and the aim is to record as much behavioural detail as possible to develop a narrative account (Bryman, 2001). One of the most popular methods of unstructured observation is participant observation

(Bryman, 2001). This entails the prolonged immersion of the observer in a social setting, where the researcher takes some part in the daily activities of the place to observe the behaviour of its members (Schwandt, 2000; Bryman, 2001).

Bryman (2001) believes prolonged immersion in a social setting can make the participant observer better placed for gaining a foothold on social reality. Through this prolonged immersion, the participant observer can begin to understand the special use of words and slang that penetrate the culture. Secondly, participant observation is also likely to provide access to deviant and hidden activities that insiders might be reluctant to talk about in an interview. Thirdly, the unstructured nature of participant observation can uncover unexpected topics or issues. Finally, participant observation comes close to a 'naturalistic' emphasis because the researcher confronts members in their natural social setting.

As with all qualitative research, the key to participant observation is gaining access to the social setting. To this end, it would have been interesting to be given the opportunity to work as an employee within the case study store. Unfortunately, the superstore was unwilling to grant this level of access. As a 'worker' in the store, I would have been able to 'perform' as a back-office or shop-floor employee. Here I could have interacted with store technology and fellow employees in an attempt to understand some of the issues raised through my qualitative interviews. Working in the 'real' workplace setting would have allowed me to collect some of my own experiences in comprehensive field diaries. And prolonged immersion in the work-setting as a superstore employee might also have introduced me to a series of additional behaviours and concepts.

Yet while successful participation observation 'lets you in the door' (Bernard, 2000: 318), it forms just one part of the ethnographic whole (Bryman, 2001). In total, ethnography is both the process of collecting descriptive data and the written product of that work (Bernard, 2000). Participation observation demands that the researcher always maintains respectful distance from those studied (Schwandt, 2000) – 'cultivating empathy but never sympathy, rapport but never friendship, and familiarity but never full identification'. Rather than 'going native', the researcher should immerse themselves in a social setting and learn to remove themselves everyday so they can intellectualise what's seen and write about it objectively (Bernard, 2000). Like Wakeford (1999) who spent four months working in a cybercafé in London, if access had been allowed, I

would have worked in the space, made comprehensive field notes and then theorised in the evening.

3.9 Summary

As Neuman (1994) suggested earlier (see Section 3.3), and as was referred to in the conclusions of the penultimate section, this project was completed through an iterative research path. Research development tended towards a cyclical pattern, whereby a successive series of steps (some backwards, some sideways and some forwards) were made within a slowly moving, upward spiral. In moving along this iterative research path (see Appendix 6), a novel and appropriate perspective on analysis and interpretation arose (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). As was asserted earlier (see Section 3.1), the subsequent four chapters (Chapters 4–7) present this approach. Each of these chapters provides an answer to one of the aforementioned research questions. Through the summary to each analytical chapter, it is suggested that particular concerns emerge. Each subsequent chapter endeavours to address these concerns and the trail begins with a description of the case study store (see the following chapter).

4 Segmentation and the case study store

*How does the organisation of labour within the store correspond to Freathy's (1993)
application of segmentation theory?*

This chapter represents an attempt to provide a descriptive background for the
subsequent qualitative analysis. An introduction to the company is followed by a
detailing of the space of the superstore itself and a brief illustration of in-store
technology. Next, Freathy's (1993) application of segmentation theory to the superstore
labour market of Manchester is compared to the individual case study store. First, it is
suggested that the organisation of labour within the store replicates Freathy's
classificatory framework and is segmented into a multi-tiered primary sector and a
secondary sector of clerical staff and sales assistants. Secondly, through a presentation
of secondary evidence, issues of correspondence and contestation to Freathy's
framework are highlighted around several key elements of segmentation. In summary, it
is suggested that in-depth (qualitative) analysis is required in an attempt to move
towards a comprehensive understanding of employment relations within the case.

4.1 The company

For the usual reasons of confidentiality, details will remain purposefully vague (the
subsequent information is taken from company literature). However, for the sake of
context, it should be highlighted that the superstore belongs to one of Britain's major
retail companies. The company was founded towards the beginning of the century and
opened its first self-service supermarket in the 1950s. Expansion through the 1960s was
ensured via the acquisition of smaller retail companies and the company opened its first
superstore at the end of the 1960s. During the 1970s, the company attempted to broaden
its customer base and closed many of its older, high-street stores, instead choosing to
concentrate upon the development of out-of-town superstores. Continued growth into
the 1980s was sustained through a superstore building programme and the success of
on-site petrol filling stations. Expansion in the 1990s came via the evolution of new
store concepts, including a reintroduction of smaller city-centre stores, the combination
of petrol-filling station and convenience stores within local communities and the

selective use of twenty-four hour opening. Further strategies for growth included the adoption of new technology systems, most notably the launch of a customer loyalty card and an electronic commerce programme, and the introduction of customer banking facilities. A further stage of expansion has included the development of stores across Europe.

Currently, the company has over 500 stores in Great Britain and over 100 across other European states. The company has over 200 superstores and employs more than 150,000 people. A typical superstore employs between 300 and 400 people and the company suggests that nearly all of these workers will come from the local community. The company assert that their training programme allows candidates with potential to rise from the shop-floor to senior management. In addition, the company has a structured graduate training scheme. The company head-office is based in the south-east and the first two tiers of the organisational structure (see Figure 4.1) are based there.

Figure 4.1: The organisational structure of the company

Chairman	Chief Executive	Deputy Chairman

↓

Company Secretary	Marketing Director	Human Resources Director	Finance Director	Retail Director	Commercial Director
Pensions Secretariat Treasury Taxation Site facilities Transport Consumer law	Marketing Customer service Advertising Market research Loyalty card Estates City-centre shops	Human resource development	Finance Audit Europe	Retail operations Local stores	Commercial directors Technical services

↓

Regional Director and Regional Team (based at one store within each geographical region)

↓

Store Level (the focus of the research)

(Source: Company literature)

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4.2 The store

The case study superstore opened in early 1997. During interview, members of the senior management team conveyed that this store opening was of particular importance to the company for two key reasons. First, and over a number of years, the company had been involved in protracted attempts to open a superstore within Sheffield. Their eventual success means that the store's performance will be monitored closely. Secondly, the case study store is (as the store literature boldly states) 'a completely new shopping experience'. Both externally and internally, the store can be viewed as a dramatic break from the normal perceptions of a superstore. A detailing of the space of the store should provide some explanation.

Above the store, running along the main road, is a twenty-four hour petrol filling station. Off the main road lies a purpose-built approach lane that leads down to the superstore. The store itself lies in a sunken basin and covers a considerable area. This area has been landscaped and in addition to trees, shrubbery and a river, the store boasts a 'country walk' that stretches around the eastern side of the car park. Despite this landscaping, one can still distinguish much of the surrounding area; a mixture of low to middle-class housing and low density industry. To the western side of the landscaped car park, on the opposite side of a high-speed rail track, lies another rival superstore. The case study store has provision for 478 parked vehicles. This need for parking space is also demanded through the store's park 'n' ride (to the city centre) scheme. A staffed office within the car park supports this scheme. This office provides information and a selection of magazines, drinks and confectionery to the park 'n' ride customers. In addition, the store also offers a free and regular bus service from the city centre to the store.

The store itself lies towards the northern end of the car park. On initial viewing, one is immediately struck by the external appearance of the store. Senior team members highlighted that the store's design was part of a new and original concept within the company. The roof comprises of a regular, bisected series of waves from one end of the store to the other and the building is illuminated by a widespread use of glass and white metal. Vast windows run alongside the front of the store and at the western end of the store front is a large, open archway. This provides customer access to the store.

On entering the store, one is again struck by the originality of the in-store design. The store is airy and bright with wide, spacious aisles. To the east of the entrance area is a large bank of twenty-seven checkouts and to the west is a customer service desk

(housing a cigarette kiosk, photocopying and photoprocessing facilities). Running behind the checkouts, facing out towards the car park, is a 110 seat in-store customer restaurant. In front of the checkouts are a plethora of aisles. In addition to what one would perceive as being the usual supermarket products, the store also stocks clothing and home entertainment merchandise (such as music, books and toys). At the far end of the store (facing the checkouts) are a series of specialist counters (bakery, fresh fish, fresh meat and hot chicken). Finally, running along rails on the walls, are a number of security cameras. Other cameras are located inside (both on the shop-floor and in the back-offices) and outside the store.

Staff enter the building round the back of the store. A security buzzer allows access to the reception area and to the immediate right is the reception desk, behind which are the staff pigeon holes. On walking straight ahead, one enters the back-office area through double-doors. Running horizontally is a corridor, off which lie a number of rooms. On the left-hand side are the staff restaurant, staff notice board and staff changing rooms. On the right-hand side is: the door for the reception desk and staff pigeon holes; the cash office; the staff training and development room; the stock control, price check and wages office; the interview room; the personnel office; and the store manager's office. Located further down the corridor is the security office. Via this corridor, one is able to gain access to the shop-floor space. Behind the far end of the store is a covered area which acts as an external hold for non-perishable products. This is connected to the warehouse which, in turn, has access to the shop-floor.

4.3   The technology used in-store

Fernie (1997) recognised that technology was an increasingly important agent in the retail workplace and a series of different ICTs were utilised within the case study store. These were, for the most part, general company applications that relied on a set of tried and tested technologies and non-industry specific packages (Technology Foresight Panel, 1997). However, and as will be illustrated subsequently (see Chapters 5 and 6), the particular conjunction of technology and workers at this locus sponsored very specific relationships. Table 4.1 provides a summary of these technologies. Particular attention should be directed towards the store management technologies and a range of sales, pricing and stock ordering technologies.

Table 4.1: Technology used in-store

Technology	Details
PC	Holding numerous packages which are utilised within the management of the store. There are two within the back offices, located within the manager's office and the training and development room.
Mainframe	The collection of packages available on the PCs.
Quadrant	The name of a package on the PC, accessible through the mainframe, which is used to illustrate the store's performance over a range of variables.
MIS	Management information system - accessible through the mainframe, this provides numerical information on store performance.
e-mail	Internal company communication system which links stores, depots and central offices.
Human resources system	PC-based database which holds personnel information.
Ami Pro	Word processing package, accessible through the store's PCs.
Reception laptop	Used to control the in-store pager system.
Wages computer	Utilised within the administrative tasks of the payroll.
Cash computer	Keyboard-based computerisation used within the cash office tasks.
Price check system	Technology used within the responsibilities of the price check department. Interacts with the store's checkouts.
Stock control system	Computer system utilised in the completion of stock control activities including ordering and waste.
CCTV	Closed-circuit television – nine security cameras controlled by a computer system running Windows '95.
Fuel system	Petrol filling station ordering and fuel loading system.
Scanners	Bar code readers used in price-verification.
Telephones	Supports a range of external communication links.
Pagers	Used in-store to alert managers to particular issues (e.g. the checkouts' pager system).
Radio	Hand held-radio system used within certain store tasks (e.g. security).
Checkouts	Computerised tills within the store located as a main bank of twenty-seven at the front of the store, at the customer service desk and at the petrol filling station. The customer service desk till can also action refunds and exchanges.
Storecard	Customer loyalty card system.
Petrol station computer system	Provides access to the main store's stock control system, the fuel loading system and e-mail.
Petrol pump payment system	Petrol filling station pumps where customers can chose to pay 'at the pump' via credit card.

Via a company mainframe, two PCs in the back offices of the store provided the senior managers with access to a series of relevant packages. Of specific importance was the quadrant, a package which was used to display the store's (and the management's) success at meeting centrally set targets. The quadrant was a circle that was divided into four sections (people, customers, finance and operations) and these sections were internally sub-divided into particular measures. For each measure, a series of lights (green for on-target, amber for way off-target and red for way off-target) indicated the management's success at meeting specific targets. The quadrant, and its mechanism for showing targets and achievements, was central to store management activity. The quadrant was supported by the management information system (MIS). The MIS provided a vast database of statistics covering the different measures of the store and the quadrant was automatically updated in response to changes in the MIS. These centrally collated MIS figures were accessed by the senior management, often in the event of a 'light' change on the quadrant, to provide a detailed statistical breakdown of performance within each measure. In the advent of any particular issues, it was suggested that the mainframe e-mail system provided a vital communication link between the store management and the head office.

Products sold through the store's computerised checkout system were passed over a bar-code reader. Information from checkout sales was sent automatically across an in-store network to pricing and ordering support systems in the back offices. The price check system was used to investigate in-store pricing irregularities. The price check workers also used a set of hand-held scanners. These bar-code readers were used to scan information from products on the shop-floor and the data was then downloaded directly into the price check system. The stock ordering system was integral to a range of activites within the store, including waste control. In addition, products sold through the checkouts were automatically re-ordered through the stock control system.

4.4   Evidence of segmentation

After being granted access to the store, the gatekeeper outlined the broad worker roles within the store and provided a detailed list of staff details in the form of human resource data (for more details, see Section 3.4). Supporting Freathy's (1993) basic classificatory framework, the case study store appeared to be highly segmented into a multi-tiered primary sector and a secondary sector of clerical staff and sales assistants

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(see Figure 4.2). At this stage of the analysis, the aim is simply to highlight how the workplace was organised.

The multi-tiered primary sector was split into three main componenets. The upper-primary tier was comprised of a series of senior managers. The store manager had overall responsibility for the store and was aided by four other senior team members. These senior team members held responsibility for a number of departments within the store (such as training, ambient grocery and stock control). As in Freathy's (1993) framework, a middle tier of management oversaw operations within these specific departments. The hierarchical organisation of the primary sector also allowed for a lower-tier of management and the department managers were assisted by a series of supervisors. A series of clerical staff and sales assistants were then attached to each particular department. These workers represented Freathy's (1993) secondary sector employees.

The five following sub-sections offer a segmented description (after Freathy, 1993) of the case study store. This description replicates Freathy's (1993) approach, searching for evidence of segmentation through management-proffered information. The specific context of the case differs from Freathy's (1993) at three key levels: this research provides an in-depth study of one food-selling store (Freathy undertook a broad analysis of seventeen food and non-food selling stores); the research has been completed in a different local labour market (Sheffield instead of Manchester); and the project is contemporary (Freathy's original fieldwork was completed in 1988). The subsequent description is based upon a comparisson between theory (see Chapter 2) and secondray evidence, which has been adapted from the aforementioned human resource data. Through this comparisson, correspondence and contestation are highlighted around several key elements of segmentation, namely tiers, job titles, hours, gender and remuneration (before income tax and national insurance deductions).

For reasons of confidentiality, the precise details of this data will remain hidden. It should also be recognised that there are gaps within the data. The human resource data was highly sensitive and the gatekeeper displayed an understandable reluctance to offer this information. Given this reticence, it was not possible to obtain specific information concerning senior management remuneration or supervisory human resource data. However, and despite these deficiencies, a detailed description of segmentation within the store has been developed.

Figure 4.2: The organisation and task segmentation of the store

Store Manager			
Personnel Manager	**Customer Services Manager**	**Ambient Trading Manager**	**Fresh Food Trading Manager**

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

Department managers	**Department managers**	**Department managers**	**Department managers**
Training	Checkout supervisors Shoppers' restaurant	Ambient grocery Stock control Home and wear Provisions	Produce Stock control Deli Bakery

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

Supervisors	**Supervisors**	**Supervisors**	**Supervisors**

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

Clerical workers			
Wages	Cash Price check Security Reception	Stock control	Stock control

and

Sales assistants			
Staff restaurant	Checkout operators Customer service Checkout trolleys Newspapers Shoppers' restaurant Garage Cigarette kiosk	Ambient grocery Home and wear Provisions Frozen foods Wines and spirits Warehouse	Produce Deli Meat Fish Hot chicken Bakery Plant bread

Primary sector, upper-tier: senior managers

In correspondence with Freathy's classificatory framework (1993), the senior management of the case study store were all employed on full-time contracts (see Table 4.2). Freathy and Sparks (1996) suggested that senior status resulted in extensive rewards, such as generous benefits schemes and high remuneration. However, Tomlinson, Brockbank and Traves (1997) stated that despite equal numbers at entry points, male workers gained greater access to these privileges and women remained poorly represented at senior levels. Broadbridge (1991: 42) proposed that this under-

representation was related to the hierarchical organisation of retail work, where masculinity was a prerequisite for workplace success (Broadbridge, 1998).

Table 4.2: Evidence of segmentation; the primary sector, upper-tier

Number employed	Full-time	Part-time	Male	Female	Basic, full-time pay (per week) from
5	5 (100%)	0	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	-

(Adapted from the case study store's human resource information)

This trend, though, was not replicated within the confines of this single case. Although only a small sample of five workers, the majority of the senior managers (including the store manager) were female (see Table 4.2).

Primary sector, middle-tier: department managers

As with the upper-tier, Freathy and Sparks (1996) suggested that department manager positions were associated with full-time contracts and evidence from within the case (see Table 4.3) supported this assertion.

Table 4.3: Evidence of segmentation; the primary sector, middle-tier

Number employed	Full-time	Part-time	Male	Female	Basic, full-time pay (per week) from
17	17 (100%)	0	7 (41%)	10 (59%)	£269.68

(Adapted from the case study store's human resource information)

In addition, Freathy and Sparks (1996) insinuated that the pay for workers within this tier was considerably higher than that received by secondary colleagues. Reference to Table 4.3, and a comparison with Tables 4.4 and 4.6, illustrates that the difference between the basic weekly wage of these two tiers within the case study store was over one hundred pounds. It should also be stated that certain department managers earned well in excess of this basic weekly rate. The training manager and bakery section manager started from a basic rate of £295.89 and the stock control manager from a basic

rate of £314.48. Moreover, after the unsociable hours premium, benefits and pension contributions, the ambient grocery (night-shift) department manager received (before deductions) over five hundred and twenty pounds a week. As in the upper-tier, the majority of employees within this middle-management tier were female (see Table 4.3). Whilst holding the majority (four out of five) of checkout management positions, it should also be noted that the highest basic paid, specialist departmental functions within the store (the training, bakery and stock control managers) were also filled by women.

Primary sector, lower-tier: supervisors

Despite the aforementioned problems surrounding the supervisory human resource information, it was possible to deduce certain relationships from the limited data that was available. Freathy (1993) asserted that the role of supervisor closely matched Piore's (1975) conception of lower tier primary employment. As with the managerial positions, conditions of employment were suggested to be relatively secure and all supervisory interviewees within the case study store held full-time contracts. However, primary conditions of employment were not reflected in the form of extensive fiscal rewards. The supervisors within the case study store received no extra remuneration for their additional supervisory responsibilities and only received the same basic pay (£158.53) as their secondary counterparts.

Secondary sector: clerical

Freathy (1993) suggested that the majority of clerical workers enjoyed greater job security, in the form of full-time contracts, than their shop-floor counterparts. Results within the case study store reflected this divide.

Table 4.4: Evidence of segmentation; the secondary sector (clerical)

Number employed	Full-time	Part-time	Male	Female	Basic, full-time pay (per week) from
32	24 (75%)	8 (25%)	18 (56%)	14 (44%)	£158.53

(Adapted from the case study store's human resource information)

As can be seen in Table 4.4, three quarters of the store's clerical workers were employed full-time, whilst only 35% of sales assistants were employed under the same working conditions (see Table 4.6). Given the demands of contemporary retail operations (Sparks, 1992), a number of researchers have pointed to the development of functional flexibilisation strategies, where secondary retail workers are multi-skilled to perform a number of tasks (Freathy and Sparks, 1996; Penn and Wirth, 1993; Atkinson and Meager, 1986). However, these suggestions appeared to be contested by human resource evidence from the case study store's clerical tier. Echoing Marchington and Harrison's (1991) belief that the operation of functional flexibility within retail was limited, the human resource information (see Table 4.5) illustrated how clerical workers were associated to specific departments.

Table 4.5: Departmental breakdown for the secondary sector (clerical)

Department	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Male	Female
Cash days	5	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	0	5 (100%)
Price check	6	4 (67%)	2 (33%)	4 (67%)	2 (33%)
Wage department	2	2 (100%)	0	0	2 (100%)
Stock control days	10	9 (90%)	1 (10%)	9 (90%)	1 (10%)
Stock control twilight	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	2 (100%)	0
Stock control nights	1	1 (100%)	0	1 (100%)	0
Security days	2	2 (100%)	0	2 (100%)	0
Reception days	4	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0	4 (100%)

(Adapted from the case study store's human resource information)

Within the case study store, the majority of the secondary sector workforce (53%) were female. However, most clerical workers (56%) were male (see Table 4.4). Men, as Freathy (1993) had suggested, tended to be confined to specialist areas, such as price check and stock control (see Table 4.5). Women filled the majority of 'general' administrative clerical roles, such as reception.

Secondary sector: sales assistants

Against the job-security enjoyed by clerical workers, Freathy (1993) believed that sales assistants experienced many of the conditions identified by Doeringer and Piore (1971)

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as characteristic of the secondary sector, being overwhelmingly female, part-time and low paid. Table 4.6 illustrates how the majority of sales assistants within the case study store were female shift-workers, employed on a part-time basis. This flexible, part-time model of working (Gregory, 1991) appeared to suggest that the store could specify their labour requirements in line with product demands, whereby labour was purchased in a 'just in time' fashion (Walsh, 1991). In searching for confirmation within the case study, it was discovered that just four of the store's ninety-three checkout operators were employed on a full-time basis (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.6: Evidence of segmentation; the secondary sector (sales assistants)

Number employed	Full-time	Part-time	Male	Female	Basic, full-time pay (per week) from
278	97 (35%)	181 (65%)	127 (46%)	151 (54%)	£158.53

(Adapted from the case study store's human resource information)

It was suggested above, that a dependence upon numerical flexibility has been supported by an associated operation of functional flexibilisation strategies. Freathy (1993) declared that the concept of the secondary labour market within retailing was reinforced by the low level of demarcation between sales assistant jobs. He suggested that there was regularly no strict definition of job title and that individuals were expected to undertake a range of duties and to be flexibly deployed in response to the peaks and troughs of the business. Twelve workers within the case study's secondary sector fulfilled their responsibilities under the banner of 'flexible worker' (see Table 4.7). However, and against Freathy's (1993) assertions, the majority of secondary workers were identified through their attachment to a particular department (see Table 4.7).

From this departmental information in Table 4.7, further relationships were identified. Freathy (1993) suggested that males within the secondary sales assistant positions tended to be confined to specialist areas, such as the warehouse and the butchery. Through reference to Table 4.7, it is noticeable that the male workers within the case fulfilled positions across the departments of the secondary, sales assistant tier but were dominant within the warehouse and other specialist areas, such as the fish counter and the ambient frozen foods area. It was also clear that the majority of female

Table 4.7: Departmental breakdown for the secondary sector (sales assistants)

Department	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Male	Female
Ambient grocery days	14	4 (29%)	10 (71%)	14 (100%)	0
Ambient grocery nights	17	15 (88%)	2 (12%)	15 (88%)	2 (12%)
Plant bread days	3	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	3 (100%)	0
Plant bread twilight	1	1 (100%)	0	1 (100%)	0
Provisions cabinet days	7	4 (57%)	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	4 (57%)
Provisions cabinet nights	7	5 (71%)	2 (29%)	7 (100%)	0
Provisions flexible	1	0	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0
Meat days	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
Meat counter only	4	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	3 (75%)	1 (25%)
Flexible workers	12	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	4 (33%)	8 (67%)
Produce days	6	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	5 (83%)	1 (17%)
Produce nights	2	2 (100%)	0	2 (100%)	0
Checkout operators	93	4 (4%)	89 (96%)	24 (26%)	69 (74%)
Checkout customer service	8	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	1 (12.5%)	7 (87.5%)
Checkout trolleys	4	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	4 (100%)	0
Fish	3	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	3 (100%)	0
Warehouse days	2	2 (100%)	0	2 (100%)	0
Warehouse nights	2	2 (100%)	0	2 (100%)	0
Deli days	13	5 (38%)	8 (62%)	3 (23%)	10 (77%)
Hot chicken	6	1 (17%)	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	5 (83%)
Frozen foods days	1	0	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0
Frozen foods nights	1	1 (100%)	0	1 (100%)	0
Staff restaurant days	6	1 (17%)	5 (83%)	0	6 (100%)
Staff restaurant night	3	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	2 (67%)
Newspaper days	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	2 (100%)	0
Home and wear days	7	4 (57%)	3 (43%)	2 (29%)	5 (71%)
Wines and spirits days	4	4 (100%)	0	3 (75%)	1 (25%)
Wines and spirits nights	1	1 (100%)	0	1 (100%)	0
Bakery days	12	7 (58%)	5 (42%)	6 (50%)	6 (50%)
Shoppers' restaurant	15	5 (33%)	10 (66%)	4 (27%)	11 (73%)
Garage days	13	3 (23%)	10 (77%)	4 (36%)	9 (64%)
Garage nights	4	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	3 (75%)	1 (25%)
Cigarette kiosk	2	0	2 (100%)	0	2 (100%)

(Adapted from the case study store's human resource information)

workers were based around several discrete areas; the front-end (checkouts, customer service and the cigarette kiosk) and the restaurants (both for the customers and the staff).

4.5   Summary

Having earlier set the specific economic, geographical and technological context of the case, it can be summarised from the presentation of human resource data (see Section 4.4) that the organisation of labour within the case study store broadly corresponded to Freathy's (1993) application of segmentation theory. Most notably, the segmentation of the store's workers appeared to dovetail with Freathy's (1993) conceptual framework for the superstore labour market (see 'Tiers' in Table 4.8). Despite this broad pattern, there were specific issues of contestation (see Section 4.4).

Whilst these human resource statistics provide an understanding of the organisation of labour within the case, it is difficult to draw detailed inferences about how the superstore works. The analysis within the subsequent chapter provides an additional layer of understanding by comparing qualitative evidence, from the store's workers, to Freathy's (1993) original findings. It is hoped that this experience-led analysis can allow the development of a more extensive comprehension of employment relations within the case.

Table 4.8: Evidence of segmentation; a summary

Tiers	Number employed	Full-time	Part-Time	Male	Female	Full-time pay (per week) from
Primary, upper-tier: senior managers	5	5 (100%)	0	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	-
Primary, middle-tier: section managers	17	17 (100%)	0	7 (41%)	10 (59%)	£269.68
Primary, lower-tier: Supervisors	-	-	-	-	-	£158.53
Secondary: Clerical	32	24 (75%)	8 (25%)	18 (56%)	14 (44%)	£158.53
Secondary: sales assistants	278	97 (35%)	181 (65%)	127 (46%)	151 (54%)	£158.53
Total	332	143 (43%)	189 (57%)	154 (46%)	178 (54%)	-

(Adapted from the case study store's human resource information)

5   Segmentation and worker experiences

How do the store workers' activities correspond to Freathy's (1993) application of segmentation theory?

Having used quantitative data to challenge Freathy's (1993) application as a framework for segmentation within the store (see Section 4.4), analysis within this chapter seeks to compare and contest Freathy's (1993) findings through qualitative research. Freathy's (1993) original application of segmentation to the superstore labour market sought confirmation through interviews with superstore managers. Furlong (1990) suggested that, as with Freathy's original model, the majority of existing knowledge about labour market segmentation had come from studies of employers. This chapter presents an attempt to seek a new layer of confirmation through in-depth interviews with a range of staff members across different activities within the store.

Freathy, in conjunction with Leigh Sparks (1994, 1995a and 1996), attached significance to the utilisation of ICTs within the retail workplace. Given their, and other researchers, concerns (see Chapter 2) particular concentration is centred upon the complex array of technological artefacts that are utilised within the workers' activities (Graham, 1998). Here, through a wholly relational perspective (Graham, 1998), an attempt is made to understand these ICTs within their context of use (Thrift, 1996), where it is suggested that the social and the technological are caught up within complex and recursive interactions (Graham, 1999).

In this chapter, the workers' experiences are presented through the five multi-tiered segmentations presented in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.4). Attention is then given to the issues that appear to correspond to, and contest, Freathy's (1993) segmented framework (see Chapter 2). Given a series of possible contestations, it is summarised at the end of the chapter that a reconsideration of the retail superstore workplace should be attempted around the three core issues of dictation, delegation and authority (see Section 5.3).

5.1   Primary sector

Upper-tier: senior managers

Paul Freathy (1993) suggested that the upper-tier of the primary sector were not subjected to elaborate work rules and were able to enjoy a degree of autonomy and responsibility within their roles. Freathy (1993) asserted that it was important that this autonomy was viewed within the context of a high degree of centralised control. Kate, the store manager, echoed these sentiments but suggested that this control became manifest through deliberate processes of dictation:

> as a company we're moving more and more towards having more responsibility for making decisions at a local level. For example, I can to a degree say what I'm going to stock and what I'm not going to stock. But then a lot of it is central. We are dictated to about what we can and can't do.
>
> (Kate, senior manager)

Freathy and Sparks (1996) suggested that the head office appreciated the importance of the retained presence of the store management to organise what could not be controlled centrally. At store level, Kate stated that the store manager held the ultimate responsibility for the overall success of the store. Corresponding with Freathy and Sparks' (1994) and Tomlinson, Brockbank and Traves' (1997) assertions, case study evidence suggested that ICTs played a central role within store management activities. Through a recursive interaction (Graham, 1999) with mainframe software, and most importantly the quadrant, the store manager constantly monitored performance and highlighted problems within specific areas of the store. Here, the manager monitored the effectiveness of the other senior management staff who were responsible for particular measures and targets within the different areas of the store. These other senior staff, whose freedom had to be viewed within the context of the store manger's ultimate control, delegated responsibility for each of their line departments to a department manager. As a result of this delegation, these other senior managers held a 'higher level' view of their departmental procedures, only 'drilling down' as necessitated. This, it was stated, provided the other senior management staff with the freedom to become involved in additional work.

Kate, the manager, said that she was ultimately responsible for the overall success of the store and evidence, from within the case, suggested that ICTs played a central role within her management activities. Kate occupied an independent room within the back offices of the store. Here, she had access to her own PC, on the company mainframe, which allowed connection to a number of mainframe functions. Of these functions, Kate drew particular attention to the quadrant:

> Well, basically we've got a quadrant which is how we measure performance, both of the store and the people working in it ... The quadrant is probably the piece of technology that I use most to help me do my job.
>
> (Kate, senior manager)

Kate highlighted how the quadrant was divided into four sections; people, customers, finance and operations. These sections were sub-divided into measures with specific targets that needed to be achieved. With each of these measures, there was a light; either green (for on-target), amber (off-target) or red (way off-target). Effectively, the quadrant's lights were a computer-based mechanism for displaying Kate's success at meeting specific targets across the different sectors of the store:

> the big plus is it helps you look at the picture as a whole, you know, it's very balanced. So it's just as important for me to make sure my development and my morale are on green lights as it is some of these financial controls round here.
>
> (Kate, senior manager)

The quadrant's display of lights informed Kate's monitoring of the store. An amber or red light required action, and as store manager, Kate stated that she held the responsibility to engage particular strategies to sponsor change on the shop-floor:

> So sales at the minute, we're not meeting budget on sales. So the first thing we've got to do is try and identify why. So what that would involve is getting together with the managers and the staff and asking some questions ... And you drill down further and so then you might start to look at well, is it something to do with how we're managing our stock control systems? Why are we always running out of promotion lines at seven o'clock on a Tuesday night? What is it

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that's happening? So it makes you drill down to find out what the problem is, hopefully fix it and then you start seeing the results reflected in the quadrant.

<div align="right">(Kate, senior manager)</div>

Following Webster and Robins (1989) suggestions, information processing (via the quadrant) allowed an extension in the manager's capacity to monitor. From problem identification (a red light on sales, 'drill down'), through to change ('fix' the problem) and reflection (a green light?), Kate monitored internal store performance through the sectoral responses of the quadrant. Kate stated that she also used the mainframe technology to monitor the store's relative performance against the company's other stores within the local area. Kate declared that this form of external monitoring regularly offered an outside explanation for a red light on the quadrant. Through a reference to the Management Information System (MIS), Kate suggested that she was able to understand similarities in, and external influences to, local trading patterns.

you can look at the other stores within the area because they'll generally tend to be doing the same in terms as trade as you are because that'll be influenced by what's going on in the locality.

<div align="right">(Kate, senior manager)</div>

The quadrant, and an associated series of mainframe technologies, provided Kate with a plethora of internal and external information. Kate monitored this information and used the emerging trends as her guide to the engagement of particular strategies. Kate asserted that this inevitably required the monitoring of the effectiveness of her other senior team staff who were responsible for specific measures on the quadrant. Here, the recursive interaction (Graham, 1999) between Kate and the quadrant produced a system of control that issued orders down through the store management hierarchy on the basis of information channelled up through the computer system (Ducatel, 1992):

in a nutshell, my job is to make sure that we achieve all the measures on that quadrant through the people in the store ... that passes down to everybody in the store because all my senior team are measured on elements of the quadrant that they have a specific accountability for.

<div align="right">(Kate, senior manager)</div>

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For example, Lucy, the ambient trading manager, detailed how she was responsible for success within a number of measures within the ambient areas of the shop-floor, including dry grocery, health and beauty, household, home and wear, frozen foods and wines and spirits:

> Basically, my job is to make sure that we've got the stock that we need at the right time, it's on the shelves, we've got a clean and safe environment for customers, staff are trained and knowledgeable in their job, we have the right people at the right time in the business.
>
> <div align="right">(Lucy, senior manager)</div>

Like Kate, the other senior management staff recognised that the quadrant was inherent within their management of the store. Robin was the store's personnel manager and he explained how the quadrant was an essential element within his attempts at effective store management:

> I mean, every week in the management meeting we talk around the quadrant ... basically if you've got any red lights or amber lights, that's your spur to action because you've either got a problem or you're about to have a problem coming up and you need to get there and be practical and deal with it before it turns into a big one.
>
> <div align="right">(Robin, senior manager)</div>

Departmentally, Robin took charge of wages and the staff restaurant. The wages system, suggested Robin, was made simple though its computerisation and the competence of the store's wages clerks. Corresponding with Kitchin's (1998) suggestions, these workers effectively worked alone, processing information, and were given the authority to make low-level decisions. Robin's interaction with wages became apparent at a 'higher level':

> Where my real involvement comes in is tracking the higher level picture, which is how is the store wage budget performing, 'How much money have we got to spend? Can we afford to replace that vacancy or do we need to save that money

because we've overspent the last few weeks?', and so on. So mine's a fairly higher level sort of view of it.

<div align="right">(Robin, senior manager)</div>

Vicky, the customer services manager with responsibility for quadrant measures across the front-end, concurred. Here, she was responsible for the twenty-seven checkouts within the store. Vicky explained how trade at the front-end fluctuated and, as a result, checkout schedules were analysed on a daily basis. This analysis was complicated through the company's 'one-in-front' policy.[1] Even considering the aforementioned fluctuation and complication, Vicky stated that she was prepared to take a higher level view. Here, she delegated responsibilities to checkout department managers:

> I just really try and manage the line department through the checkout managers.
> I try and push as much responsibility down.
>
> <div align="right">(Vicky, senior manager)</div>

Vicky also managed a range of back-office functions. One of Vicky's back-office management concerns was the price check department. Once again, Vicky essentially retained a monitoring role, checking and signing reports as necessary:

> But Kevin, who's another of my checkout managers, he's responsible for price check. I delegate the power down to him and that works fine. So if there's something that I need doing in price check, then I'll call Kevin in, we'll have a chat about it, I'll say, 'OK, go away do it and then come back to me'. Because otherwise I wouldn't physically have the time to do the job.
>
> <div align="right">(Vicky, senior manager)</div>

By delegating power to other department managers, Vicky asserted that she allowed herself additional time to, 'get on with the other things'. For example, as customer service manager, Vicky explained that she was involved in a number of on-going

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[1] One-in-front policy - each checkout queue should only consist of one person being served and another person waiting to be served.

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customer relations projects, including the implementation of the customer plan. This plan involved a wealth of information gathering and results:[2]

> we'll be working on these for the next six months. Then what we'll do with that then is to measure how successful we've been and then re-prioritise it to something else.
>
> (Vicky, senior manager)

Middle-tier: department managers

In correspondence with Freathy's (1993) findings, the department managers worked under the ultimate authority of the senior team and held responsibility for discrete areas of the store. As Freathy (1993) suggested, the middle-tier of superstore management fulfilled highly defined duties and they were governed by a formal set of work procedures. In fulfilling their duties, these department managers maintained a series of internal workplace relationships with their senior management superiors, other departmental staff and relevant external parties and this required the utilisation of a broad sweep of ICTs. Within this middle-tier, there were a number of checkout department managers who were accountable for a broad range of issues at the front-end. However, and against Freathy's suggestion (1993) that all department manager positions were area-specific, the checkout department managers were delegated additional responsibilities for other areas of the store. The management of these diverse line departments required an ability to simultaneously manage disparate areas of the store.

Catherine held a specific department manager position within the store. Under the direct control of the personnel manager, Catherine was the store's training manager and, with regards to her tasks, she stated that she held a series of defined responsibilities:

> I co-ordinate training, make sure training takes place, make sure any legal training takes place ... My job is purely and simply to make sure that training happens for the 320 staff that we've got in-store.
>
> (Catherine, department manager)

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[2] Including SWOTs (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) on their local competitors, accompanied shops with customers, quarterly checkout surveys and the questioning of staff.

Catherine's work procedures required the utilisation of a PC. This back-office computer was housed within the training and development office and held the store's training records, the personal details of the staff and the wages of those employed within the store. Catherine asserted that she then utilised this catalogue of information within her job. She also used the computer to send and receive e-mail:

> The mail that we get down every day, especially if Robin's off, because obviously if anything came down for the personnel manager, things like updating the share price board I need to do, all training materials are ordered by e-mail and things such as transfers [of workers] between stores
>
> (Catherine, department manager)

Fiona was an ambient stock control manager and, like Catherine, she held responsibility for a specific area of the store (the stock control department). Working under the direct control of Lucy, an ambient trading manager (see the preceding sub-section), Fiona asserted that she fulfilled a formal set of work procedures. Here, Fiona and her department utilised a series of ICTs, such as the price check system, the PC, bar code readers, e-mail, pagers and telephones, to fulfil a highly defined monitoring role:

> That's why I say, 'We don't order stock'. 90% of the stuff on ambient is sales-based ordered. That's why maintaining accuracy on the system is so important because everything is sales-based ordered and if the system's not accurate, then it's not good.
>
> (Fiona, department manager)

Fiona's overall responsibility was to ensure that stock was always available on the shop-floor and this required the maintenance of a set of workplace relations and procedures. Fiona stated that she had a daily duty to confer her departmental information and issues to Lucy, the ambient trading manager, and her senior within the workplace organisation. Fiona also used e-mail to communicate to sources outside the store:

> Checking mail, my mail account obviously. It's at least every hour that somebody needs to check e-mail for that. And sending messages obviously. Ordering bits and bobs that we do order off there, like equipment and other

things. We can use it for all sorts, finding phone numbers, extension numbers, there's all sorts on there

(Fiona, department manager)

Within this middle-tier of management, there were five checkout managers in-store that held a responsibility for a broad range of issues at the front-end. As a checkout manager, Kevin stressed that he was responsible for a series of defined duties. As his superior (Vicky) had stated within the previous sub-section, Kevin confirmed that he held a delegated responsibility for the scheduling of staff, to ensure that the company target of 'one-in-front' was met. With regards to finance, Kevin claimed that he had to ensure that the tills had change, that the safe book was balanced and that the shorts and overs of the checkout lanes were fully investigated. In dealing with the workers concerned, Kevin stated that he was able to call upon the price check technology (in the back-offices of the store) to monitor shop-floor activity. Concurring with Freathy and Sparks' (1994) assertions, Kevin highlighted that employees could be tracked and their performance closely monitored. From this process of monitoring, an appropriate strategy was enacted:

We can pull off the back office equipment, who's signed on what checkout from when until when. So if it's a particular lane, we'll pull off who's been signed for that time period and we will speak to them. We can more or less pinpoint it (any irregularities) if we go back through the journal role.

(Kevin, department manager)

Kevin also asserted that he was responsible for the staff issues that arose at the front-end of the store, including the development of the employees under his compass. One method of attempting this training was through job-swapping. Kevin gave the example of two individuals, one in stock control and another on the checkouts, who changed positions for a week:

Obviously there'll be an impact because they'll have training, they won't be as efficient as the other person and similarly for us. But by the end of the week, you get somebody that's up to speed, plus we've got another relief checkout

operator and they've got someone if there's illness or long-term absence that can work in their department and we can always fill and cover it.

(Kevin, department manager)

In the long term, Kevin suggested that this strategy ensured flexibility for the store and made his task of scheduling easier. Maintaining effective workplace relations formed an important element of Kevin's job. These were often formed alongside other managers within the store:

the relationship that we have revolves around meetings and sat in a room and discussions. Everything that we sort out is sorted out on paper and comes from inside our heads.

(Kevin, department manager)

Technology, claimed Kevin, was not utilised with regards to the maintenance of these relationships. However, technology was used when strategies needed to be enacted through external, company contacts. Under specific circumstances, such as when the store ran out of a particular product, Kevin declared that he would either phone or e-mail a range of different, local stores.

Concurring with Freathy's (1993) earlier assertions, the aforementioned department managers were empowered through their responsibility for specific areas of the store. However, the formality of this emerging pattern of discrete area management was contested through the multilevel demands that were delegated to checkout department managers. As checkout department managers, Kevin and his associates held an additional responsibility for other areas of the store. Kevin was responsible for price check and this demanded a regular interaction with the individuals within this discrete, back-office department.

Diane, like Kevin, fulfilled checkout department manager responsibilities and her broad compass also included managing the petrol filling station, security and park and ride. Alongside the demands of her checkout management responsibilities, Diane suggested that her petrol station duties were highly involved because of the legal aspects involved in running the garage:

The other major problem in the morning is we've got three A4 checklists of things that we have to do and they're legal checklists and if we don't do them, then the fire officer can come and shut us down at any time. So that's one of the most important things that we've got to do in the morning.

(Diane, department manager)

Her staff, therefore, needed to be appropriately trained, a process which took four weeks. This inevitably created problems for staff scheduling:

So if somebody rings in sick, we have to get cover from the store and they don't know what the hell they're doing

(Diane, department manager)

With reference to the day-to-day procedures of the garage, Diane stated that there was a computer, within the back-offices of the petrol station, with access to the stock control system at the main store. The stock control department at the main store continued to order the garage's stock. However, through the petrol station computer, Diane and her workers at the petrol station had the ability to electronically view the main store system to 'see if they've got the stock that we need'. Diane stated that the petrol station's computer also held the fuel loading system, for when ordered petrol arrived, and had e-mail capability:

which we use quite a lot to e-mail the petrol buyer to tell them the different prices that are on. We have to do fuel savers three times a week, going round all the other petrol stations.

(Diane, department manager)

From her own workplace experiences, Diane declared that this was the first of the company's petrol stations that she had worked in that had included this technology. She asserted similar claims over the technology within the security office, where she suggested that the store boasted the best surveillance equipment within the region. This, inevitably, made the security team's job easier and was utilised within the decisions Diane made:

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> Security involves stopping shop-lifters, making sure the staff searches have been done, involvement with the police, looking into CCTV, putting policies and procedures into place, what I want to happen to a shop-lifter, what I don't want to happen to a shop-lifter, what I want to arrest for, what I don't want to arrest for.
>
> (Diane, department manager)

As a shop-lifter was caught, Diane used electronic mail to create a catalogue of potential criminals. Through a combination of technologies, Diane and her fellow security workers monitored, recorded and acted upon criminal activity within the store

> For example, if we've caught a shop-lifter, we'll e-mail the region saying, 'We've caught this person and this is the description', and they do it as well so we keep files and in e-mail you've got a file for security so we don't have to have a hard copy, just stick it into a file and then when you want to have a look at it, it's there.
>
> (Diane, department manager)

Lower-tier: supervisors

Supervisors took orders from the department managers and stepped into the management role as required. Against Freathy's (1993) assertions, it was generally suggested that the supervisors spent the majority of their work-time completing the tasks of other secondary colleagues. Despite the use of technology for communication and surveillance, individual experiences from the front-end corresponded to Freathy's (1993) suggestion that supervisory work tended to be repetitious. However, in contestation to Freathy's (1993) findings, not all supervisors were in charge of front-end and shop-floor areas. Back-office workers fulfilled supervisory responsibilities, stepping into the management role as required. In all individual cases (both on the shop-floor and in the back-offices), supervisory status was confirmed after prior experience within the store. Against Freathy's (1993) findings, there was a considerable measure of demarcation between the different supervisory positions. Nevertheless, in one specific back-office worker's case, a plethora of flexible responsibilities contested Freathy's (1993) assertions that supervisory work tended to be repetitious. However, it

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should be highlighted that the workplace role, which had been developed for this particular worker, was very different to that which might have be found in any of the company's other stores.

A supervisor took orders from the department managers and the senior team but had a particular function within the store:

> stepping into the management role when they're not available
>
> (Nicola, supervisor)

Therefore, against Freathy's (1993) definition, the 'primary sector' status of the case study supervisor was contested. Unlike the rest of the management team, the supervisor continued to perform the tasks of other secondary individuals within their departments, holding temporary authority when called upon. As a supervisor, Nicola declared that she was expected to recognise when an intervention was required. To develop an understanding, Nicola detailed the responsibilities of her supervisory role:

> You make sure that your staff's all right for starters, your tills are in working order, there's no faulty equipment down there, making sure that there's enough change in the tills, making sure that you've got no queues, making sure that with one-in-front, you're on to your barrier with it. Also that you've got one-bag packer to three tills which, if it's really busy and you call reliefs down. So you've got to be aware of that all the time. Also you've got making sure that the trolleys are available for the customers, keeping an eye on the trolleys outside. Making sure that the baskets are available for them. And that the front of the store's clear of paper and things like that. The customer service desk is all right. Any problems, they normally call supervisor if there's no managers down there, to make the decisions or to speak to the customers if they've got a query. You've also got cash office, making sure that the change trolley is full. If it's not, getting in touch with cash office and making sure that they can get the money down to you or you go up for it. The cafe, helping out in there if they need any help. And checkouts because obviously you've got a lot of people that work on the checkouts. You know, making sure that comment cards and pens and Storecards are always available as well as making sure that you're getting your breaks off and your lunches off. Going through training records because we

have a couple of people down there for training as well. Making sure that they're written up to date. So really, it's quite a responsibility.

(Nicola, supervisor)

Although these supervisory demands placed a degree of responsibility upon Nicola, it appeared reasonable to suggest, as Freathy (1993) proclaimed, that her supervisory work tended to be repetitious, with a concentration upon ensuring that work schedules were maintained, upon the co-ordination of the checkout areas and upon providing the first line of query for customers. Nicola also conferred that her supervisory role necessitated the utilisation of a series of ICTs. Radios and pagers were used to communicate with other departments and managers within the store. A secondary pager system, utilised for checkouts alone, told Nicola which cashiers required assistance. There was a keyboard by every checkout and each button on the keypad paged Nicola about a particular problem, such as security, change and cleaning. Nicola also suggested that she could use the back-office technology (cash, price-check and stock control) to monitor the performance of specific staff:

Yeah, we can pull anything off, miss-scans or double scans or things like that. We can pull it all off and if the same names keep cropping up all the time then somebody will say something but it's very, very rare.

(Nicola, supervisor)

Inevitably, however, Nicola was still required to answer to her superiors and her autonomy only stretched as far as her role definition required. As was explained above, the supervisor only fulfilled management obligations when called upon and, for the majority of their time, they continued to perform the tasks of other secondary individuals within their departments. Here, Nicola spent only a small percentage of her working hours within her scheduled department (reception). Instead, the majority of Nicola's working day was spent on the shop-floor:

I serve customers, help on the customer service desk, tobacco, other departments as well as checkouts. Our aim is to keep the customers happy, trying to keep the right amount of bag-packers on the bags and the right amount of tills open and

watching queue length. So all round the store. I always wander from one department to another.

<div align="right">(Nicola, supervisor)</div>

When prompted to discuss reception, Nicola stated that she had only spent around six months on the desk since the store had opened. The majority of this time had been spent covering holidays, sick leave and maternity leave. However, she was still part of a flexible response strategy for when problems arose:

> But we try and get, I think there's about ten of the checkouts that are actually reception-trained because we need to cover lunches, breaks and things like that. So with us being supervisors as well, if there's nobody else available, then we will leave checkouts, leave it in another supervisor's hands and then go and cover round there.
>
> <div align="right">(Nicola, supervisor)</div>

Freathy (1993) suggested that supervisors were primarily in charge of shop-floor and checkout areas. However, Pamela and Chris were contracted as supervisors within the back-office space. As supervisors, they had, as highlighted earlier, a particular responsibility:

> We'll, I've got a department manager and I'm a supervisor so when they're not there I sort the rest of the department out.
>
> <div align="right">(Pamela, supervisor)</div>

As branch systems operators, Pamela and Chris' day-to-day role concerned insuring that the right stocks, either fresh-food or ambient, were ordered and available at all times. Stock system information provided the superstore with the ability to respond swiftly to changes in demand (after Fernie, 1997) and, as such, computer systems were integral to their activities:

> We've got several computer systems and on-set computers which we use to order stock. It's all computerised nowadays.
>
> <div align="right">(Chris, supervisor)</div>

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Through these systems, Pamela and Chris had the responsibility to undertake a daily review of the store's stock. Pamela viewed their work as 'common sense' but recognised that the branch systems operator required a very specific knowledge. Chris concurred with these sentiments:

> Products get scanned, the computer reads the bar-code, says it's one of these and at the end of the day it collates all the information and says, 'Right, you sold ten oranges so we need to order ten more oranges', and that's what it does. And we're just there to look ... It's just managing the computer system really. The computer generally does it all for us but it's not perfect. So you have to have a few people looking over the computer for solving problems ... We're constantly looking up different products in the system and seeing what data the computer's got and just changing the data if we feel it's necessary.
>
> (Chris, supervisor)

If errors persisted, Chris and Pamela were required to modify the computer information. More specifically, it was from their informational input that the chain of automatic ordering initially began:

> Yeah, generally we have to enter the demand but the system will slowly activate it itself. It will know if we have an average sale of ten oranges a day and if one week we sell fifteen a day, it will then think for itself and the next week it will order twelve oranges. It won't go up to fifteen but it will slowly go up to fifteen.
>
> (Chris, supervisor)

Within their roles, the branch systems operators used e-mail to interact with other stores and depots within the company, though, in both Chris and Pamela's case, the continued use of the telephone was also highlighted. It should be emphasised, however, that Chris and Pamela's utilisation of computers did not occur because of their supervisory status. This responsibility was conferred to all branch-systems operators. Against Freathy's (1993) suggestions, there was a considerable level of demarcation between the stock control positions. Other roles within this department included reductions assistants and waste. However, Pamela and Chris had progressed within their department and on performing satisfactorily within their roles, had been promoted to supervisory status.

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Corresponding with Freathy (1993), these supervisory staff, including Nicola (earlier) and Shelly (subsequently), had prior experience within the secondary sector (see Appendix 5: 19 and 27).

Along with the other supervisors, Shelly asserted that she was connected to a secondary role and, like Nicola, she was contracted as a receptionist. Within this position, Shelly fulfilled the appropriate duties of dealing with the public, and other company enquiries, and ensured the passing of information between relevant parties within the store. However, Shelly's contractual role was complicated by the specific position she held within store administration. Shelly claimed that she usually spent only an hour and a half on the reception desk during a typical eight-hour shift. Although she was contracted as a receptionist, her hours came under the productivity total for checkouts. Nevertheless, Shelly said that her presence on checkouts (as at the reception) was often minimal, to the inevitable chagrin of the checkout managers:

> you've got the checkout manager saying, 'Oh, can you go on checkouts Shelly, oh, we need relief cashiers'. And which isn't a lot now but obviously they get a little upset because they've got their hours, my hours, under their department and they're short if I'm not on it.
>
> (Shelly, supervisor)

Once again contesting Freathy's (1993) proposition that supervisors were primarily in charge of sales floor and checkout areas, Shelly said that she spent the majority of her time interacting with the store management:

> I do any typing up that needs doing. Letters for managers, answer comment cards, go to the post office. What else? I'm sort of the person that if you want anything doing 'ask Shelly', Shelly sort of does it.
>
> (Shelly, supervisor)

Shelly stated this general administration role meant that a large percentage of her work-time was based on the store PC. These computing skills were then utilised by the senior team and Shelly asserted that she was regularly used as an extra element of the management team:

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the managers include me in some things like we're doing CSI surveys, which are customer surveys. I got included in one of the teams, you know. And at the moment we've got ideas which I'm doing with Catherine and another department manager. Yeah, they sort of, they ask me for help because they're obviously busy at times and what have you. So, I support the managers as well as working with the shop-floor staff.

(Shelly, supervisor)

In addition, Shelly's ability and willingness to interact with technology also resulted in further in-store training. Her potential capacity to use e-mail for example, was viewed as being beneficial to the store:

They were going to train me up on it actually because it'd be an advantage if I'm trained up on it. I'm always willing to learn.

(Shelly, supervisor)

Inevitably, therefore, the flexible demands of Shelly's responsibilities were in contrast to Freathy's (1993) suggestion that supervisory work tended to be repetitious.

———————

The following synopsis presents a short summary of primary sector findings. Despite raising the importance of centralised control, the store manager, and the other senior managers of the upper-tier, appeared to enjoy a degree of autonomy and responsibility. The store manager held ultimate responsibility for the overall success of the store and used ICTs to monitor the effectiveness of the other senior management staff, who were responsible for particular areas of the store. These other senior management staff held a 'higher view' of their departmental procedures and delegated responsibility for each of their line departments to a department manager. In correspondence with Freathy's (1993) findings, the department managers (the middle-tier) held responsibility for discrete areas of the store. Within this middle-tier, there were a number of checkout department managers who were accountable for a broad range of issues at the front-end. However, and against Freathy's suggestion (1993) that all department manager positions were area-specific, the checkout department managers held additional responsibilities

for other areas of the store. The management of these diverse line departments required an ability to simultaneously manage disparate areas of the store. Supervisors took orders from the department managers and stepped into the management role as required. Against Freathy's (1993) assertions, it was generally stated that the supervisors spent the majority of their work-time completing the tasks of other secondary colleagues. Experiences from the front-end corresponded to Freathy's (1993) suggestion that supervisory work tended to be repetitious. However, in contestation to Freathy's (1993) findings, not all supervisors were in charge of shop-floor areas. Back-office workers also completed supervisory responsibilities and one interviewee fulfilled a specific management assistance role.

5.2   Secondary sector

Clerical

A higher level of demarcation, than Freathy (1993) might have expected, existed between the clerical jobs. These clerical workers held specific roles within the store and completed a limited number of tasks within one specific area (such as ordering, pricing, wages, cash, security and administration). Many of these roles included decision-making responsibilities and each of these roles required the utilisation of information and communication technology. In the completion of their tasks, some of the clerical workers were required to move between the discrete spaces of the shop-floor and the back-offices. Other workers remained in the back-offices and monitored shop-floor activity through their departmental technologies.

As Freathy had (1993) suggested, these secondary workers could be flexibly deployed in response to workplace changes. For example, Arthur was contracted as a stock control assistant. He manned the night-shift but recent changes to the workplace organisation had required Arthur to become more flexible in his activities:

> I was ambient stock control on nights. But with me not being now on stock control, I don't know how they class my job title as this has only sort of happened in the last month. But they still use me for stock control. All right at the moment, with holidays and people off sick, I'm tending to do more of the

filling side of it and not stock control at the moment but hopefully that's going to get better.

<div align="right">(Arthur, clerical)</div>

Arthur claimed that he continued to undertake a 'small' amount of stock control activities but subsidised this with a considerable time spent:

helping out wherever needed on a night-fill.

<div align="right">(Arthur, clerical)</div>

He suggested that he still had access to the stock control, sales-based ordering system. However, as a result of the aforementioned changes, Arthur stated that the system now closed down for six hours during the night and this clearly limited the amount of work he was able to undertake within the back-office:

And I've been sort of used to sort of people bringing me problems with stock and saying, you know can you look into this and can you look into that - the amount of time I've got, sort of, on nights now, to do that, it's very restrictive.

<div align="right">(Arthur, clerical)</div>

Therefore, as a result of the management's desire to restructure the workplace, Arthur had recently been required to undergo a transition. As a result of this transition, Arthur's job role had become confused and the strict definition of his job-title had been removed.

However, the majority of clerical workers held more strictly defined job roles. As the following evidence suggests, a considerable level of demarcation existed between clerical positions. Within these jobs, clerical workers fulfilled a series of responsibilities. As a stock control assistant on the day-shift, Steven suggested that he was responsible for making sure that the correct products were in-store. Steven asserted that he searched for potential gaps on the shelves of the shop-floor and scanned the specific products using a hand-held bar code reader. Steven stated that he then took the bar-code reader into the back-office to download the information into the stock control system. This information was then printed-off automatically as a record of product numbers. Steven suggested that he then entered the stock control system and product

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profile, where all the product numbers of his scanned low-lines were input. For each product, the system displayed on the screen what should have been delivered, what was currently stored in the warehouse and how many products had been sold. He then analysed this information and thought about some of the issues that would arise with forthcoming orders:

> The problems that arise off that is mainly that we've exceeded sales, so therefore it's out of stock. 'Not availables', 'not orderables' and say if we've got two coming in delivery and they didn't come in, then I've got to claim for those as being short-delivered. Or if we've got two cases already in the warehouse and I can't find it anywhere, then I have to do a count on it and then to correct the books up so the system doesn't think we've still got two.
>
> (Steven, clerical)

Through this use of the system, Steven monitored the store's stocks and was required to make decisions concerning the issues that arose. He was required to change information and this was particularly pertinent when a product was 'out of stock'. Under these circumstances, Steven said that he entered the system to view the sales and increased the factors:

> Basically, that just drags more stock in about a day or two later.
>
> (Steven, clerical)

Simon and Jennifer were price check operators and they shared the same back-office space as stock control. Their main roles concerned legalities over the pricing of products and the displaying of point of sale (POS) information within the store:[3]

> and if you're advertising a price, it goes through the system at that price and not at a quid or penny more than what it is because potentially we could be charged £2,000 for every product, so like a box of 48 packets of Polos is £96,000.
>
> (Simon, clerical)

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[3] POS concerned in-store advertising and the legalities of how a product was described.

As with stock control, their jobs necessitated the utilisation of a range of information and communication technologies. By monitoring the information on two computer screens in the back office, Simon and Jennifer's role was to ensure that prices were displayed correctly on the shop-floor. The prices of the products changed automatically within the computer system. However, Simon stated that they were authorised to control and alter the prices of the products going through the checkouts. As an example, Jennifer confirmed that they were involved in 'special offer' price reductions during the day. Here, they were able to introduce a price reduction within the system:

> you can manually override it. Obviously, there's company policies about doing it. We do quite a few systems reductions throughout the day and not just on things like, fruit and vegetables ... we do systems reductions on things like the Deli, the fish counter, the meat counter, we change the prices quite regularly on them throughout the day ... So we do manually override a few things on it. It isn't just looking at it. We do do stuff on it as well.
>
> (Jennifer, clerical)

The price check operators also completed price verification on the shop-floor. In a similar method to stock control (see Steven, 5.3), Simon and Jennifer took a hand-held bar-code reader on to the shop-floor, scanned the products, downloaded the information into the system, a report was printed-off and they then checked the report to ensure that everything was accurate:

> we then check it manually so it's a bit dim I suppose. I suppose it's just a way of capturing the stuff when we download it and then you look at a report which you would then act on manually.
>
> (Jennifer, clerical)

In addition to their aforementioned tasks, Simon and Jennifer were also able to use the system technology for electronic interaction. Jennifer suggested that they checked e-mail 'a few times a day to see what's come down'. She claimed that they had a reasonable amount of e-mail contact with other stores (for example, asking for certain items) but had no contact with the regional office. However, they did contact head office if they had a specific need to speak to a buyer about a particular product. With

each of these contacts, the method of interaction (be that telephone or e-mail) was entirely dependent upon the specific situation.

Also sharing the same office space as stock control and price check were the wages clerks. Barbara, as a wages clerk, undertook a series of tasks (once again, utilising technology), one of which was completing the exceptions report every morning. Here, she stated that she monitored when people clocked-in and adjusted the system to correct the hours that the workers completed. Every Wednesday the store completed registers and each manager provided information for hour changes, worker holidays and leavers. This information was then entered into the system:

> you've got about 350 employees. So we've got different registers for different departments and we have to change, not everybody's hours, it's mainly the checkouts because we've got a lot of staff on there and we have to go into their personal details and change their hours on the computer.
>
> (Barbara, clerical)

Barbara asserted that she was also required to print off wage slips. The wages clerks were regularly besieged by wages queries and in extreme cases, Barbara referred to the senior wages clerk in Cardiff:

> What we do is phone her first and then she'll tell us to put in on the e-mail. Obviously, if she's got to pay some extra money, she's got it there to say that we've actually sent information to her.
>
> (Barbara, clerical)

Barbara asserted that the wages clerks held an additional duty to print reply letters to the people, from outside the store, who had inquired about recruitment. When she received a letter, Barbara said that she searched the computer information archive to ascertain whether the individual had previously applied to the store:

> you take their name out and print another letter off saying 'We still haven't got any vacancies' and then check all the surnames and send one of those other letters saying, 'We haven't got any jobs'.
>
> (Barbara, clerical)

Barbara reported that she was also required to undertake costings to discover how much each department spent per week. The store had a wages budget and on every Saturday, Barbara stated that she had to sign-off for the payroll. The personnel manager then analysed the payroll, observing how much each department had spent and how much overtime had been used.

Outside the office shared by stock control, price check and wages, there were a series of other back-office roles. Lindsey worked in the cash office using a basic form of technology to undertake her tasks:

> it's only a basic, you can't really call it a computer. I don't know what you could call it really. It's just like a little, small keyboard and everything's done for you. You're just putting information into it and it's not very interactive.
>
> (Lindsey, clerical)

Lindsey reported how money and vouchers were taken from the tills and sent in pods, through tubes within the store, to the cash office. Lindsey declared that she then used a counting machine to sort the money and vouchers and then entered the totals into the system. In addition to the above role, Lindsey was required to monitor worker performance at the front-end. She stated that a series of checkout reports were produced over night through the price check system. During the following day, Lindsey investigated these reports and informed the management of any discrepancies:

> we just look through them and if there's anything that looks suspicious then we let somebody know.
>
> (Lindsey, clerical)

Lindsey suggested that she was also responsible for the production of several reports, including an end of day synopsis, a scanned and a non-scanned coupons report and a shorts and overs (to illustrate whether the checkout takings were correct). She stated that she also produced a lift report, which listed everything that she had entered into the system and then, if there was a problem, she was able to look back and see where the error had occurred. Finally, each Monday, an end of week report was collated and sent to head office for storage.

Roy worked in security and monitored the store through the use of nine cameras and a bank of CCTV screens in a small office at the back of the store. In undertaking this monitoring, Roy proclaimed he used a computer system to program camera positions in pre-set events. In an event, Roy set positions and time-lengths for the series of cameras to view the areas of the store:

the manager might come in and say, 'We're having a problem in this area'. So I'll say, 'What about having a camera panning all the time?', or we can set a camera to have five seconds, ten seconds, a minute, a minute on there zoomed in, I'll set a programme up.

(Roy, clerical)

Roy suggested that the apprehension of a shop-lifter inevitably necessitated interaction with the police force. To successfully report a crime, the burglary needed to be caught on film:

So I've got to be able to follow them on camera, zoom in and get them actually concealing the goods and follow them till they actually get to the font-door.

(Roy, clerical)

Sales assistants

In correspondence to Freathy's (1993) assertions around low-skill levels, many sales assistants referred to the simple and repetitive nature of their work. Despite Freathy's (1993) suggestions that there was a low level of demarcation between secondary sector jobs, the sales assistants (like their clerical counterparts) were attached to specific roles within the store and usually completed a limited number of tasks within one area of the store. Nevertheless, it should be appreciated there was some evidence of flexible deployment. Subsidiary evidence appeared to support Freathy's (1993) and Robinson's (1990) suggestions that these multiskilled secondary workers were only trained to a minimum level of competence. However, in contestation to this general pattern, certain sales assistants did require a higher level of skill, and training, to perform their tasks.

Freathy (1993) proclaimed that there was a low level of demarcation between secondary sector jobs. However, as with the clerical workers in the previous sub-

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section, case study evidence suggested that sales assistants did fulfil specific roles within the store. As Table 4.7 illustrated (see Chapter 4), secondary workers were attached to particular departments. However, within these departments, as Freathy (1993) had declared, there were a series of sales assistants, within the case study store, who fulfilled a series of low-skill roles. These workers regularly asserted that their tasks were basic and tedious. For example, Roger worked as a sales assistant in frozen food and he conferred that:

> it's very, very basic. All it is is just loading a trolley up and putting boxes out. Basically, from the moment I get here I just go in the freezer and I load my trolley up and I'm backwards and forwards.
>
> (Roger, sales assistant)

Maggie and Ruth spent the majority of their work-time on the checkouts. Like Roger, they described their tasks as 'limited' (Ruth) and 'simple' (Maggie). Similar trends could be noted amongst the night-shift workers and Mary provided a description of their tasks:

> Well, we pull the cages out at evening, then we fill the shelves, check on price labels, bar coding, make sure everything's all right. Just keep it tidy and clean. It's more like common sense.
>
> (Mary, sales assistant)

Despite these workers' attachment to particular departments and roles, management demands often necessitated a transition to another department. This flexible deployment corresponded with Freathy's (1993) suggestion that workers were often required to fulfil a range of duties across a number of different departments. For example, Roger (who was based in frozen foods, see above) and Farhan, his work colleague in the ambient food department, said that they were sometimes required to fulfil duties within the wines and spirits department. Both declared that they were also regularly called to the front-end to bag-pack. Checkout worker interviewees also suggested that they became involved in bag packing and Maggie' (a checkout worker) stated that she had been deployed to work in the cigarette kiosk:

I've worked on the kiosk a couple of times. It's OK, I enjoy it. But it's like everything else, knowing where everything is, you have to rely on people pointing to where the cigarettes are and with sort of practice it would be all right but it's only every now and again.

(Maggie, sales assistant)

Maggie's recognition of a need for practice tallied with Freathy's (1993) and Robinson's (1990) suggestion that secondary workers were only trained to a minimum level of competence. Farhan referred to his experiences within the price check department and stated, like Maggie, that his training had only covered specific areas of importance:

You know the labels that say how much a product is? If they're not on, then we just go into price check and type the labels out. And also, there's guns. Basically, the guns (hand-held scanners) make it easier for us. If we just walk around, scan all the stuff that's off and check them on the computer. But I haven't been trained for that. I've only been trained for half of that. So I just get the information and give it to price check and stock control.

(Farhan, sales assistant)

Farhan declared that his on-going training had also stretched to the front-end. However, once again, he proffered that he had only been trained for three hours on the checkouts. Joe, on the other hand, was fully checkout-trained. When compared to the majority of sales assistants within the store, Joe suggested that he covered a much broader set of roles:

Working on the checkouts obviously, serving the customers, customer service skills, bag-packing for customers, I do everything really, I'm a 'Jack of all trades'. I work at the garage sometimes, grocery, customer service desk, produce. As I say, I get around and do a bit of everything. I'm not bothered, I like a bit of variation.

(Joe, sales assistant)

Joe's flexible workplace position provided contact with a different set of technologies to those that would have been used in a normal checkout-worker role. He claimed that he

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had used the price verifying, hand-held scanners, that he was aware of how to use the computers in the price check office and that he had been trained to use the photo-machine behind the customer-service desk. Joe had undergone considerable training and had gained a wide knowledge of the store's different working practices. Therefore, in contestation to Freathy's (1993) general assertions, certain sales assistants (including Tina, subsequently) did require a higher level of skill, and training, to perform their tasks. Following Robinson's (1990) suggestion, this training provision increased the differential experiences of secondary employees.

Tina was permanently based at the petrol filling station. The petrol station was located separately from the store and this necessitated a specific approach to stock handling:

> Being remote from the store we have to fetch and carry stock between the store ... We have a little machine ... it's like a little hand-held computer that we scan all the out-of-stocks or all the low stocks onto it and then we take it down to the store, download it onto their main computer down there and it gives off a printed sheet of stock that we need for the day and then two of us go round the store and pick all the stock.
>
> (Tina, sales assistant)

As in the above example, Tina was required to utilise a number of different technologies within her role. In addition to the tills and the 'pay at the pump' credit card system, Tina stated that she was required to check petrol deliveries through the in-garage computer. A system, run by fuel logistics at head office, provided a link between the pumps, the tills and the computer. This system automatically kept track of petrol usage at the garage and re-ordered fuel when stocks were low. Tina monitored this procedure, to check that the petrol was delivered to the correct pumps and to ensure that:

> they're not sending us thirty thousand litres of petrol that we don't need.
>
> (Tina, sales assistant)

Within this monitoring, Tina asserted that she could not change the information within the system. However, this monitoring had sometimes required suitable telephonic action:

There have been odd occasions where there's been a delivery late on in the evening and you can see that there's no way that we're going to have enough room in our tanks to fit it in so you just give them a phone-call and they'll push it back a few hours. They give you a bit longer to sell it.

(Tina, sales assistant)

Tina also occasionally utilised the company's e-mail system. For example:

if you're asking for permission for anything, they like to have a copy of it. You can't just pick the phone up to head office and say, 'We need to get our vans booked in for a service', which I can appreciate.

(Tina, sales assistant)

Here, electronic interaction was used as a 'written form' of confirmation that decisions, undertaken by sales assistants at the garage, were acceptable.

The sales assistants in the petrol station were required to use a series of technologies. As Diane suggested (see Section 5.1, 'department managers'), this utilisation of a range of different technologies required an intense training period. The knowledge that this training provided inevitably placed a considerable level of demarcation between sales assistants, at the petrol station, and some of the generalist shop-floor workers (alluded to earlier within the sub-section). Similarly to the workers at the petrol station, and contesting Freathy's (1993) claims over a lack of secondary sector demarcation, there were also sales assistants within the main store that fulfilled more highly skilled roles. Claire, Sarah and Martin were customer service assistants and they completed a number of tasks, utilising different technologies. First, they were required to deal with refunds and exchanges, where the action was recorded on the till via the selection of an appropriate key. In actioning a response, Claire suggested that:

you just really have to use your own judgement if that's going to be an awkward customer or if the customer's quite happy with just getting a refund.

(Claire, sales assistant)

Secondly, they dealt with customer complaints. Customers were required to either fill-in a customer complaint card (if they required a response) or, alternatively, they could

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proffer an entry to the customer complaints log. If their complaint was vital, they could demand to see a manager. Complaints required an appropriate response from the staff member in question. Essentially, claimed Martin:

> You have to take their word for it, you can't argue with them. I've had a few complaints but I don't argue with them. I had a complaint for yawning once.
>
> (Martin, sales assistant)

Thirdly, they dealt with customer enquiries, including the company banking service. Here, Sarah informed customers of the service and if they were already banking with the company, she was able to provide a limited service. She was not empowered to deal with customer accounts directly but provided cash for withdrawals and accepted customer deposits:

> What we have to do is lets say they come and they say, 'Right, we want to put five hundred pounds in this account'. All we do is take the cash off them, count it in front of them and have a witness, put it in a pod and swipe the card and then you just push it up the chute and that's it.
>
> (Sarah, sales assistant)

Fourth, they controlled the store's photocopying and photoprocessing facilities and were also required to serve at the tobacco kiosk. In addition, the customer service assistants were required to deal effectively with waste and orders on their desk. Returned customer products that could not be re-sold were placed in a waste bin. A hand-held scanner was then used to record these products and the information taken to the price check system for downloading.

Case study evidence in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.4) appeared to support Freathy's contention that the secondary sector was segmented, with different terms and conditions between clerical and sales assistant positions. Building from this descriptive context, the qualitative analysis within this section attempted to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the employment relations of the case. It was discovered that a higher

level of demarcation existed between the clerical jobs. These clerical workers held specific roles within the store and completed a limited number of tasks within one specific area. Many of these roles included decision-making responsibilities and ICTs were integral to these duties. In the completion of their tasks, some of the clerical workers were required to move between the discrete spaces of the shop-floor and the back-offices. Other workers remained in the back-offices and monitored shop-floor activity through their departmental technologies. The sales assistants (like their clerical counterparts) were also attached to specific roles within the store and usually completed a limited number of tasks within one area of the store. In correspondence to Freathy's (1993) assertions around low-skill levels, several of these shop-floor workers referred to the simple and repetitive nature of their work. In addition, outside their specific roles, there was some evidence of flexible deployment. This evidence coincided with Freathy's (1993) suggestion that secondary, shop-floor workers were often required to fulfil a range of duties within a number of different departments. Subsidiary evidence appeared to support Freathy's (1993) suggestion that these multi-skilled secondary workers were only trained to a minimum level of competence. However, certain demarcated sales assistants did require a higher level of skill, and training, to perform their tasks.

5.3   Summary

Freathy's (1993) original application of segmentation to the superstore labour market sought confirmation through interviews with store managers. This chapter presented an attempt to provide a new layer of confirmation through in-depth interviews with staff members across a range of different activities within the store. This additional layer of qualitative analysis has suggested that whilst Freathy's (1993) classificatory framework remains significant, it might be unfair to view this model as an outright explanation for contemporary working practices within the retail superstore.

The concluding summaries to each section provided a synopsis of this analysis. From these summaries, evidence has been collated and is presented below (see Table 5.1). From this evidence, it is now claimed that a reconsideration of the superstore workplace should be attempted around three core issues (dictation, delegation and authority). In conclusion, it is asserted that a detailed analysis (see Chapter 6) of these core issues is required.

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Table 5.1: Three core issues of reconsideration

	Core issues
1	**Dictation** Despite evidence that appeared to suggest that the senior team enjoyed a degree of autonomy, Freathy (1993) declared that the freedom of senior team members had to be viewed through the context of centralised control. More specifically, the store manager asserted that this context of control became manifest as distinct processes of centralised dictation (see Section 5.1, '*Upper-tier: senior managers*').
2	**Delegation** Senior management staff delegated responsibility for each of their line departments to a department manager (see Section 5.1, '*Middle-tier: department managers*'). Despite Freathy's suggestion (1993) that all department manager positions were area-specific, the checkout department managers were delegated additional responsibilities for disparate areas of the store.
3	**Authority** In spite of Freathy's (1993) assertions, it was generally suggested that the supervisors held temporary authority (see Section 5.1, '*Lower-tier: supervisors*') and spent the majority of their work-time completing the tasks of other secondary colleagues (see Section 5.2). Clerical workers held specific roles within the store and completed a limited number of tasks within one specific area that usually included some decision-making authority. In addition, certain demarcated sales assistants (customer service, garage) did require a higher level of skill, training and responsibility to perform their tasks.

6 Conceptual reconsiderations

Given specific case study evidence, in what ways might existing theoretical conceptualisations of the retail superstore workplace be reconsidered?

Building from the concluding summary to the preceding chapter, this further layer of analysis commences from the premise that detailed analysis of dictation, delegation and authority is required because these issues represent the novel aspects of the case. Notwithstanding the obvious strengths of Freathy's (1993) classificatory framework, the chapter's findings suggest two key ways in which existing theoretical conceptualisations of the superstore workplace might be reconsidered.

Section 6.1 proposes a reconsideration through a concentration on power relationships and the blurring of segmentation in the retail superstore. It is suggested that dictation, delegation and authority are a series of power relationships. These relationships, which are in part facilitated by a series of ICTs, represent the exercise of power across the space of the case study superstore. It is insinuated that these power relationships are inherent to the store's working practices. Evidence from across these three power relationships suggests that these working practices encourage a blurring of Freathy's (1993) segmented divides. As a consequence of these working practices, subsidiary evidence highlights a series of workplace tensions and a potential breakdown of worker relations.

Section 6.2 proposes a reconsideration through a concentration on the employees' reinterpretations of superstore working practices. It is suggested that the power relationships of dictation, delegation and authority are reinterpreted within individual worker strategies of resistance and manipulation. Integral to many of these reinterpretations are ICTs. Although deployed by the head office with particular working practices in mind, it is suggested that ICTs are *actually* utilised by the workers within specific strategies of manipulation and resistance.

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6.1 Power relationships and the blurring of segmentation

Dictation

Despite earlier evidence (see Section 5.1) which appeared to suggest that the senior team enjoyed a degree of autonomy, it is suggested within this sub-section that the freedom of senior team members had to be viewed through the context of centralised dictation. It is asserted that through centralised dictation, the store manager fulfilled a specialist role, ensuring that a range of accountabilities for particular measures on the quadrant were passed down to her senior management colleagues. Kate, the store manager, and her senior management team then monitored progress through the quadrant. The majority of this information was collated centrally and transferred electronically to the store. This electronic interaction provided centralised access to the individual store's mainframe information and this, when connected to a structure of work rules, allowed the head office to dictate management practices at the store level. Inevitably, Kate's autonomy had to be viewed within the context of centrally set targets and regional dictation. This regional dictation was also important for other members of the senior team who held the capacity to negotiate above store management level. This negotiation required an effective utilisation (given head office constraints) of specific ICTs.

Following Paul Freathy's (1993) declaration, specific evidence from the preceding chapter (see Section 5.1) suggested that the upper-tier of the primary sector were not subjected to elaborate work rules and were able to enjoy a measure of autonomy within their roles. Kate, as the store manager, insinuated that she held the autonomy to make decisions and she viewed her role as 'absolutely crucial':

> If you've not got a good store manager then all the work that they do in the centre will quickly go down the toilet. Because we'll have a central function that will look at how we're going to market the store, come up with new initiatives, decide your promotions, etcetera, etcetera. But everything is delivered through your store. So if you're not then delivering it, if you've got the wrong person in that job, that could have a disastrous impact on the company.
>
> (Kate, senior manager)

However, as she expounded the importance of the store manager's role, Kate recognised that the head office retained a centralised control over most in-store processes. These sentiments concurred with Freathy's (1993) assertions that upper-tier autonomy had to be viewed within the context of a high degree of centralised control. Moreover, and despite allusions towards autonomy, Kate affirmed that centralised control became manifest as head office dictation over-ruling store management autonomy (see Section 5.1). Through head office dictation, the store manager fulfilled a specialist role within the store, ensuring that each of the measures on the quadrant was satisfied through the workers within the store. In the antecedent chapter (see Section 5.1), Kate stated that she was expected to achieve these measures through the pushing down of accountability onto her other senior team staff. This cascading of accountability provided Kate with the time to concentrate upon a holistic monitoring (through her PC) of in-store processes. To enable this concentration, Kate delegated responsibility for each sector of the quadrant to the other senior staff. Kate reported that her senior management staff remained subordinate through a persistent process of negotiation. Here, Kate monitored senior team performance through the quadrant and held regular manager meetings where she 'drilled down' into specific areas of concern. Like Kate, the other senior managers monitored performance through the quadrant. Vicky declared that she was initially sceptical of the quadrant but was seduced through its benefits:

> I mean, you're very reluctant at first when you're like, 'Oh, you're going to manage the store by a quadrant and lights', and you're thinking, 'God, it's on another planet this'. But it really gets you focused.
>
> (Vicky, senior manager)

However, and as Kate demanded of her senior management associates, Vicky possessed a clear vision of the role that the quadrant held within the measurement of performance and within the management of the store. Moreover, she had begun to appreciate how more elaborate work rules were beginning to be introduced which would necessitate that management activity was led by an interaction with mainframe system information:

> And what we do in the manager's meeting is we have a walk round the quadrant every week and focus on the red lights. And we talk round them and see how

we're going to get them off the red lights. And eventually, everything we do will be driven by the system, the quadrant.

<div align="right">(Vicky, senior manager)</div>

The 'driving' of store-activities required the effective use of performance information and Kate, the store manager, suggested that the quadrant provided a new approach to performance measurement within the store. She proposed that the business was 'evolving' and that the performance measuring, which had formerly concerned only profits, budgets and other quantitative totals, now concerned qualitative values, such as staff morale and customer satisfaction. She asserted that most of the information utilised within the quadrant resource was collated centrally, by the head office, and transferred electronically to the branch-plant store. This process of information collation, and data transfer, relied upon the specialist interaction of the head office. Such head office interaction allowed centralised access to the mainframe information from which the senior management measured performance within the store. Whilst it had been previously suggested that the mainframe technologies, such as the quadrant, assisted performance measurement within the store (see Section 5.1), it should be recognised that the use of ICTs, to measure and display performance, permitted the centralised monitoring of store (and senior management) performance (after Freathy and Sparks, 1994):

> now, when I go for my reviews with my boss, we're not just looking at how much profit we've made, we're looking at how you've got there. So, it's much more balanced and much more difficult because you've got a lot of balls to juggle. It's very difficult to keep that quadrant all on a green.

<div align="right">(Kate, senior manager)</div>

Inevitably, the degree of senior management autonomy, within the case study store, had to be viewed through the constraints of a constant requirement to satisfy head office dictations. The quadrant provided a standard mechanism for centralised performance testing as senior managers, across the organisation, were striving for satisfactory results and green lights:

Customer satisfaction index, so what percentage of customers are satisfied, where we've got outstanding percentages as a store, probably one of the best in the company, at the moment, 90.8% of customers are very satisfied with us and 99.36% are either satisfied or very satisfied.

<div align="right">(Vicky, senior manager)</div>

These percentages, within specific quadrant measures, articulated how Vicky, and the rest of the senior team, viewed her performance as a manager within the store. At a wider level, Vicky acknowledged that these totals were monitored by head office and compared to other stores within the organisation. Concurring with Freathy and Sparks' (1994), the passing of information through system technology (see Section 5.1), allowed the head office more effective control at the store level. The quadrant, and its connected structure of work rules, provided the head office with a higher degree of centralised control than Freathy (1993) intimated. For example, Kate, and her senior management colleagues, had a collection of budgets to meet. These annual budgets were centrally set at the beginning of the year and it was the store manager's responsibility to ensure that these budgets were achieved and a green light, on the quadrant, maintained. Kate stated that these annual budgets were met through the satisfaction of a series of smaller and more regular targets. Here, Kate claimed that she held the autonomy to set her own targets. However, she also declared that re-targeting could only be completed with the agreement of Kate's superior, the regional director:

at the beginning part of the year, we weren't achieving our waste budgets. You've got to come in with that figure at the end of the year, so what I've had to do is re-target to claw back the overspend ... So I've then got the facility to put my own targets in which I've got to agree with my boss.

<div align="right">(Kate, senior manager)</div>

Moreover, other members of the senior management team could also report to a regional function. As Kate demanded, Robin stated that the management of his sector necessitated close negotiation with the store manager. However, Robin was also prepared to communicate and negotiate outside (and above) the store manager's authority. Robin outlined how he was able to negotiate at a regional level to support his authority at the local level:

And also, the PM (personnel manager) reports to a regional personnel function, called the Regional Development manager (Debbie) and so I've sort of in a way got two bosses. My normal boss is Kate but then I do have a link with Debbie as well which nobody else has got outside of the store ... Debbie's the expert resource as well as everything else.

(Robin, senior manager)

Reporting to regional and central functions required the effective utilisation of information and communication channels. Concurring with Tomlinson, Brockbank and Traves (1997) assertions, Robin suggested that e-mail was a 'vital lifeline of information'. However, Robin suggested that networking through the e-mail system was constrained through head office dictation. In consequence, Robin reported that the senior management turned to alternative forms of communication:

They (head office) do encourage it for management trainees but most established managers frown upon it and when you see all the crap that comes down on it you just think, 'Well, that's not how you should use this communication tool'. So now on the phones, if you want to network, you can just pick up the phone and talk to someone. Because you can't really do a lot on e-mail to network anyway, in terms of having a chat or bounce ideas around. It's a fairly cold system so yeah, I'd encourage the use of the phones anyway ... it's nicer to talk to people I always think if you can.

(Robin, senior manager)

Delegation

Against the expectations of Freathy's (1993) segmented framework, it was observed within the last chapter (see Section 5.1) that the delegation of responsibility occurred throughout the hierarchical case study superstore. Within this sub-section, it is proclaimed that the 'pushing down' of accountabilities from senior to department management provided time for an additional range of senior team responsibilities. To avoid an abdication of responsibilities, successful delegation necessitated interaction and regular feedback. However, this interaction was subject to restriction. Such problems were particularly vivid in the case of separate store spaces, such as the petrol

filling station and the security office. The use of ICTs, and consequential restrictions to face to face interaction, helped to increase these problems and sponsor the breakdown of internal store relations, creating feelings of isolation amongst the staff. Moreover, and against Freathy's suggestion (1993) that all department manager positions were area-specific, the additional responsibilities for disparate areas of the store, given to checkout department managers, represented a further substantial constraint upon contact time.

The previous chapter (see Section 5.1) emphasised how the store's senior managers were encouraged to push their sectoral accountabilities down to their department managers. Lucy, a senior manager, said that this policy provided her with the freedom to make higher level decisions for her department:

> To focus on the things that are important in my job rather than you could find that you're down-managing.
>
> (Lucy, senior manager)

Lucy indicated that this cascading of accountabilities provided additional time for a range of managerial responsibilities. Robin agreed but said that this policy had to be used with care:

> I think there's also a big difference between delegation and abdication and if you abdicate responsibilities, then that's no way to manage because you just pass it down and eventually it goes wrong. I think delegation's OK because what you do there is, you don't let go of it completely, you keep a handle on what's happening, you're still there for support if that person needs it.
>
> (Robin, senior manager)

Robin's determination to discover a suitable balance of delegation rested neatly with Bonamy and May's (1997) concentration upon interactivity and the division between autonomy and subordination. Vicky, like Robin, stated that she favoured a system of delegation. Kevin worked as a checkout manager, under the ultimate supervision of Vicky. From Kevin's assertions, it appeared that their working relationship was based upon a form of delegation, which necessitated interaction and regular feedback:

You can make decisions and do things as long as you run it back past Vicky and say, 'Look, we had this problem, this is what I've done'. If she's not happy with it, she'll tell you and you'll not do it again or she'll say, 'Did you think about doing it this way?'

<div align="right">(Kevin, department manager)</div>

However, Diane reported that this form of delegation was subject to restriction. Through the example of her department management of the petrol station, Diane suggested that there was limited interaction between the senior managers and the staff members:

We never see management up at the petrol station and when they do come they pay at the pump which really gets the staff's back up because they try hard. You know, they do all the objectives that I set them and there's nobody really there to praise what they're doing. And I don't think it's nice when a store manager comes and pays at the pump rather than going and seeing the staff. They don't see them from one week to the next.

<div align="right">(Diane, department manager)</div>

This lack of interaction from the senior management appeared to be reflected in the approach of the store's middle-tier. Kevin, as a department manager, said that he restricted face-to-face interaction with the petrol station staff:

by the time you've got up to the garage to come back down, you've wasted ten or fifteen minutes if you've walked. At least ten minutes if you go out in the car and then drive up, talk to them and then you come back down. So it's generally a phone-call to the garage ... it is a big effort to go up and speak to them

<div align="right">(Kevin, department manager)</div>

Diane inevitably suggested that spatial separation, and the strategies that were adopted to communicate between the garage and the main store, resulted in experiences of isolation:

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I feel alone. I feel isolated up there and so do the staff because everything that goes wrong, it's our fault. They don't feel part of the store at all. It's really difficult for them up there ... The morale up there is just low.

(Diane, department manager)

In support of these claims, Tina concurred with Diane and drew attention to the isolated aspect of petrol filling station work:

We tend to be very isolated up here. A lot of the people in the store don't see us as part of the store. We're like a little unit out on our own as far as everybody else is concerned. Like this little held-hand computer (bar-code reader), we very often have problems getting hold of one down there because they won't see it that we need one to work as much as they do and there's about six of them down there and we have difficulty getting hold of one ... We're out of sight up here and I think it's so easy for them to see their job as more important than ours ... It's almost like we could be twenty miles away instead of just a few hundred yards up the road.

(Tina, sales assistant)

With regards to this isolation, however, Kevin believed that the petrol station staff held at least partial responsibility. He suggested that a breakdown in negotiations could be identified:

the garage staff think they should just be able to come and get what they want and they don't appreciate what goes off in the store. I would say that a little bit of it is that people in the store don't appreciate what goes off at the garage but most of the time, it's the appreciation of each others jobs that causes the problem.

(Kevin, department manager)

This relational breakdown was supported by communicative technologies. In an attempt to avoid direct contact with the stock control department, Diane stated that she used the telephone to make requests for e-mail communications:

So if I'm up there [in the garage], I just ring them up and say, 'Can you e-mail so and so and tell them so and so', and they'll do it for me because I don't like going in there ... Because the petrol station and stock control don't get on at all.

(Diane, department manager)

Essentially, Diane's management of the petrol station necessitated a careful approach to the breakdown of internal store relations. Diane indicated that this required considerable effort. Moreover, and as was identified in the previous chapter (see Section 5.1), department managers were usually delegated additional responsibilities for disparate areas of the store. Given the aforementioned concerns surrounding the management of the petrol station, Diane declared that this range of accountabilities represented a substantial constraint:

I think, to tell you the truth, if they'd just give me the petrol station, park and ride and security, I'd be all right. It's just the fact that I've got to come down and do the checkouts as well. It's just too much. It's definitely too much ... I've got four departments and I've got twenty in the petrol station, I've got two company guards but we've got contract guards as well that I have to look after, we've got the park and ride which is four staff. So you've got somewhere like stock control who's got one department manager and eight staff and me who's got four departments and like thirty-odd staff, it's just too much.

(Diane, department manager)

Roy worked in security and was immediately answerable to Diane. He suggested that he felt isolated within his separate office space. To compound this isolation, Roy concurred with Diane and declared that the managerial arrangement for security was unsatisfactory:

Personally I don't think it's very good. Not because of anything against her but I think that she's away from us. I think that there should be a manager who comes in and sees us everyday and says, 'Have you anything to report? Is everything OK?' But we don't. We don't get anybody. Week in, week out, nobody comes to see how we're going on ... They haven't had time for us and we've just been left to our own devices out here and it's OK, I don't mind. I just get a little bit

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fed up that they come and start laying the law down and you think, 'Well, it would be better if you'd come more readily'.

<div align="right">(Roy, clerical)</div>

Further examples also suggested that a cascading of accountabilities to the department management team problematised the amount of contact they were able to provide for their disparate responsibilities. Kevin, as well as being a checkout manager, held accountability for the price-check department:

> You can spend a full day just running round, picking up little bits and bobs from all areas ... So when it's quiet, you'll get off and you'll think, 'Right, I'll have ten minutes here and I'll see how they're doing there', and you're constantly moving round in a circle all day saying, 'Right, how are you getting on with this? Right, you've sorted that, what about this?'.

<div align="right">(Kevin, department manager)</div>

As a checkout manager, Kevin held a specific responsibility for the front-end and this necessitated fulfilling the work of a duty manager during his shift-time. To maintain authority in the price check department, Kevin had to engage a specific strategy:

> But if I'm on duty down at the front, I get my chaps to come and find me, rather than waiting for me to find them because I might not get time. With price check it's, 'Come and find me and I'll see what we can sort out'.

<div align="right">(Kevin, department manager)</div>

As a department manager, Kevin (and his colleague Diane) held defined duties within the store. However, Freathy (1993) suggested that these duties would be 'highly' defined and that department managers would work to a formal set of procedures. From Kevin and Diane's assertions, it appeared that their split departmental duties problematised their role definition. In a more ideal scenario, Kevin suggested that he would dedicate his work-time equally between the specific work-spaces under his authority:

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If I could cut my hours down and do eighteen hours down at the front-end, eighteen and a half with price check, it would be brilliant but you can't always guarantee that. You do need, I would say, to spend at least half my time in there but some of the time, I don't seem to spend more than a couple of hours a week in there.

(Kevin, department manager)

Authority

The aforementioned disparate responsibilities of checkout department managers placed severe constraints upon their contact time. As a coping strategy, supervisors were empowered to 'act' as department managers (see Section 5.1). Therefore, and against Freathy's (1993) adaptation of segmentation theory, supervisory authority was temporary and these lower tier primary sector employees spent the majority of their time fulfilling secondary sector tasks within their department. It is suggested within this sub-section that supervisors encountered a number of problems as they attempted to negotiate temporary authority through the secondary workers within their departments. This temporary authority also obligated a willingness to abandon their tasks and responsibilities at the command of the returning department manager. In addition to these supervisory concerns, the broad responsibilities of the checkout department managers necessitated a reduction in direct interaction with clerical workers under their authority. As a consequence, it is asserted that several secondary sector, clerical workers assumed the burden of (unrewarded) decision making authority. It is also suggested that clerical work was complicated through the added demands of information manipulation. Some of the back-office systems required almost constant interaction and decisions had to be made and errors avoided, often without the interaction of a department manager. It is suggested that these experiences highlighted, in most cases, the division between clerical and sales floor staff. However, it is recognised that certain sales assistants did require a higher level of skill and training to perform their tasks.

As was identified in the preceding sub-section (see *'Delegation'*), the disparate responsibilities of checkout department managers placed severe constraints upon their time. For example, Kevin suggested that front-end responsibilities were a specific bind for a department manager who was simultaneously attempting to fulfil a series of responsibilities. In an attempt to form one particular coping strategy, Kevin stated that

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supervisors were empowered to 'act' as department managers (see Section 5.1). In the result of a department manager being called to another area, Nicola (a supervisor at the front-end) was given the authority to control checkout procedures. Unlike Freathy's (1993) assertion, supervisory authority within the store was temporary and most supervisors spent the majority of their time performing the tasks of other secondary individuals within their departments. Nicola, a supervisor within the store, suggested that she encountered a number of complications when she attempted to negotiate her (temporary) authority through the secondary workers of the front-end:

> I can't tell people to do things, I actually have to ask them and if they don't do it then I do it myself or ask somebody else to do it that will do it. Really I should be saying something like, 'Have you got a problem with that?' But I don't. I just sort of cower away and think, 'Oh, I'll get somebody else to do it', or I'll do it myself. It's really awful. And you get so frustrated sometimes, you know, 'I've only asked you to do it. I've not told you to do it, or ordered you to do it, I've asked you to'.
>
> (Nicola, supervisor)

Chris was also employed as a supervisor and he stated that he often had recourse to engage with the stock control assistants within his department. He asserted that his strategy of questioning had met with a varying response. Like Nicola, Chris proclaimed that he had been uncomfortable in undertaking this questioning. However, a gradual recognition of his authority had sponsored firmer interaction:

> They're getting used to it. But it's only slowly. I mean, I'm only just slowly getting into it. Before I used to find out what they were doing and not say much. I had a particular problem with one of the members of staff who would always swear at me and stuff like that. Which wasn't very good. But slowly, I'm getting round. Because theoretically, I am in charge of him so I need to make sure that he's doing his job or it's going to cause problems for me.
>
> (Chris, supervisor)

The negotiation of temporary authority also necessitated a flexible approach to the completion of tasks. Shelly stated that supervisors were regularly obligated to abandon

their work, within one department, to perform tasks within another area of the store. Shelly said that these transitions were frustrating:

> I get a little bit ratty when I'm pulled away, you know, or sort of getting my teeth into something
>
> (Shelly, supervisor)

Nicola also asserted that she was required to end work at the command of department managers. She insinuated that a lack of negotiation caused particular problems:

> Other managers, they can come down and take over and you think ... 'I've worked that out all morning and I've got it into a system now', but they didn't even bother to ask. They just don't ask anything.
>
> (Nicola, supervisor)

Nicola concluded that the actions of the returning department managers created problems for the supervisory team. Alongside the problems of supervisors, the aforementioned broad responsibilities of the majority of department managers (see Section 5.1) also created subsidiary concerns. It was suggested in the preceding chapter (see Section 5.2) that clerical workers within the store were regularly required to fulfil decision making responsibilities. This obligation was regularly compounded by a lack of direct interaction with the departmental manager. Inevitably, many secondary, clerical workers suggested that they were given the burden of unrewarded authority. For example, the back-office staff within the price check department referred to their lack of contact with Kevin, their department manager (see the preceding sub-section, *'Delegation'*):

> Basically we never see him because he's so busy down at the front-end. We see him for about two minutes a week which is all right because we all get on with our jobs but it does mean that we tend to make decisions that we're not actually paid to make to an extent. So we're doing things that normally our old manager would have done, or would have made the decision for, and we've taken the role onboard but obviously we're not getting paid
>
> (Jennifer, clerical)

Jennifer said that their influence over decision-making stretched to the organisation of their working-day:

> I mean basically we can make our own decisions and can even make our own decisions more or less about what hours we're all going to work which a lot of other people in the store don't. We sit down and plan our own hours and share them out. And we always go for our lunches and our breaks when we want whereas a lot of other people down at the checkout, they're told, whereas we make those decisions, 'Right, we'll go for a cup of tea now or whatever'.
>
> (Jennifer, clerical)

It was also suggested in the previous chapter (see Section 5.2) that, unlike their shop-floor counterparts, the superstore's back-office workers held certain authorities to manipulate information. However, this manipulation required an almost constant interaction with the store's computer systems. Towards this end, Simon stated that the price check operators were repeatedly required to work long hours:

> We always have to be here before the store opens and after we close, just to like get the system up and running and then close it down at night.
>
> (Simon, clerical)

In addition, Jennifer asserted that the company demanded, not only long, but flexible hours of work from its price check operators:

> My hours of work are a complete jumble I suppose. Like today I'm going to be finishing at half ten and I'm going to be back here for six tomorrow morning which is going to be four hours of sleep or whatever. And also we do a couple of night-shifts as well, because it's the promotion change, like one of my colleagues is doing nights. So we can do two night-shifts a week, two six o'clock starts and it's just a complete nightmare.
>
> (Jennifer, clerical)

Simon concurred and elaborated upon the restrictions that this practice placed upon his personal social time:

> Quite often it seems like you do nothing but go home, go to work, get up, go to work, that's all it ever seems to be. Just a continuous ritual.
>
> (Simon, clerical)

Similar demands were placed upon the store's stock control workers. As with the price check employees, and as was identified in the preceding chapter (see Section 5.2), stock control procedures included decision-making responsibilities and each of these roles required the utilisation of information and communication technology. Sayer and Walker (1992) had concluded that computerised stock control systems allowed a tighter rein between sales and orders. However, Chris suggested that the computers exhibited an inability to understand local and variable trading conditions, which inevitably complicated worker/technology interactions within the stock control department:

> But there are certain things the computer can't understand, like it's someone's birthday or the weather. You know, the weather's a drastic one isn't it, the computer just doesn't understand that. And it causes problems, particularly on fresh foods, it's very hard. It makes my job very complicated.
>
> (Chris, supervisor)[1]

Moreover, despite the automation of the process, humans were an inherent element of the stock control network. As was identified in the previous chapter (see Section 5.2), the various workers within the stock control department were required to monitor and then change the system information. Inevitably, human error could also be vital:

> You can't really blame the technology can you? The computer only does what you tell it to do. So it's our fault to an extent because we're giving the computer all the information really
>
> (Chris, supervisor)[2]

The network necessitated human interaction and errors, once entered and sent across space, would (usually) be processed:

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[1] Although a supervisor, it should be remembered that Chris (like all supervisors) spent the majority of his work-time fulfilling the responsibilities of secondary workers within his department. It was with reference to this context that Chris declared the following information.

[2] As above.

we have to confirm and once it's confirmed, that's it ... it's very rare that they question anything like that that you send. The only thing that springs to mind that they've questioned was a fresh food one.

(Fiona, department manager)

Chris outlined this example in more detail:

We order flour for the bakery and we accidentally scanned in the wrong product. What we were after was sixteen bags of flour. Pamela scanned them in and scanned in the wrong product where she asked for thirty-six pallets of flour and this was after twenty-four hours and none of us realised what was going on and after twenty four hours of ordering, we got a phone-call from the depot saying, 'Do you want thirty-six pallets of flour'. Because that's like six lorry loads (laughs). And it was like, 'Shit!'. We almost got six lorry loads of flour through human error.

(Chris, supervisor)[3]

The risk of processing an error placed a considerable degree of pressure and responsibility on the store's stock control workers. The requirement to fulfil these responsibilities, often without the interaction of a department manager, highlighted Freathy's (1993) reported division between the experiences of the clerical and the sales staff. In supporting such a dichotomy (Sparks, 1992), it was suggested in the previous chapter (see Section 5.2) that, unlike their clerical counterparts, the superstore's sales assistants did not hold the authority to manipulate information. However, it was identified in the previous chapter (see Section 5.2) that certain demarcated sales assistants (customer service, petrol filling station) did require a higher level of skill, and training, to perform their tasks. Claire declared that checkout work drove her 'crazy' but asserted that the customer service assistant completed a diverse range of tasks (see Section 5.2):

It's a bit more varied. Well it's just that you're never bored on that job because there's always something to do. If you're not serving customers, you're doing

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[3] As above.

photographs or there's basically something to do. There's the waste to do as well and taking returns back or something. But you're never just sat there. Basically on the till, if you haven't got a customer to serve, you're sat there with nothing to do and that's all there is to it.

(Claire, sales assistant)

However, Martin asserted that he was not seduced by the extra remuneration that these additional responsibilities provided:

it's not worth it for the hassle. I think it's something like twenty pence extra an hour. But there's like two of us down there at the moment and it's just like keeping photos going, taking orders for photos, then we've got to do customer service and tobacco as well and there's only two of us. That's not to count all the stock that needs to go on the shelves that people have brought for refunds. No chance. For twenty pence extra I'd rather be sat on a till. You don't get any hassle on there.

(Martin, sales assistant)

In summary, evidence from across the three power relationships suggested that the superstore's working practices encouraged a blurring of segmentation and sponsored a potential breakdown of worker relations. To some extent, this blurring problematised Freathy's (1993) model of segmentation and represented a challenge to his existing theoretical framework. In reference to dictation, it was suggested that the correspondence of the senior management to an upper-tier of a primary sector was limited by the head office's use of ICTs to constantly monitor management performance. Consequent head office dictations resulted in defined work rules which placed severe constraints upon management autonomy. Secondly, it was observed that, against Freathy's (1993) perceived framework, the delegation of responsibility occurred throughout the superstore. To avoid an abdication of responsibility, it was stressed that successful delegation necessitated interaction. However, it was suggested that this interaction was subject to restriction through: exclusion within separate store spaces; the use of ICTs to restrict face to face interaction; and the disparate responsibilities given to

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checkout department managers which represented a substantial constraint upon contact time. Finally, and against Freathy's (1993) adaptation of segmentation theory, it was asserted that supervisory authority was temporary. The supervisors encountered a number of problems as they attempted to negotiate temporary control. In addition, the broad responsibilities of the checkout department managers meant that clerical workers regularly assumed the weight of decision making authority. It was also suggested that clerical work was complicated through the added demands of information manipulation. Moreover, it is suggested that the working practices associated to the power relationships of dictation, delegation and authority were reinterpreted within individual worker strategies. The following section refers to these strategies of manipulation and resistance and details supportive evidence.

6.2   Reinterpretations

Manipulation

Section 6.1 suggested that the autonomy of the store's senior management had to be viewed within the context of a high degree of centralised dictation. This was partly achieved through the utilisation of ICTs, such as the quadrant, that were used to measure performance but which could also be used to allow the centralised monitoring of store activity. However, it is suggested within this sub-section that the more subjective elements of the quadrant's system of performance monitoring relied upon the honesty of the senior management team. Therefore, a store manager held the capacity to 'cheat the system' to allow for a more favourable reading of their personal achievements. It is also observed that the potential for the unauthorised manipulation of information was not confined to the primary sector. ICTs were inherent to the majority of secondary sector clerical workers tasks and it was suggested (see Section 6.1) that the price check workers were conceded authority (Allen, 1997) above and beyond Freathy's (1993) expectations for a secondary worker. Evidence within this sub-section suggests that this authority then provided the potential for the unauthorised manipulation of system information.

In line with Freathy and Sparks (1994) suggestions, it was illustrated in the previous chapter (see Section 5.1) that the store manager, Kate, was able to draw upon system information to measure, monitor and control the store's performance. Within the store, Kate suggested that the quadrant drove management activity. The quadrant

indicated store performance via a series of lights and, after interacting in unison, the senior management team engaged particular responses. In the previous section (see Section 6.1), it was suggested that the autonomous conditions of the upper tier of the primary sector had to be viewed through the context of a high level of centralised dictation. Whilst it had been previously suggested (see Section 5.1) that the mainframe technologies, such as the quadrant, assisted performance measurement within the store, it should be recognised that the use of ICTs also permitted the centralised monitoring of store (and senior management) performance. This centralised monitoring limited senior management autonomy and an associated system of management rules were viewed as a challenge to the expectations of Freathy's (1993) retail segmentation theory. However, this breakdown of upper-tier autonomy, via the monitoring of management performance through ICTs, provided the management team with the opportunity to manipulate quadrant performance. Echoing Graham's (1998) sentiments, this potential for manipulation highlighted some of the difficulties experienced by the company head office attempting to achieve social ordering 'at a distance' through the use of a complex array of technological artefacts. The quadrant indicated performance across a wide range of store-based variables; these ranged from profit and turnover to staff morale and customer satisfaction. The information within each of these measures was produced through many different contexts and Kate questioned the potential bias of some of these measures:

> With your financial ones and your operations, there's no arguing about it. But I do think there's still a certain amount of subjectivity in some of the measures that we use.
>
> (Kate, senior manager)

To clarify her claims, Kate highlighted the apparent subjectivity of the customer satisfaction index. In highlighting this subjectivity, Kate began to draw attention to the potential for information manipulation. The store manager, aware that their performance was being monitored through specific quadrant measures, held the capacity to influence the results:

> as a store manager, you could fudge your figures with some of the measures. So for example, with the customer satisfaction index, we survey our customers and

... if you think about human nature, are you going to approach a customer that's looking as grumpy as hell and ask them for some research? You're probably not.

(Kate, senior manager)

Such manipulation biased the information used within the quadrant. From Kate's examples, it appeared that the potential for manipulation was great. Below, Kate proffered an additional strategy which could be enacted by a store manager attempting to cheat the system:

Your development index is based on how many reviews you've done which is measured from a plan you've got in-store. Now I have got a plan and I know how many reviews we've said that we're going to do each period and if we don't do them, we're really honest about it. But no-one's going to really come and check-up on that. So if I wanted to, I could say, 'Oh, I've not achieved twenty this period, I'll just slot them in the next one and say that I've achieved them all and give myself a figure of 100%'. So you can do that. And then there are issues about, well OK, you've done the numbers but what about the quality of that review? What about the quality of the training that's been carried out?

(Kate, senior manager)

Therefore, the more subjective elements of the quadrant's system of performance monitoring relied upon the honesty of the senior management team. Moreover, in the concluding remarks of this statement, Kate raised a series of quality concerns. She stated that the quadrant did not concentrate upon quality (only quantity) and, therefore, the depth of information was limited. However, and despite these concerns, the quadrant remained as both the informational centre of management activity and the indicator through which central office monitored management performance.

The unauthorised manipulation of system information was not confined to the primary sector. As Penn (1995) described, and as was observed in the preceding chapter, technology was inherent within a range of departmental activities. The secondary sector, clerical workers within the price check department (see Section 5.2) utilised a series of ICTs. In addition, it was suggested in the previous section (see Section 6.1) that these price check workers were conceded authorities above and beyond

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Freathy's (1993) expectations for a secondary worker. Evidence from the price check department suggested that this authority provided the potential for the unauthorised manipulation of (management interaction and) system information. With reference to the technology used within the price check department, the department manager Kevin declared succinctly:

> They walk out with the bar-code scanner, find the bar-code on the product, punch in the price it's displaying and once they've finished the section, come back, download that information into our system and it tells them if it's right, wrong or anything like that.
>
> (Kevin, department manager)

As had been illustrated in the previous chapter (see Section 5.2), the price check department's workers' interaction with the system, and the check for illegal pricing errors, formed an integral element of the price check department's work:

> We nearly had one yesterday, when someone had put something up for raspberries saying '33% extra free' and we didn't actually have any 33% extra free pack sales, so in that case we are illegal on it, because we're saying 33% extra free and there isn't.
>
> (Jennifer, clerical)

However, Simon suggested that the significance of pricing errors provided an opportunity to manipulate his interaction with the store management. By persuading the management that he was involved in pricing activities, Simon claimed that he was able to engage a strategy of work avoidance:

> if the manager says, 'Can you do this?', and I say, whatever they ask me, 'I've got legal responsibilities', they just walk away, nine times out of ten they do. So we can sort of pull the wool over some manager's eyes
>
> (Simon, clerical)

More generally, Simon suggested that the price check team negotiated problems in unity and attempted to resist criticism through a manipulation of the situation:

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If we make a cock-up, which we do from time to time, we always try and cover each other's back, well most of us do anyway, there's one really that doesn't want to. It's not just a case of playing the game or playing with everybody else, it's 'we're a team, we're a department, if we mess up, fair enough'. But we should all look out for each other.

(Simon, clerical)

Simon said that the price check operators also attempted to avoid criticism by passing blame to their departmental technology:

But sometimes, like now, we blame the computer. You know, 'I don't understand why it's there'. It's a useful get out clause.

(Simon, clerical)

Finally, Simon conferred that he had used his knowledge of the price check system in a more surreptitious manner. The following story details how Simon used his knowledge to manipulate the system for personal gain:

So, in a shop like this, you can take them to the cleaners. You really can. I mean, I actually did it with one in Great Yarmouth. You know, the big model cars, they'd been on offer down to £9.99 from fourteen quid or whatever they were. So me and the Mrs went round and thought, 'Oh, I'm sure they'd gone back up. I know they've gone up.' But there was no price on there. So I had a look through, found one I liked, which was a Jaguar XJ220, and behind it was an old piece of POS that was four months old, from the summertime. So I thought, 'Sod this', stuck it back on the shelf, went through, paid my money for it, they didn't have a customer service desk as such, so I went and queried it down with one of the supervisors down at their checkouts and said, 'I've been over-charged here'. And he said, 'Oh, that's double the difference what we've over-charged you', which was about five pounds. And I said, 'Oh, that's all right'. And then he came back and he'd fiddled about with his till and I said, 'But isn't it company policy that you get a full refund and the product for nothing'. And he said, 'I'll just go and get my supervisor'. And he came down and they looked and it was,

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'Oh yeah', and they gave me my money back and I got my car for nothing. And I'm quite happy to take another store, but I wouldn't do it with this one, because it makes their figures look bad and their price check department because we have performance things that come out as well.

<div align="right">(Simon, clerical)</div>

Resistance

Supervisors fulfilled management responsibilities in the department manager's absence and, against Freathy's (1993) adaptation of segmentation theory, were required to complete the tasks of a secondary worker at other times (see Section 5.1). Breaking down broad segmented divisions in this manner provided the store with a flexible and cheap response to department manager absence. However, and despite receiving no extra remuneration for their responsibilities, it is suggested within this sub-section that workers were prepared to fulfil supervisory roles. Undertaking the supervisory role was viewed by workers as a method for resisting boredom and as a procedure for illustrating an eagerness to progress within the company. Freathy (1993) suggested that secondary workers, in particular sales assistants, regularly held no strict definition of job title and were trained to a minimum level of competence. However, evidence from within the store suggested that training, task rotation and an inclusion within 'projects' were made available to secondary workers. Rather than opting for 'progression' to a supervisory role, several sales assistants suggested that training provided a method for resisting tedium. However, other workers concentrated upon the lack of interaction within their work. Against the perceptions of Freathy's (1993) adaptation of segmentation theory, some secondary workers were required to perform specific functions within exclusive spaces. From this enforced isolation, workers suggested that they formed particular strategies of work resistance.

As was alluded to in the antecedent section (see Section 6.1), supervisors fulfilled management responsibilities in the department manager's absence. Unlike the propositions of Freathy's (1993) adaptation of segmentation theory, the supervisors ordinarily performed the tasks of many of the store's secondary workers (see Section 5.1). These workers received no extra remuneration and blurring segmented divides in this way allowed an economical response to department manager absence. Claire, a customer service assistant, was aware of these payment anomalies:

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I think that the pay scales around here are so varied but that they've got a really weird way of sorting everything out. Say just like the supervisors on checkouts, just for instance today, there's been no manager down there because they've all been in meetings and there's always supposed to be a manager on the shop-floor and there hasn't been. So the supervisor's been there, acting as manager, yet they're only on the same pay as the people on the checkouts which are on less than us on customer service, they're on about £4.50 an hour. Yet they're acting as a manager.

<div align="right">(Claire, sales assistant)</div>

Under such circumstances, it was easy to see how supervisors, like Chris, were frustrated:

It's very low for the stress you are under. It just doesn't seem worth it.

<div align="right">(Chris, supervisor)</div>

However, Chris believed that his willingness to accept extra supervisory accountabilities would persuade the head office that he held a willingness to progress. These beliefs correlated with Freathy's (1993) proposition that movement into a supervisory position was viewed as the traditional promotional path for the shop-floor staff. Tina concurred and, having asserted that working as a general assistant could 'get a bit stale', she stated that she would have appreciated the opportunity to move into a supervisory position:

They're having a meeting sometime next week here, something to do with promotion, anybody who's interested in going for promotion. The company like you to go through several courses and they also like you to be multi-skilled which means you've basically got to be able to do every job in the store before they consider you for promotion.

<div align="right">(Tina, sales assistant)</div>

Joe also said that undertaking supervisory responsibilities was appealing:

There's no more responsibility and there's no more pay but some people don't mind doing it because it's quite a good step up in their career if they want to become a department manager eventually or anything.

(Joe, sales assistant)

Joe was not a supervisor and was employed as a general assistant at the front-end. However (and despite being contracted for the checkouts), Joe said that he completed a range of tasks across different departments within the store (see Section 5.2) and, across these tasks, Joe suggested that he was frequently used in a supervisory capacity:

I'm not actually a supervisor and I'm not classed as a supervisor but they know I've got quite a lot of experience compared to a lot of people who work here. So they know they can trust me because I've done it all before. They can give me the CB radio and the bleeper and ask me to supervise and give them change and whatever and they can get off and they can leave me in charge of the checkouts because I know what I'm doing.

(Joe, sales assistant)

In undertaking this role, Joe was effectively seduced into performing the tasks of a supervisor, without an official recognition of his position. However, Joe implied that he was happy to fulfil this role as part of a personal coping strategy:

I know you've got much more responsibility on your shoulders but it's basically more interesting than sitting on a checkout all day. You get to do different things and you've got that element of trust really as well.

(Joe, sales assistant)

Similarly to Joe, Shelly fulfilled a series of roles within the store. As was identified in the previous chapter, Shelly was a supervisor but was employed as 'the little errand girl' (see Section 5.1). She stated that she found it annoying that she was often 'pulled in all directions'. However, she asserted that her frustration was tempered by enjoyment:

I think I'm very lucky actually although I do get a bit frustrated at times. But I would get bored to tears sat on a checkout for thirty-six and a half hours.

(Shelly, supervisor)

Freathy (1993) suggested that supervisory work tended to be repetitious. Whilst this might hold true in a comparison with a senior team position, Joe and Shelly's suggestions illustrated that the specific individual context had to be considered. Both workers viewed their particular positions (and the role of a supervisor) as fulfilling. Neither referred to their work as repetitive and both suggested that the supervisory role provided job-interest in comparison to checkout work. Sparks (1992) affirmed that the majority of work on the shop-floor was repetitive and, as was identified in the previous chapter (see Section 5.2), shop-floor workers within the store often viewed their tasks as 'basic' or 'limited'. Joe and Tina (see above) asserted that movement into a supervisory role provided one possible strategy of resistance. However, other workers exhibited little interest in this transition. Nick asserted that he was not seduced by the opportunities of the financially-unrewarded authority of a supervisory position:

I don't want to be a Muppet. You don't get no more pay, you don't get no thanks for it. So I'll just stick as I am ... If you got more money for it, yeah. But you don't. At the end of the day, you're taking the manager's role off them but you don't get no thanks for it, you don't get no more money for it, so what's the point? So I'll leave it to them. They get paid for it. It's good for them.

(Nick, sales assistant)

Freathy's (1993) adaptation of segmentation theory suggested that secondary sector superstore workers, like Nick, regularly held no strict definition of job title and were expected to undertake a range of duties, and to be flexibly deployed, in response to changes in customer flow. Sales assistants in particular were seen to work under conditions which Freathy (1993) viewed as characteristic of the secondary sector, with a low level of skill and training, where the priority was to ensure that workers reached a minimum level of competence. Nevertheless, evidence from the previous chapter (see Section 5.2) suggested that this view of segmentation became contested within the confines of the case study store. More specifically, Robin, a senior manager, said that

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training, task rotation and an inclusion within 'projects' were provided for secondary workers within the store:

> I think most of our staff, given half the chance, will spend all day every day doing training because it's time out of their day job. And with the best will in the world, when you do the same job day-in, day-out for years, it can get a bit tedious ... Although there's things we can do to try and shake that up, such as putting training in there but also moving the jobs and rotating tasks, changing management style and getting them involved in little projects and meetings and things that are happening around the store as well ... We try and get them, if they want to, to try and do as much up and above their job role as they sit fit.
>
> (Robin, senior manager)

Concurring with Robin's comments, several interviewees suggested that 'progression' to a supervisory role was not the only method through which secondary workers attempted to resist boredom. Farhan worked as a general assistant on the shop-floor. With regards to the functions that he undertook within the store, Farhan declared that:

> I haven't got that many responsibilities basically. Like I say, the main thing is just putting stuff on the shelves and keeping it tidy. That's really all we've got to do. That's why I really want to get trained for other things. It does get a bit boring doing the same work all the time so that's why I want to get trained for other things as well and move around a bit.
>
> (Farhan, sales assistant)

As a general assistant with responsibility for the restocking of shelves within the ambient food areas on the shop-floor, Farhan was keen to become multi-skilled within other areas of the store. He looked on with envy at the computer utilisation within the back-office:

> Everything basically happens in there, price check, wages, all the stock control, everything. So, it would be really good to get into that office.
>
> (Farhan, sales assistant)

Rather than seeing this multi-skilling as a preparatory stage for a transition to a supervisor position (see Joe above), Farhan revealed his motives as a strategy to resist tedium. Karen worked as a general assistant filling shelves on the night-team and, like Farhan, she conferred that she would have appreciated the opportunity to utilise in-store technology:

> I have actually got my name down for training to do price check, which could be very difficult, seeing as we're a bit tight on staff and what have you. 'Cause it would mean me having to do the training on days. They do want someone qualified on nights for when they do the stock changing at promotion ends and things like that but when it'll happen, I don't know.
>
> (Karen, sales assistant)

Similarly to Farhan, Karen also believed that this utilisation would help resist boredom:

> I'm very interested in finding out why we get certain products, where it comes from, how we get it, that kind of thing ... I just want to know why really. I'm not happy with just receiving the stuff. I want to know why I've got it ... so I don't get bored, I suppose. It's a case of I like to keep my mind occupied and learning something new is one way of doing it really.
>
> (Karen, sales assistant)

However, other workers concentrated upon the lack of interaction within their work. Rather than proffer a desire to train within other areas of the store, a number of secondary workers asserted that they completed their tasks in isolation from the main shop-floor space. Against the perceptions of accepted segmentation theory, some secondary sector superstore workers (both clerical and sales assistants on the shop-floor) performed particular functions in exclusive spaces. Many of these workers proclaimed that this enforced isolation allowed the formation of strategies of resistance. For example, Jennifer stated that working within the back-office provided a clear distance from the shop-floor space:

> You're away from the customers, so it's more peaceful in that sense because people who work on the shop-floor would say that they're always being bothered

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by customers ... I mean, Christmas is a nightmare for everyone else but it doesn't really affect our line at all, we don't get any busier, there's absolutely no impact on us really at Christmas, whereas everyone else would go on and on about Christmas.

(Jennifer, clerical)

As with Jennifer, Chris completed his tasks within the back-offices of the store. He asserted that the utilisation of back-office technology, which was essential in the completion of his tasks, provided him with a considerable level of on-the-job autonomy:

I can come in and doss for six hours, work for two hours and then go home ... Because there's a lot of freedom in my job. The system takes care of most of it and then really we're only there for the last twenty percent and if it's not done, it's not done and you won't get caught.

(Chris, supervisor)

Other workers implied that they also benefited from the exclusivity of their work-space. Roger, whose work concentrated upon frozen food, asserted that the isolation of his space provided a distance from the management gaze:

they leave me alone because it's minus twenty-four in the freezer and it's surprising what a barrier that puts up. You can really hide from people in minus twenty-four situations.

(Roger, sales assistant)

Nick, who worked within the warehouse, made similar comments and stated that the isolation of his work area provided a personal resistance from management interference:

I've got my own space and not managers breathing down my neck saying all the time, 'can you do this, can you do that, can you do the other'. They might come round once a day and say, 'This needs doing and that needs doing'. But apart from that, I'm on my own.

(Nick, sales assistant)

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Finally, Joe held a specific responsibility for the store's park and ride office. Joe worked in isolation and although he referred to the tedium of his work, Joe recognised that he had been able to pursue his own strategies of interest:

> when I'm in park and ride, you literally get seventeen customers over a four hour period sometimes. It's just so boring in there, it's untrue. I sit in there and have Radio 1 on in the morning and it's such a cushy job it doesn't matter. It's just the fact that that you have to get up early. And I just sit there and read all the time. I just sit there and read all the magazines. They didn't used to have magazines in there but I suggested they ought to put them in there to sell them to people who get buses but the only reason was for me to read them obviously. And I take my own magazines and just sit and read all the time and chat to the people and make cups of tea and stuff. And I always think, 'Are they watching me? Are they going to come up?' But I don't think they ever will because nothing ever goes on in there, it's so boring. They have a camera but I doubt it's ever turned on in there or looked at anyway.
>
> (Joe, sales assistant)

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This section has illustrated how the preceding power relationships of dictation, delegation and authority (see Section 6.1), which were integral to the store's working practices, were reinterpreted within individual worker strategies of resistance and manipulation. First, it was suggested that the workers produced their own personal strategies, involving the unauthorised manipulation of information. Kate, the store manager, suggested that it was possible for a store manager to manipulate the results, which indicated store performance, to allow for a more favourable reading of their personal achievements. ICTs were also inherent to the majority of secondary sector clerical workers tasks and it was suggested (see Section 6.1) that the price check workers were conceded authority (Allen, 1997) above and beyond Freathy's (1993) expectations for a secondary worker. Evidence suggested that this authority then provided the potential for the unauthorised manipulation of (management interactions and) system information. Secondly, it was proclaimed that the workers produced their own personal strategies of resistance to job tedium and the management gaze. Fulfilling

a supervisory role and undertaking additional training were viewed by workers as methods for resisting boredom. Other secondary workers concentrated upon the lack of interaction within their work. From this enforced isolation, workers stated that they formed particular strategies of resistance to the management gaze.

6.3   Summary

The preceding two chapters identified consistencies between Freathy's (1993) classificatory framework and task segmentation within the case study superstore. Nevertheless, this exploratory research has aimed to add new layers of understanding to retail workplace research. To some degree, case study evidence in Chapter Six has suggested that a breakdown of segmentation can be identified and that a detailed reconsideration of the retail superstore might be advisable. Of central importance to these reconsiderations have been concepts of power and technology.

After Allen (1997), it was established that a nuanced conception of power was required that recognised that the extension of power within the case study superstore involved relationships other than just domination and subordination (in this case, dictation, delegation, authority, resistance and manipulation). Integral to many of these power relationships were ICTs. Deployed by the head office to allow greater performance monitoring and worker control, ICTs were often reappropriated by employees in their attempts to reinterpret superstore working practices.

Peck (1996) suggested that it was also important to recognise that head office control was contested through the social context within which employment relations were embedded. In accepting Peck's (1996) claims, the following chapter 'looks over the factory gate' to consider the fragile balance between head office control and worker consent.

7 Social context of superstore employment

How can the structure of superstore employment relations also be the outcome of supply-side determinants?

Following Peck (1989), Freathy (1993) concluded the discussion surrounding his framework by declaring that the structure of employment relations was the outcome of an interdependence of demand-side *and* supply-side determinants. However, despite reaching this conclusion, Freathy's (1993) framework paid limited regard to external, supply-side mechanisms. In completing his fieldwork, Freathy (1993) only spoke to store managers and other workers were not interviewed. Moreover, his communication with these store managers resulted in a demand-side intensive appreciation of retail superstore segmentation. Subsequent work, around the issues of superstore segmentation (with Leigh Sparks, 1996), directs attention to the supply-side but this interest is biased towards the implications of Sunday shift-work.

Bearing this apparent deficiency in mind, and following a consideration of the work of Jamie Peck (1989; 1996), this chapter represents an attempt to provide an additional supply-side layer to the emerging analysis. Given Peck's (1996) assertion that employees had to be willing to work, the analysis concentrates upon evidence which illustrates a fragile balance between company control and worker consent. Following Peck's (1989; 1996) analysis of segmentation theory, it is suggested that labour control is dependent upon the social context within which employment relations are embedded. By looking 'over the factory gate' (Peck, 1996: 34), it is suggested that the labour supply is shaped by a series of autonomous social forces from 'outside' the labour market. After Peck's (1996) reconsideration of the concept of the local labour market (see Chapter 2), an attempt is made to understand the social context of the case study workers through Freathy's (1993) adaptation of segmentation theory (see Chapter 2). Explanation is also sought from Massey's (1995) work (see Chapter 2) on the social effects of a new cloning spatial structure (retail headquarters in the south-east controlling a series of branch plants) superimposed upon an area, Sheffield, still suffering from the inequalities of the old, dominant divisions of labour.

The subsequent presentation is based around six external social concerns (childcare, other domestic relationships, financial survival, lifestyle choice, social

experience and self-esteem). These social concerns emerged through a careful period of data categorisation (see Section 3.6), where familiarity with the interviewee's responses, was followed by a direction of attention to the aforementioned theoretical interests, in an attempt to match data with theory. These six external social concerns are followed by a final summary.

7.1 Social Concerns

Childcare

It was identified earlier (see Chapter 2), that the contemporary retail organisation demanded numerical flexibility from its superstore workers. Leigh Sparks (1992: 18) indicated that the central process in operation over the last 30 years had been, 'the gradual adjustment of the workforce to the demands of the employers'. This, he argued, had taken the form of a dismantling of the full-time model of working (Sparks, 1992) and its replacement with a flexible, part-time model (Gregory, 1991). Here, employers specified their labour requirements in line with product demands (Walsh, 1991), where shift lengths corresponded to the peaks and the troughs of the business (Freathy, 1993). Returning to our case, Sarah was employed as a sales assistant on the shop-floor. Initially concurring with the above sentiments, she stated that:

> When I started the job they did advertise for flexible people and you really have got to be flexible, there's no two ways about it. Some people, they just lay down the law and they say, 'I can't do it because I've got kids', which is fair enough.
>
> (Sarah, sales assistant)

Sarah's second assertion highlighted a movement against the aforementioned trend. Her comments began to illustrate how female workers, within the store, resisted the demands of the employer. Support for these claims was sought from theoretical understanding and empirical evidence. Theoretically, it was established earlier (see Chapter 2) that a plethora of academics suggested that the 'whip-hand' (Walsh, 1993) lay with the female labour-supply, as opposed to company demands. Flexible hours, Sparks (1987) stated, suit women. More specifically, empirical evidence from within the case suggested that female workers manipulated the inherent, numerical flexibility of the retail organisation. A number of secondary workers asserted that they had

resisted their scheduled hours of work and had had to change their hours of work because external childcare responsibilities had placed constraints upon their flexibility. For example, Ruth explained that she had become a single parent whilst working at the store. Inevitably, she changed from three night shifts because they, 'didn't fit around my home-life'. This required a transition from a back-office role (price-check) to a checkout assistant position. Despite this negotiation, Ruth declared that her need to be at home for her daughter at particular times necessitated her specific strategy:

> I'm working in the day-time, three days. My main thing was not what the job was, as long as I'm getting the same money and I'm working in the daytime, it was all I was looking for.
>
> (Ruth, sales assistant)

Similarly to Ruth, Jessica chose to change her hours so that she could dedicate her time to childcare. Having previously worked across four days, Jessica was given the opportunity to squeeze her hours into two longer day shifts. Jessica proclaimed that this allowed her to draw minimal assistance from her extended family. Relating back to her personal experiences, Jessica confirmed that this situation was ideal:

> Because with my little girl only being four, my mom and dad always worked so we didn't see them and I think you tend to want to do better and I think two days is enough to put her with her Auntie or Nanna. I don't like putting her out, if you know what I mean. I know everybody does it and it's just a way of life but I don't like to send her out to family, I'd rather me have her. But that's just me. I think if she grows up like that, then she'll be like that herself.
>
> (Jessica, clerical)

Like Jessica, Barbara also used her extended family to provide assistance with the care of her child. She also stated that she had become unhappy with the prevailing situation:

> I'm up at six and then I finish work at six and I have to drive across to the other side of Sheffield to pick him up. So I'm not getting home till half past seven, eight o'clock and then it's like bath and I'm just shattered.
>
> (Barbara, clerical)

As a coping strategy, she approached the personnel manager and asked to move to part-time hours:

> I told them the situation and that I want to go part-time. It worked out well actually because we've got two wages clerks when it should be one. So obviously, it worked out well because he would have to tell one of us that one person's going to do wages and the other's fired. So it came at the right time actually.
>
> (Barbara, clerical)

The store's desire to reduce overheads provided Barbara with the opportunity to reduce her commitment to work. Inevitably, this enabled Barbara to spend more time with her child (see Appendix 5: 16). Like Barbara, Mary had held a day-shift role within the store. Mary also stated that this role had prevented contact with her child:

> I didn't want the day job. Because I was doing ... two till ten thirty, and I wasn't seeing the kids when they came home. And they were in bed and fast asleep and then I was seeing them the next morning and it just wasn't working and I didn't want to see them fast asleep all the time.
>
> (Mary, sales assistant)

In an attempt to allow for an alternative coping strategy, Mary decided to change to the night-shift. As the passage below confirms, this strategy allowed Mary to maximise her contact with her son:

> It's convenient for the kids, then I can get my job done. My kid's nine, well I can put him to bed, then I can come to work. Then when I get home in the morning, he can have his breakfast, Chris (her husband) goes to work and I take him to school. I can go to bed, the baby sitter picks him up and gets me up. And then I've got time with the kids.
>
> (Mary, sales assistant)

Gregory (1991) suggested that evening retail work satisfied women with pre-school children. Mary's personal situation (above) implied that this theory could be extended

to school-age children. However, a reflection upon the issues surrounding career progression suggested that flexible retail hours did not suit all secondary sector females with school-age children. Freathy (1993) suggested that it was commonly recognised that structured career progression did not exist for retail workers within the secondary sector. Against this backdrop, Catherine, the training manager, stated that there were opportunities for progression within the store:

> We've got a new promotions thing called Options where rather than anybody being able to apply for a job, you need to get on Options and actually meet the criteria and then should a position come up, rather than apply for it, you would automatically be put forward for it. So the options are certainly there, it's just a case of proving that you can actually do the job.
>
> (Catherine, department manager)

To these ends, Catherine said that regular Options meetings were planned to give workers the opportunity to learn about the routes towards management within the store. However, although enticed by the possibility of promotion, a number of lower primary tier and secondary workers suggested that domestic commitments could constrain their ability to progress within the company. Nicola (see Appendix 5: 27), for example, was employed as a supervisor and she hoped that she would become a department manager. Nevertheless, with the added complications of the Options programme, and the subsequent demands of a new position, Nicola suggested that her aspirations sat uncomfortably against domestic responsibilities:

> It's hard work. When you work full-time and you've got a family as well, it's hard work to find time to set aside and think, 'You've got to do this and you've got to do that'.
>
> (Nicola, supervisor)

Karen agreed with Nicola's assertions. Although unsure about whether she would eventually aim for promotion, Karen claimed that she was intending to prepare herself for progression:

But you ask anybody what they intend doing and not many people know. So that's one of the reasons I'm looking for training now. Get as much training and knowledge as I can do. And then I should imagine it'll be another year or two before anything forms as to what I can use it for or where I could lead it to. I mean, me kids are growing up now, the youngest is ten, so maybe even going on to days, in a different position, like in price check, stock control, could be something like that.

(Karen, sales assistant)

Karen, as a secondary sector worker, indicated that a combination of increased company knowledge, and decreased domestic commitments, could allow for progression in the future. However, it should also be recognised that the significance of childcare commitments was not only confined to non-management roles within the store. In opposition to her secondary sector colleague (see Karen's assertion above), Kate, the store manager, said that she was aware of distinct opportunities for further progression within the company. Nevertheless, Kate stated that she had already completed a series of internal moves on the company's behalf (see Appendix 5: 36). Therefore, given her personal circumstances, Kate suggested that she was happy to remain in Sheffield:

I was, a couple of years ago, really ambitious and I did want to go and do the next job. But at the moment, I'm a bit on ice. The opportunities are there if I want to. It's my choice that I said that the next few years I'm happy to stay here, consolidate. I mean, I need to make sure over the next two years that this store becomes profitable, so that's a big enough challenge. And then I'll wait and see. You know, I've got a couple of kids, they're only young, so as they get older, then maybe I'll change.

(Kate, senior manager)

Other domestic relationships

Evidence from the previous section suggested that flexibility within the retail workplace had provided certain workers with the scope to enact effective childcare strategies. These strategies regularly necessitated reduced contact with domestic partners. In the preceding sub-section (see *'Childcare'*), Mary affirmed that her hours of work (the

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night-shift) were convenient for childcare arrangements. When prompted to discuss whether this compromise was equally suitable for her husband, Mary conferred that she believed that the ongoing arrangement was adequate:

> I see him in the morning and I see him when he comes home from work and then I come out and Chris will go to bed. He sometimes goes to bed about ten. Because I have two days off and when we have two days off we spend it together. It's like a five day shift. I sit and watch 'Corra' with him, you know what I mean?
>
> (Mary, sales assistant)

In addition, Mary was not the only secondary sector employee to utilise this strategy. Karen also chose to work the night-shift because of her desire to maintain personal childcare:

> My husband works days and with children and we've never put the children into care or anything like that. We've always made sure one of us is at home.
>
> (Karen, sales assistant)

Once again, when prompted to discuss the effect of this arrangement upon her relationship with her husband, Karen suggested that their arrangement continued to provide an effective response to the demands of childcare:

> No, we've never had no problems because we've basically done that between us for about ten years now.
>
> (Karen, sales assistant)

However, following Massey's (1995) concerns around the likely effects of a new spatial division of labour, many workers suggested that they had found it difficult to acclimatise to the flexible demands of the superstore workplace. Across the segmentations, other full-time workers expressed concern that the flexible hours of work did not sit comfortably with their partner's hours of work. Sarah, a secondary sector employee, stated that the requirement to work late at the weekends was inconvenient:

The only thing is if I work late Saturday, which I do occasionally but I'm not complaining, but my husband gets Saturday and Sunday off so he has all Saturday on his own really which is not much fun for him but beggars can't be choosers.

(Sarah, sales assistant)

Sarah asserted that she was prepared to consent to the demands of her employer to secure her employment. However, when considering her own personal arrangement, Jennifer, Sarah's secondary sector colleague, did not concur. As was alluded to in the previous chapter (see Section 6.1), Jennifer asserted that she fulfilled flexible hours, which were scheduled around the needs of the price check department. Her partner was a research student and she said that the demands of her work impacted upon their interaction:

Because he does your normal nine till five or whatever and then I'm up at half four for a six o'clock start or I'm on a late night or whatever. So my hours don't fit in with what he's doing at all. I mean, I work weekends, he doesn't work his weekends.

(Jennifer, clerical)

Despite this incompatibility, Jennifer stated that she believed that this arrangement was not a tremendous strain upon her partner and herself. Nevertheless, she suggested that she was beginning to become frustrated by the temporal demands of her position:

I wouldn't say that it massively creates tensions. I mean, obviously there's times where we just don't see each other. But I don't think we've had any tensions about it really. I think he's been quite good about it, he's never really moaned about it. But I am getting to the stage where I don't want to do the hours anymore … If I was looking for another job, it would be one of the factors.

(Jennifer, clerical)

Like Jennifer, Diane asserted that the flexible requirements of her position had reduced the level of contact between herself and her partner. As she detailed below, the specific

requirements of her management role did not fit neatly with the scheduled hours of her partner's work:

> He's all right about it but what really gets him mad is when they start ringing me up in the middle of the night and it's him who answers the phone and when you're on late nights tomorrow, it doesn't matter, but he has to get up at seven and they don't think about him. And no other day department manager has to do nights but I do because I've got a twenty-four hour filling station. So he's not bothered, he's been quite good really. You know, sometimes when I should have finished at three, I'm not home till ten at night and it's, 'Here, I've made your tea, it's in the microwave', not, 'Where've you been, what've you been doing?'
>
> (Diane, department manager)

Despite the flexible demands of her position, Diane declared that she believed that her partner and herself had developed an understanding. These 'understandings' became more important with management career progression. In his attempts to provide an understanding of retail management progression, Freathy (1993) suggested that individuals at the top of the superstore hierarchy moved along a structured career path. In completing their management activities, store managers were expected to be mobile and to relocate where necessary. Kate, the store manager, implied that personal flexibility was an essential characteristic for any individual wishing to progress within the company:

> you've got to be prepared to be flexible and mobile. But if you're flexible and if you're mobile in the company, then it is relatively easy enough to plan your career and for those opportunities to be there.
>
> (Kate, senior manager)

Fiona (see Appendix 5: 30) held a department manager position within the store and like Robin, her senior within the store hierarchy, she declared that she was keen to progress within the company. As Kate explained above, promotion-seeking managers were expected to be flexible and mobile. However, when probed to discover whether she

would be prepared to move further away, Fiona suggested that she was constrained by a series of external personal circumstances:

> Not at the moment, and that's nothing to do with work, that's personal. My Mum died last year and my Mum and Dad live at home and I would not want to go anywhere else at the minute, I want to be at home.
>
> (Fiona, department manager)

Like Fiona, Melanie (see Appendix 5: 31) worked as department manager within the store and she also held a desire to progress to senior management. When asked whether she would be prepared to move in order to procure promotion, she also referred to a set of external personal factors:

> Not really, I don't really want to and that's the only thing that puts me off ... Because my friends are here and my family. I think it could be quite lonely moving away because you don't make them sort of friends as you do here.
>
> (Melanie, department manager)

Financial survival

Freathy and Sparks (1994) asserted that the financial benefits of retail employment were regularly satisfactory to encourage workers to restructure their work/domestic time relationship. Most specifically, Freathy and Sparks (1995) proclaimed that Sunday trading added an extra layer of complication to retail employment patterns. Joe explained how Sunday-work paid 'double-time' and, under a full-time contract, he was paid extra for undertaking overtime. This additional remuneration was a welcome inducement:

> I try to work as many Sundays as possible. Because I'm full-time now, if I do any overtime except for Sundays or things like Bank Holidays, then they have to pay me time and a half, which they don't like. I just remind them every time someone comes over and says, 'Do you want any overtime?', I say, 'You have to pay time and a half', and there'll go, 'Oh, yeah'.
>
> (Joe, sales assistant)

Unlike Joe, Claire had been unable to secure full-time hours. In line with the demand-side assertions of Gregory (1991) and Townsend, Sadler and Hudson (1996), Claire said that she believed that the store was keen to utilise part-time workers for flexible response strategies:

> Basically, in the whole store, every time they're losing someone off a department, they're not replacing them. If they lose a full-timer they'll replace them with a part-timer. I mean, it works out for them because it's flexible if they need to swap your hours or anything. You know, it's flexible for them.
>
> (Claire, sales assistant)

Claire asserted that the lack of a full-time contract deprived her of a range of entitlements, such as share options and longer holidays. In addition, Claire stated that she was unable to rely upon the availability of overtime work. As a strategy to increase her overtime options, Claire chose to work three extended shifts:

> Thursday, Friday and Saturday, I do ten hour shifts ... I had the option, I can either come in for three days and do nine hour shifts and then on the fourth day just come in for three hours and it takes me an hour to get in. If I'm coming in for a three hour shift and I'm doing two hours travelling time for that, it's hardly worth it. So I might as well. And once you've done nine hours, staying for another sixty minutes is nothing really, so I chose to do the three days and it gives me three days that I can try and get overtime on to make my hours up.
>
> (Claire, sales assistant)

As a response to demand-side restrictions, and in an attempt to increase the potential for remuneration, Claire made a decision to restructure her domestic/work time relationship. However, Peck (1996) suggested that it was also important to consider supply-side mechanisms. Within this case, it was observed that specific external social circumstances resulted in particular supply-side restrictions. Many secondary sector workers suggested that their consent to work was obligated in instrumental terms. Echoing the sentiments of various colleagues, Ruth explicitly proclaimed that her wages were essential for her family's subsistence:

I come here for the money. I might as well be honest ... It's just a way of surviving.

<div align="right">(Ruth, sales assistant)</div>

To these ends, Kirby (1993) highlighted how retail workers were often required to work unsociable hours because of their income-dependence. Arthur, for example, claimed that he would rather have worked during the day-shift. However, he asserted that he chose to work during the night-shift because of the inducement of a night premium. He suggested that this additional income was essential in his attempts to provide a suitable standard of living for his family:

> my wife realises that, you know, to sort of give them a decent standard of living, I'm having to work nights. All right, it's difficult on her. The age gap in our family is big. I've got a year old lad and a ten year old and I've got twins of coming up to seven. So you can imagine, it's difficult for her, especially through her holidays, having to keep them quiet whilst I can get a decent amount of sleep.

<div align="right">(Arthur, clerical)</div>

In detailing his personal situation, Arthur suggested that his four children stretched domestic funds and he conferred that his wife was unable to work because she had a deformed hip. She received incapacity benefit and Arthur asserted that this provided an additional source of income. Benefits were referred to as an additional source of income for other workers on the shop-floor. However, this external source of income often problematised worker consent. Inevitably, a number of workers within the secondary sector confirmed that they were only willing to work whilst their external benefits could be maintained. For example, when Ruth was prompted to discuss whether she would be enticed by the possibility of increased hours, she stated that:

> No, because I'm on family credit, so it's not beneficial.

<div align="right">(Ruth, sales assistant)</div>

Ruth proclaimed that she would be unable to survive without family credit and she was concerned that additional income might jeopardise the provision of this benefit. In

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particular, she drew attention towards the in-store benefits systems. Here, she was concerned that extra income, through these systems, could affect her ability to receive family credit:

> I wish people knew more about it. Like this profit related pay. How does this affect me? Nobody's too sure. It could mean that when I get that profit related pay, it will be in one of my wage packets that I have to send off to family credit and it could mean that for the next six months, I'm working for nothing. You can't do overtime, you can't do that, you can't do the other ... It's like when they come and ask if you if you want to work overtime. You get fed up of saying, 'No, I don't', because it looks like you don't want it. It's not that you don't want it, it's because you can't.
>
> (Ruth, sales assistant)

When prompted to suggest whether the situation would improve if she worked full-time, Ruth stated that:

> If I worked full-time, I'm working for about twenty pound. I work sixteen hours and to work for thirty-six hours, I'd get about twenty quid. And I would be silly to do it and then I'm having to put my mother about ... I can't see the point for the money.
>
> (Ruth, sales assistant)

Inevitably, Ruth proffered a strategy of resistance whereby she was determined to earn the maximum permissible income. Roger highlighted similar objectives. However, his weekly hours took him above the allowable limit:

> My contract says eighteen and a half hours a week. And the amount of money me and my partner bring in together is just over the top of getting family credit.
>
> (Roger, sales assistant)

Roger asserted that he had considered possible attempts at changing the situation. One option was withdrawing from the labour market. However, echoing Massey's (1995) concerns over the quality of jobs provided through the insertion of a new division of

labour, Roger said that he was keen to remain in the position to improve his chances of getting out of retail work and into a 'proper' full-time job:

> I think working is costing me more than I used to get in benefits, like housing benefits and things like that. It's such a disincentive. It really is such a disincentive but I needed to get a job, I needed to be working. I've done a year here and I'm really desperately looking for a job. Something like postal services that's full-time. Because there was no way I was going to get a job, a proper job before. I need to be working because unless you can put down on that CV, 'currently in employment', you've got no chance ... So I really needed this job and I've done nearly a year now so I'm pushing out my CV again.
>
> (Roger, sales assistant)

Lifestyle choice

The secondary workers within the previous sub-section (see, *'Financial survival'*) highlighted the vulnerability of their external, domestic situations. Within these examples, specific combinations of low income and social benefits produced survival strategies. Other secondary workers expressed a different requirement for their income. These different requirements were associated to personal circumstances and they highlighted the broad range of individual local labour market positions and social backgrounds within the secondary sector of the store. For example, Farhan stated that his job provided money for clothes and 'going out'. As a student living at home (see Appendix 5: 1), his reasons for undertaking work were very different to those which had been identified by workers in the previous sub-section (see, *'Financial survival'*). Echoing Massey's (1995) concerns around coherence within the workplaces of a cloning spatial structure, Farhan believed that this difference had originally caused problems:

> If I didn't have this job I couldn't go out or anything. The only reason I'm working here is to buy clothes and everything and to go out. That's it. Everything else is all right. Food, accommodation and everything, my parent's are taking care of that. I'm one of these lucky kids aren't I? I bet you're thinking, 'Lucky git'. Because that's one of the problems. At the beginning, what I used to do was go out and pay for my clothes and everything and you've

got some people here where this is their living and you feel a bit..... At the beginning, I got people who were a bit like this with me. But now they're just like my best mates. You've just got to get to know them basically.

(Farhan, sales assistant)

Like Farhan, Joe was a young, single male. Although not living at home, Joe was saving his money to go travelling. This, he conferred, was his sole priority. As a consequence, he was adamant that the job itself, and the work undertaken within that employment, were irrelevant:

> I can hardly say anything like job satisfaction because it's not really, is it? I mean, it could have been here, it could have been working at a pizza place, it could have been working at a hotel. At the end of the day, it's just wherever it takes me to get the money. It's not as if it was a career move.
>
> (Joe, sales assistant)

Jennifer also suggested that she did not view her job as a 'career'. She asserted that she simply viewed the job as a short-term method for clearing the debt-burden from her university education:

> To an extent, it's not something that I want to do forever but I enjoy it as much as any other job because I fell in to it, I could have been doing something a lot worse to clear-off my overdraft.
>
> (Jennifer, clerical)

Massey (1995) suggested that the insertion of a new spatial division of labour, upon areas in economic decline, often resulted in companies turning to the previously unwaged. In this superstore's case, the flexibility of retail work provided job opportunities for young labour market entrants. As with the workers in the previous sub-section (see, 'Financial survival'), these young workers suggested that the nature of their employment was a marginal concern. However, key differences between these two groups of individuals could be highlighted. Farhan, Joe and Jennifer expressed a belief that their future lay outside the store. Their consent to fulfil the requirements of their work was explained through a motivation to provide a short-term answer to external,

financial demands. As such, these workers held the power to withdraw their consent at short notice in response to individual lifestyle choices. Farhan attended college and fulfilled part-time hours within the store (see Appendix 5: 1). With regards to his hours of work, Farhan asserted that:

> Late hours is fine because it fits in with my school. I don't have to worry about missing lessons.
>
> (Farhan, sales assistant)

Like Farhan, Martin was keen to work 'unsociable' hours and was very eager to earn 'double-pay' during a day that did not impinge upon his 'clubbing' time:

> Well, Sundays doesn't affect anything because it's only spent in bed anyway. I might as well get up and earn a bit of money.
>
> (Martin, sales assistant)

Both Martin and Farhan confirmed that their education remained their priority. Therefore, neither were prepared to work during shifts which coincided with their lectures. Inevitably, the flexibility of the retail environment provided the scope for both Martin and Farhan to fulfil convenient hours of work. Here, Farhan recognised that his personal situation was vastly different to many of his departmental, shop-floor colleagues. The case stories within the preceding sub-section (see *'Financial survival'*) emphasised this difference. The consent to work for these aforementioned employees necessitated careful strategies involving a combination of external, social benefits and limited, internal incomes. Segmentation, based upon external personal circumstances, clearly existed within, and not only between, sectors. Nevertheless, certain full-time secondary workers did confer that external interests led them to pursue particular days off within the working week. Nick, for example, highlighted which day he preferred to keep free:

> Saturday, because I can watch the football and go out and get bladdered on a Friday night and have no worries about work.
>
> (Nick, sales assistant)

Similar concerns could be identified within the expressions of certain lower tier, primary sector employees. Nicola averred that she had recently had her hours set. Under these conditions, she was scheduled to complete the same hours every week. During this transition, she stated that she had also changed her area of responsibility, from the reception desk to the checkouts. Nicola asserted that she completed this transition because of personal circumstances:

> I actually came off reception to go back on to checkouts because I was getting early mornings and late nights. I'd got Monday, Tuesday starting at five and then they'd give me Wednesday as a day off, then they'd give me Thursday early. So what was the point in having a day off when you can't do anything because you've still got to go to bed for nine o'clock because you've got to get up for four? And Saturday was permanent late nights which was does not mix well with a social life because I want to go out at the weekend.
>
> (Nicola, supervisor)

Nicola suggested that her scheduled reception hours had prohibited an external social life. As with many other workers, Nicola had been eager to secure her freedom from the demands of weekend-work. In attempting to secure this freedom, Nicola declared that she had communicated her desires to the management. By seducing the management through her willingness to work during other unpopular shifts, Nicola suggested that she had been able to use the flexibility of the store's scheduling system to her personal advantage:

> I raised it as an issue and then spoke to them (the management) about it and they said they'd have a word with the other full-timers that work down there obviously because Saturdays is on a rota system. And I work permanently now on Friday late nights.
>
> (Nicola, supervisor)

Shelly, alternatively, used the flexibility of the retail workplace as a strategy to resist her attachment to domestic labour:

if I have Saturday off, I just spend it cleaning. So if I have a day off in the week I'll do something that I want to do. You're just at home to make the dinner, you know, and while you're there, the kids and my husband will do nothing and I'll just end up cooking and cleaning and I won't go anywhere. So I have a day off in the week. When you're full-time, you've got to make time for yourself. I mean forget about the house, it doesn't matter if it looks a tip.

(Shelly, supervisor)

However, an additional concentration upon the senior management drew explicit attention towards the tremendous differences that were apparent between the experiences of the secondary, shop-floor workers and the upper echelons of the store hierarchy. Unlike the secondary workers, Robin indicated that his work provided enjoyment at two key levels:

I get a kick out of all the things that we talked about earlier which is dealing with people, a fast-paced environment, responsibility at an early age and so on ... Pretty much those reasons and sitting behind all of it is it funds a lifestyle that I want to lead. I do get paid quite well as do all senior managers and this enables me to do the things outside of work that I want to do. I'm lucky I suppose because I do enjoy it and I am able to do a lot of things outside as well. So it all fits quite well for me.

(Robin, senior manager)

In comparison to the perspectives of the secondary workers within this sub-section, Robin asserted that his position provided the basis for an enjoyable career (see Appendix 5: 33). He also conferred that this employment provided a level of income that guaranteed his participation in a range of activities outside work. Rather than providing survival, Robin's job provided a career with an income that could be used to support a luxuriant lifestyle. Robin's senior colleague, Vicky, made similar assertions:

it's your livelihood and you wouldn't be able to go out and buy the things you do and do the things you do if you didn't have a job. I'm also very ambitious and career oriented. So I want to do a good job.

(Vicky, senior manager)

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Social experience

Following Crewe and Gregson's (1998) suggestion that retailing was inherently a social experience, it should be noted that many secondary workers alluded towards the importance of the social aspects of their work. Many secondary sector workers suggested that being part of this relational work-space formed an important element of their consent to work. Joe conferred that:

> I know a lot of people and I do enjoy seeing everybody at work and chatting to them and things like that. So it is important in that sort of way because I love socialising with people, I love meeting new people all the time, it's a challenge I suppose in a way.
>
> (Joe, sales assistant)

Barbara concurred and suggested that the social aspects of her work provided enjoyment:

> Because to me each day is different when you come here. You don't go home thinking, 'Oh God'. You do go home thinking like that but there's always a joke or something happening all the time.
>
> (Barbara, clerical)

A number of the store's secondary workforce suggested that the interaction with other workers had provided the opportunity to develop close social relationships. It was regularly conferred that friends from within the workplace became external acquaintances. For Maggie, the social activity surrounding workplace participation was an essential aspect of her continued consent to work:

> It's a big part of my life. Personally, a lot of it's social as well. It's a way to meet people and make my friends. Because there's a lot of social activity involved with this place as well, with it being such a big store, there's always something happening which you want to join in. Everybody's very friendly here, everybody. That was one of the things I was worried about coming in to a big place because I only once ever worked in a big place before in a factory and they were hateful. And I was worried about that. But it's brilliant, it's brilliant ...

It's just sitting in the canteen having a coffee, there's always somebody who comes and sits with you. It's so friendly. I'm really amazed at how friendly it is. I expected there to be a lot of back-biting and bitchiness. I mean, it goes off, it goes off everywhere but it's certainly brilliant here.

(Maggie, sales assistant)

Some members of the secondary workforce made explicit reference towards the company nights out. These provided further scope for the development of internal friendships in an external environment:

I went clubbing with them yesterday. They're OK. Because on our department, when I first started, there were a few guys and then there were about three women who were working with us. But now there's all just lads on our department apart from our manager Sharon who's a woman, she's quite nice, and we're going out next week, you can come with us if you like (laughs). It's a lads' night out, it'll be really good.

(Farhan, sales assistant)

However, other workers suggested that they were eager to maintain a barrier between their work friends and their external social lives. For example, Lindsey viewed the company nights out with disdain. Given Farhan's previous assertions, her hesitancy seemed easier to understand:

Oh yeah, I know a lot of people but my work and social life is completely different. I don't want to start going on the company nights out and things like that (laughs). It's just not me. I mean, I have friends here that I go out with but not on the big nights out (laughs).

(Lindsey, clerical)

In comparison to the aforementioned debates surrounding the workplace as a provider of external friendships, Jessica asserted that she viewed the workplace as an escape route from the monotony of child-based domesticity:

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It gets me away from the house into a different environment and away from a dull environment. Because when I get home, yes there's David to talk to, I mean we've been together for nineteen years, so we know each other inside out and because we've got Katy (her young daughter), it's different, your levels tend to come down to her level and when I come to work, it's different, the conversation's completely different.

(Jessica, clerical)

Jessica developed her argument and she suggested that she derived intense satisfaction from the opportunity to spend time within the 'different' social environment of the workplace. Against some of the views which were expressed within the earlier sub-sections of this chapter (see 'Childcare' and 'Other domestic relationships'), Jessica proclaimed that she relished the opportunity to resist domestic contact. To these ends, she declared that her job represented an 'interest':

you think, 'No this is my four hours', away from the family, and away from all that and just you and everybody else. And I think you have to have something yourself for a relationship to carry on, you've both got to have your own interests. You know, he goes out with the lads every Thursday, he's done it for donkey's years and that's his way out. And he does Bonsai Trees and that's his other outlet, you know, he can sit for hours playing with his trees. Mine seemed to be doing the housework, menial tasks, go to bed and get up. And now I go to work for two days and it breaks up my week completely and I still have my grown-up days and my children days. Once you're away from your front door and you've closed it, your environment's different.

(Jessica, clerical)

Self-esteem

Following the decline of local industry, Sheffield remains an area of high, long-term unemployment. The store provided employment for around 230 people within the local area and a number of secondary workers expressed their gratitude to the company. This employment, they insinuated had provided a considerable boost to their self-esteem. Nick had been laid off from his previous position within an engineering company (see

Appendix 5: 7). He had subsequently struggled to find employment and he asserted that he was thankful to the company for eventually providing him with the opportunity to become part of a wider working community:

> it's better than sitting at home and it gets me out meeting people. I mean, I get on with everybody, I'm that sort of character. But I enjoy it. I couldn't stick in the house all the time, going to town every bloody day and window shopping and seeing the same people ... When you're sat at home it just drags and drags and drags. I mean, there's nowt worse than being sat at home on your own is there? Playing Nintendo 64.
>
> (Nick, sales assistant)

Gary acquiesced. Massey (1995) suggested that the insertion of a new spatial division of labour, within areas suffering from the decline of the preceding dominant division of labour, often resulted in long-term male unemployment. Before taking his original position with another of the company's stores, Gary conferred that he had been unemployed for two years (see Appendix 5: 22). However, and against Massey's (1995) tradition, the opening of a new retail superstore (in the case of his first job in Chesterfield and within the present Sheffield store) provided a job opportunity for Gary. In addition to the remuneration (and following the assertions from the preceding section), Gary stated that his work provided the scope to benefit from the social element of the workplace:

> You've got to have something to live by. I don't think you can manage on the dole. It does help to get out the house as well. You've got to get out of the house and when I was on the dole it was doing my head in. Sitting there and doing nowt, I just felt really lethargic.
>
> (Gary, sales assistant)

Whilst unemployed, Gary stated that he had been a regular visitor to his local job centre. However, he proclaimed that he believed that the vacancies had been substandard and that the pay had been unsatisfactory, especially for someone, like himself, who was attempting to support a family. Gary was eager to accept this job because it provided him with an opportunity to return to the workforce, to hold a regular income and to

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dispense with the need to be supported by the social services system. Ruth worked part-time and she also proclaimed that she felt that it was important that she fulfilled a role within the labour market:

> It's important to me that I'm not claiming off the system for everything. I'm not sitting in my house all the time but if somebody says to me, 'What do you do for a job?', I don't like to tell them ... Because I think all my friends have all got good jobs. I'm like the one that, 'Oh, she works on the checkout at the superstore'.
>
> (Ruth, sales assistant)

Ruth consented to complete activities within the retail workplace because she asserted that she was eager to remain part of the local labour market. However, the self-esteem that she had derived through this participation was balanced against self-conscious distress. Ruth asserted that she believed that there was a stigma attached to retail work and she said that she felt embarrassed when she compared her position to her friends'. Ruth explained these feelings with reference to her previous employment (see Appendix 5: 4):

> Because going back to when I was in the estate agent, the receptionist and all those, they were on far less money than what they are on here. But if you said to somebody that you worked as a receptionist, you would have been thought of differently to those working on the checkouts. It's just how people perceive you.
>
> (Ruth, sales assistant)

Other secondary workers within the store concurred and averred that there was a negative stigma attached to checkout work. This, they asserted, was then taken and used by people in their interpretations of retail work outside the store.

> If you say to somebody, 'I work in retail', they automatically think you work on a checkout.
>
> (Barbara, clerical)

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Barbara stated that she was annoyed that her back-office role might become confused with checkout work. This exasperation had been a contributory factor in Barbara's search for an alternative and more 'fulfilling' future. However, the following case exemplified how retail work could also provide external self-esteem. Simon, like Barbara, held a secondary sector, clerical position within the store. He was eager to elucidate upon how his family believed he held a 'glamorous' job. This, he confirmed, sponsored a degree of pride:

> It gives me a sense of well-being ... But you see, my Mrs says she'd love a job like mine. She thinks it's a big glamorous job and I don't think it is. My older brother is a brewer for Whitbread's, which is quite a responsible job, but he sees it as a big glamorous job. My younger brother works on trolleys and he sees it as a fairly glamorous job. A lot of people when they come to the office knock on the door and we just barge in and out, you know, you kick the door open. A lot of people have a fear of coming up and approaching us.
>
> (Simon, clerical)

Similarly to Simon, Chris also insinuated that his supervisory, back-office role provided a considerable degree of self-esteem. Chris (see Appendix 5: 13) referred to his personal development outside the store and suggested that his subsequent intention was internal progression:

> It's more important now because I'm looking at my career. I'm now twenty-four so its time to think about that. So it's getting important and certainly within the last year, I've changed a lot ... Before I suppose, it was just a job but now it's a career.
>
> (Chris, supervisor)

Apparently older and wiser, Chris asserted that he had reached a stage in his life where he appreciated that a commitment to a career would be required. However, other workers from the secondary and supervisory levels of the store suggested that they were not motivated by the prospect of promotion. Workplace experiences and external prejudices led workers, such as Joe, to demand a 'higher target':

I mean, I look at a lot of the department managers here and think 'not at all'. I could actually fill their position with my experience I've got now, which is just working the checkouts, I could quite easily fill the position with just a few months training. So, I've set myself more of a higher target really, a better target.

(Joe, sales assistant)

Massey (1995) affirmed that negative attitudes towards work was one of the key problems surrounding the quality of jobs provided through the insertion of a new division of labour. To this end, various workers suggested that the enticement of external education provided one potential route to a 'higher target'. Barbara provided one case example:

Because in September, college starts, so I can sit down and start planning what I'm going to do. Yeah, because a lot of people say to me, 'What about the money?'. And it's not about the money to me. You can always get little part-time jobs, I can get overtime. It's not about the money. I'm getting the money now. It's important but it's not the be-all and the end-all. At the end of the day, you've got to be happy.

(Barbara, clerical)

Once qualified, Barbara indicated that she would definitely leave the store. However, as she recognised herself, qualifications were no guarantee of a better job and an exit route from the store:

You'd be surprised, people have got degrees here. People have got good qualifications but I think once you get into the job and getting that wage, because it's quite well paid, then sometimes it's hard to get out. I know somebody who's working part-time on customer services and she's got a degree. Well it's quite sad when they've got the qualifications.

(Barbara, clerical)

Here, Barbara made a specific reference to Claire, a university graduate, who had been forced to apply for work at the store after failing to secure other employment (see

Appendix 5: 23). Claire said that she looked outside to the achievements of her university friends and found her own position embarrassing:

> So at the moment, especially with like going down and meeting my friends who are all like getting promotions and things, I think I need to be doing something else ... I don't mind the job but I just feel as though I ought to do be doing something else because I'm wasting away.
>
> (Claire, sales assistant)

Claire, asserted that she was desperate to hold a more responsible position. However, given her education and experience, she did believe that there was an 'improved' chance that she would be selected to join the company's graduate management scheme:

> So going for the management training course before and not having done business and management, which is what basically most of them did, that have got on the management training course that I know, I don't think that I would have stood a chance. But now, at least having worked here for a couple of years, it's got to have improved. And I've got the 2.1 which is the minimum you need to get onto the management training course so..... I can't lose anything, if I don't get it, I'm still working here aren't I?
>
> (Claire, sales assistant)

Robin was already a management training course graduate. As the store's personnel manager, he exhibited a strong desire to progress within the company. Massey (1995) drew attention to the industrial periphery of the UK (such as Sheffield) and suggested that the effects of the combination of a continued decline of the old dominant spatial division of labour and the insertion of a new division were that individual managers saw the job (and the region) as only one step in a career structure. Echoing Massey's (1995) and Taylor, Evans and Fraser's (1996) weary declarations, Robin insinuated that Sheffield simply represented a stage within a much broader career plan (see Appendix 5: 33). He commuted daily from Nottingham and had no external ties to the local area. Robin suggested that his current role, within this specific store, was personally beneficial because:

it's the brand new design concept and because of all that, it's very high profile. So as a career move, it's a good one because you've still got a lot of contact with directors and a lot of people keep their eye on the store.

<div align="right">(Robin, senior manager)</div>

Inevitably, Robin asserted that he hoped that this profile would help him in his aim of becoming a store manager within the next two years.

7.2   Summary

This chapter has presented an additional supply-side layer to the emerging analysis. In line with Peck's (1989; 1996) analysis, it was suggested that labour control was (to some degree) dependent upon the social context within which employment relations were embedded. Many disadvantaged secondary (sales assistant and clerical) workers were dependent upon their relationship to institutions at the outer limits of the labour market (for example, the family and the benefits agency). These secondary workers (and some primary workers) were often defined, and their consent to work subsequently controlled, by their relationship to these institutions. Therefore, general processes of control within capitalist (in this case, the retail company) attempts to re-work space in new divisions of labour (Graham and Marvin, 1996; Massey, 1995) had to be understood through a reference to the complex, social context of individuals and institutions within the particular place (Sheffield).

8 Conclusion

This project has attempted to put retail workplaces and their employees back on the research agenda. In the spirit of the new retail geography (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996), this research has attempted to take both its economic and cultural geographies seriously (Blomley, 1996). Following Scheurich (1997) and Kitchin (1998), there was a rejection of the idea of forming grand narratives and universal truths from one case study. Instead, it was suggested that the instrumental and embedded case (see Chapter 3) within this project represented just one particular example of a superstore workplace. While this may be the case, the following conclusions point to a series of critical findings that could be important for future retail workplace research.

Building from existing superstore research (Freathy, 1993), evidence of segmentation could be seen within the retail workplace, where employees were sub-divided into a dualist segmentation of high and lower-tier workers. However, case study evidence also suggested that existing theoretical conceptualisations of the segmented retail superstore might need to be reconsidered because they fail to fully capture the power-based working practices of the ICT-utilising retail superstore. Therefore, a more comprehensive theoretical conceptualisation is required if we are to understand the social space of the retail workplace. Using an additional research question as an epistemological base (see Chapters 1 and 3), the conclusion to the research attempts to place this extended theoretical literature within the context of the preceding empirical findings:

- Given the social production of the retail workplace, what are the relations of technology, power, performance, display, gender and age that make this economic space work?

Just as Lefebvre (1991) believed that space was not simply 'a container' upon which processes were acted out, the retail space of the case study store was more than a 'given' – it was more than a simple space constructed by the company for the production of profit. Following O'Neill and Gibson-Graham (1999), the company was not an ordered, rational economic entity. Using the multiple narratives (after O'Neill and Gibson-

Graham, 1999) of various workers, it was identified that the social relations and working practices of the workers were inscribed into the space of the superstore. And the spatiality of this workplace context could not be understood without reference to the employees that organised that space (after Pickles, 1985). Reconceptualisations of the social space of the retail workplace emerge around three key areas: technology and power; performance and display; and external social relations (gender and age). By their very nature, some of these conclusions are speculative. However, it is hoped that these relations of technology, power, performance, display, gender and age offer theorisations for others to develop. To this end, possible directions and methods for further research are also suggested.

Technology and power

The retail company organised the space of the workplace along careful means. Every worker had a segmented role and each role contributed to the company's attempt to successfully 'organise' space in the production of profit. In support of Freathy's (1993) classificatory framework, Chapters 4 and 5 found that the case study store was organised into a multi-tiered primary sector of senior managers, department managers and supervisors and a secondary sector of clerical staff and sales assistants. The management proffered human resource data also broadly corresponded to Freathy's application of segmentation theory, with different terms and conditions associated to particular tiers.

However, qualitative analysis in Chapter 6 suggested that power relationships blur segmented divides in the retail workplace. Despite the strengths of Freathy's (1993) segmented framework, Chapter 6 suggested two ways in which theoretical conceptualisations of the superstore workplace might be reconsidered. The first section of Chapter 6 suggested that dictation, delegation and authority were a series of power relationships, in part facilitated by ICTs, that were inherent to the store's working practices. First, head office dictation and the use of ICTs to monitor activity restricted senior management autonomy within the store. Secondly, the delegation of responsibility occurred throughout the store. However, quality face-to-face interaction between staff members was restricted through the use of ICTs, exclusion of workers within particular store spaces and extensive departmental manager responsibilities that constrained available contact time. Thirdly, supervisors found it difficult to negotiate

temporary authority and clerical workers were often forced to assume unrewarded decision-making responsibilities.

As such, and against head office attempts to introduce control, all actors produced the superstore space – including managers and secondary sector employees. Following Allen's (1997) assertion, these power relationships involved three different modes (dictation, delegation and authority). What's more, these power relationships were themselves re-interpreted in individual strategies of worker resistance and manipulation. First, the store manager illustrated how it was possible to manipulate system information to create a superior perception of the store and some price check workers manipulated their interaction with ICTs for personal gain. Secondly, other workers within the store produced strategies of resistance to the management gaze or to general job tedium. In establishing these connections, it is worth remembering as Hetherington (1997) recognises that power works across space in more subtle ways than through simple domination and resistance binaries. The challenge remains now for other researchers to detail how these forms of power become present in other service spaces. Our study introduces relations of dictation, delegation, authority, resistance and manipulation that are seen as central to the space of the retail workplace. Other retail researchers should return their 'gaze' to their workplace and note whether such power relations are replicated in other networked spaces.

Our case study research illustrated that the use of technology across the networked space of the case study store was complex. This complexity can be identified through a key example. Political economy suggests that ICTs help re-work space to the needs of powerful capitalists. While the case study company attempted to use ICTs to help create profit, local agency helped shape technological innovation (after Graham and Marvin, 1996). Chapter 6 showed a movement towards a wholly relational approach whereby technologies had to be understood through their context of use. That is, retail ICTs have different uses depending on the social context. The quadrant, for example, was a PC-powered technology divided into four segments (people, customers, finance and operations). Its data-collection was driven by other in-store sources (including the Management Information System and stock control data). The ultimate target (a green light) highlighted success within an area. By searching for green lights in the quadrant, head office monitored the store manager's performance from afar. However, the quadrant was also used at the local level in the daily managing of the store. In attempting to 'keep that quadrant all on a green', the store manager used the quadrant to

monitor the performance of her own 'team'. So in one context (head office), the quadrant technology was used to monitor the manager. But in another context (the store), the manager used the quadrant to monitor the staff. Technology use across space was always complex and always dependent upon its context.

Subsequent research, therefore, should aim to widen the context. Other workplaces and other superstores from other companies remain beyond the bounds of this research. It would be interesting to relate how similar retailing technologies are used in different places and firms. Retailing has also adopted and adapted a range of contemporary ICTs that are not the focus of this research. Subsequent researchers may also wish to pay further attention to the use of these technologies. The case study store used a series of general company applications, concentrating upon management, stock control and pricing, that would be found in most large grocery superstores. Despite the retail industry being primarily a user of tried and tested technology (Technology Foresight, 1997), the potential for increased efficiency could result in the justification of new applications in the future (Reynolds, 1997). The Internet is increasingly being used by large retailers in attempts to control the product supply-chain and to create electronic marketplaces (see Malone et al, 1987), or online trading hubs, to unite buyers and sellers within the retail industry. These marketplaces offer online purchasing facilities and these technologies may become integral to large retail firms' purchasing strategies. Attempts to control the supply-chain in this manner could lead to changes in stock ordering and price control at the store level. To these ends, work around the utilisation of ICTs remains essential. Specific attention should be given to a wider detailing of the technologies in use throughout the different areas of retailing and an appreciation of their intended (and unintended) uses across the spaces of the industry. Similar in-depth, qualitative techniques could be used. However, the researcher could also make use of focus group techniques to gain various responses from a collective of retailers with similar experiences.

However, this research has shown that while context is vital, we also must consider how the social relates to the technical in heterogeneous networks (how humans and non-humans are entwined). Callon (1991) gave the example of an apprenticeship, where the inevitable utilisation of a technical object may not necessarily equate with the designer's original intentions. In the case study retail workplace, technology was continually interpreted, deconstructed and inserted back into its context. For example, the operation of stock control systems required specialist knowledge. Products were

scanned on the shop-floor using a bar-code reader and this data was then downloaded into the stock control system, and the back office workers checked to ensure that new orders were being automatically generated. Rather than simply managing this system however, stock control workers regularly had to solve problems:

> We're constantly looking up different products in the system and seeing what data the computer's got and just changing if we feel it's necessary.
>
> (Chris, supervisor)

Human interaction then was vital. And in practice, as Callon (1991) suggested, the world (particularly the service sector) is filled with hybrids, where it is difficult to distinguish between the human and non-human. Callon explained how 'Mr Smith's package holiday' was a mixture of humans, non-humans, texts and financial products that had been put together in a precise sequence. The same was true in the retail superstore. For Mr Smith to buy his potatoes through the case study superstore, the farmer, transport systems, supply-chain technology, price check, stock control, checkouts, and workers all had to be aligned. Inevitably, space – and the heterogeneous networks of humans and non-humans - had to be controlled for Mr Smith to receive his good. For the retail company, this meant attempting to control space from afar.

To this end, other retail researchers should direct their interest towards how power relations work across space, such that certain actors determine the space of others from afar. The case study superstore echoed Foucault's (1977) Panoptic conception. Power was exercised and individuals self-regulated through the institutional organisation of space. Disciplinary power was exercised in the store through constant surveillance. The use of ICTs meant workers (whether in the back office or front office) were under the ever-watchful gaze of a 'perfect eye'. Not knowing when they were being watched, but always assuming that they were, workers could be disciplined so their bodies were more useful for capitalist exploitation. Through the quadrant, and its associated mainframe technologies, the centralised head office could monitor store management performance from afar. The head office could gaze in and view the senior manager's performance at any stage. But the manager would not know when and had to assume that they were always being viewed:

you've got a lot of balls to juggle. It's very difficult to keep that quadrant all on a green.

<div align="right">(Kate, senior manager)</div>

'In a nutshell', the store manager's job was to ensure that that the company achieved all the measures on the quadrant through the people in the store, particularly her other senior managers. Each senior team member held responsibility for a particular sector of the quadrant and was aware that that their day-to-day performance was/could be monitored via the quadrant:

> eventually, everything we do will be driven by the system, the quadrant.

<div align="right">(Vicky, senior manager)</div>

The quadrant wasn't the only technology used to monitor worker activity. Department manager Kevin, for example, stated that he could use price check technology in the back-offices of the store to monitor shop-floor activity. For this reason, helping yourself to company profits at the checkouts was unlikely to be successful. The exercise of disciplinary power within the store meant that the checkout operators were always monitored in the back-office and any irregularities noted. From this process of monitoring an appropriate strategy was enacted:

> We can pull off the back office equipment, who's signed on what checkout from when until when. So if it's a particular lane, we'll pull off who's been signed for that time period and we will speak to them. We can more or less pinpoint (any irregularities) if we go back through the journal role.

<div align="right">(Kevin, department manager)</div>

Therefore, the company attempted to control space for the production of profit. From the centralised head office, down to the senior management at the store, and on to the back-office workers manning in-store ICT systems, the case study company workers were expected to determine the space of other actors from afar. Law (1986) refers to this as 'remote control', where heterogeneous socio-technologies (such as the quadrant or the price check system) are used to be monitor and act upon the periphery. Other researchers should 'observe' whether this is the case across retail. The option to use

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other methods, such as observation and participation observation, might allow the researcher to provide alternative accounts of control.

Our research has already shown that 'control from afar' is not the full story though. As Whatmore and Thorne (1997) believed, Law's concept of 'remote control' was enshrined within a tight geometric vocabulary (global and local, or core acting upon a periphery). And despite the retail company's attempts to control space, certain actors within the network are always more or less connected than others. So instead of a tightly constrained terminology (which only considers a head office core and outlying stores), retail geographers must consider Latour's (1987) geography of flows, where agents are only more or less connected.

As Latour (1993) might have asked, is the retail superstore IT system global or local? The answer from this research would suggest it is neither. Local stores use ICT to access human resource records, sales information and mailing systems. Retail technology at the local store is also global, because it connects a store in Sheffield to head offices in the South East and out across a network to other stores throughout the Western World. However, the system is in no way universal. The search for profit dictates that stores are built in certain localities, regions and nations (see Section 4.1). Other localities, regions and nations are deemed uncompetititive and are denied entry to the network. However, localities, regions and nations with stores also find that participation is uneven. While some workers use and adapt technology (management workers, key back-office staff), other workers have little or no access to technology (shelf-fillers, trolley handlers) - and their only interaction with technology is to be monitored. Therefore, 'gaps' do appear (after Latour, 1993), and rather than being an all-encompassing, sleek surface, the technological retail network only includes 'a few scattered elements'. For this reason then, future researchers should always consider other actors that have slipped between the gaps. This research has concentrated upon ICT-utilising workers in one particular store – so the scope of extension is clear.

Future research could consider the implications of these findings outside the large grocery supermarket sector. Crewe (2000) highlights how different spaces of consumption have become increasingly important components of new work within the field. Alternative variables for consideration include smaller supermarkets, discounter chains, the shopping mall, the town-centre shopping experience, home shopping and the Internet and inconspicuous consumption spaces, such as the car boot sale (see Crewe and Gregson, 1998). In addition, given the ICT-based interests of the research, the case

study store was selected because it was viewed as being at the 'cutting-edge' of food retail developments. Repeat interviews could analyse the emergence of new ICTs in the workplace and their interpretation within the work-space. Follow-up projects could also consider retail stores (both large and small) which continued trading, without the utilisation of ICTs. Attention could also be directed away from store-based relationships. Interviews with head office staff could add an additional layer of analysis. Subsidiary interviews could be sought with regional directors, supply chain institutions and the companies that provide and maintain the ICTs. It should be also recognised that an analysis of the work processes within another food-selling superstore (either singularly or comparatively) could produce very different results.

However, while Otherness remains important, the case study research has shown that it should be conceptualised in relation to wider spatial relations. The networked ICT-utilising retail workplace remains our focus of interest. Yet by studying this space alone, we should not assume that all Others must want to be part of this space. To do so would assume a position of enfranchisement (after Lee and Brown, 1994). Inevitably, it was found that despite the ultimate aims of powerful retail capitalists, workers had their own strategies of power that shaped networked space. And for this reason, it is important to develop an understanding of how networks of socio-technical relations fail. Therefore, this research project began to illustrate the struggles involved in drawing together the networked retail space in a single account (after Hetherington and Law, 2000). So as was stated above, while Chapters 4 and 5 highlighted a broad correspondence with Freathy's (1993) segmented framework, the first section of Chapter 6 illustrated that the power relationships of dictation, delegation and authority were inherent to the successful working practices of the ICT-utilising retail workplace. However, these working practices also highlighted a series of workplace tensions and a potential breakdown of worker relations. For example, the autonomy of the senior management team had to be viewed within the context of centralised dictation. As has been stated earlier, head office could use ICTs such as the quadrant and mainframe systems to monitor management and store performance from afar. However, the store manager realised that she could 'cheat' the system and improve head office readings of the store:

> as a store manager, you could fudge your figures with some of the measures. So for example, with the customer satisfaction index, we survey our customers and

... if you think about human nature, are you going to approach a customer that's looking as grumpy as hell and ask them for some research? You're probably not.

(Kate, senior manager)

Network 'failure' was not confined to primary sector employees. Clerical workers conceded authority above Freathy's (1993) expectations for a secondary worker, used their power for the unauthorised manipulation of system information. For example, price check operators would negotiate departmental problems in unity and resist criticism through a careful manipulation of the situation. Staff would 'cover each other' and would inevitably criticise departmental technology:

But sometimes ... we blame the computer. You know, 'I don't understand why it's there.' It's a useful get out clause.

(Simon, clerical)

As Murdoch suggests then (1998: 363), there is some scope for negotiation in formalised network spaces: 'that is, actors can carve out for themselves a degree of autonomy from the network prescriptions.' Spaces of attempted capitalist domination and worker negotiation can 'shade' into one another and, as such, different spaces (in our study, spaces of dictation, delegation, authority, manipulation and resistance) can emerge from within the same network. Other researchers should now pay similar attention to these different spaces in retail (and other service) workplaces. By focussing on these spaces, we may begin to understand more about the spatiality of service industries and the varied power relations that are inherent to the network spaces produced through the use of heterogeneous ICTs.

Performance and display

As in any productive service space, the workers of the case study superstore were expected to undertake particular activities. In addition to the simple segmentation of activities identified in Chapters 4 and 5, these roles required strategies of performance and display. Some of these strategies were set by the company in its attempts to produce an effective and profitable space. Other strategies were created by individual

workers. And the spaces of performance and display within the store were consequently jointly constructed by the company and its employees.

The following spaces of performance and display (including flexible role-playing; temporary authority; masculinising 'feminine skills'; tactics and masquerades; and different roles for different social encounters) were identified through the selected form of in-depth qualitative interviewing. However, subsequent research could concentrate on observational and participant observation techniques in an attempt to identify similar retailing spaces. Observational notes could be used to identify evidence of performance and display and to suggest where possible areas of contestation might occur. Participant observation, alongside the creative use of field diaries, could provide an additional way to explicate relationships of performance and display in the retail workplace. Actual immersion in the social setting might allow the participant to understand workplace vocabularies and hidden activities (Bryman, 2001). It is hoped that the following retail workplace geographies of performance and display will provide the basis for such an exposition.

In-store role flexibility meant workers were often required to learn enough pieces to be able to 'fill in' and perform any role (after Goffman, 1956). Arthur, for example, was contracted as a stock control assistant on the night-shift but due to the sales-based ordering system closing for six hours, he helped out 'wherever possible on a night-fill.' Sales assistant Joe, meanwhile, covered an incredibly broad range of positions:

Working on the checkouts obviously, serving the customers, customer service skills, bag-packing for customers, I do everything really, I'm a 'Jack of all trades'. I work at the garage sometimes, grocery, customer service desk, produce.

(Joe, sales assistant)

Flexibility was not confined to secondary sector workers. At certain times, supervisors were also expected to 'perform' the department manager role, where they held temporary authority either at the front-end or in the back-office. However, they spent the majority of their time fulfilling the role of other secondary workers within their departments. And the temporary nature of their management performance created workplace tensions. In particular, supervisors found it difficult to negotiate temporary authority through front-end and back-office secondary workers, and they were also

frustrated when forced to abandon their responsibilities as their department managers returned.

Performances in the case study workplace, however, were not only dictated by the roles set out around segmented company activities. Retailing as a form of service employment is traditionally associated with the enactment of 'feminine skills', such as an eagerness to please the customer (after Leidner, 1991). Leidner claimed that these attributes could be incompatible with a male workforce's enactment of gender and masculinity's association with toughness and detachment. Leidner (1991), Morgan and Knights (1991) and McDowell and Court (1994) found that males employed in the service workplace often stressed the manliness of their employment and re-interpreted the feminine aspects of their work as 'honourable'. Male workers in the case study store also masculinised service work. As if performing in the role of a high-pressure businessman, senior manager Robin was keen to stress how he responded to daily issues within the store. He declared that he delegated most responsibilities to department managers. And as a 'practical' problem solver, his daily management of the wages department took place at a 'higher level':

> if you've got any red light or amber lights, that's your spur to action because you've got a problem … and you need to get there and be practical and deal with it before it turns into a big one … Where my real involvement comes in is tracking the higher level picture, which is how the store wage budget is performing … So mine's a fairly higher level sort of view of it.
>
> (Robin, senior manager)

Masculinising and re-interpreting work as honourable wasn't just confined to the senior team. Stressing honour though a purposeful sense of self-denial, clerical worker Simon expressed how his work provided a sense of 'well-being':

> my Mrs says she'd love a job like mine. She thinks it's a big glamorous job and I don't think it is. My older brother is a brewer for Whitbread's, which is quite a responsible job, but he sees it as a big glamorous job. My younger brother works on trolleys and he sees it as a fairly glamorous job.
>
> (Simon, clerical)

If all else failed, men would resort to the tried-and-tested technique of a good old 'lads' night out'. As Morgan and Knights (1991) and McDowell and Court (1994) had previously found, men used such techniques to masculinise the 'feminine' space of the service workplace. In the case study store, sales assistant Farhan implied that the transition from a mixture of men and women to all men in his department had sponsored a 'guys' culture. The obligatory 'lads night out' was taking place soon – and it wasn't hard to see why fellow female workers, such as Lindsey, viewed company nights out with disdain.

The research also highlighted a final element of male attempts to masculinise the 'feminine' retail work-space. As Thrift (1998) suggested in his work on soft capitalism, there was a new discourse as a background hum to the processes of the retail business world. Senior manager Robin, as stressed above, was particularly keen to highlight how his job required him to perform in the role of a high-pressured businessman. He used a masculinised discourse of business metaphor to accompany this performance:

> I get a kick out of all the things that we talked about earlier which is dealing with people, a fast-paced environment, responsibility at an early age and so on
>
> (Robin, senior manager)

Thrift's theory of soft capitalism also suggests that managers need to become skilled in change management to handle the 'fast pace' of contemporary business processes. Like good 'change managers', members of the case study senior team were preparing themselves for change through further courses in higher education. One member of the senior management team (Vicky) had recently completed an MSc in Human Resource Management and Robin had just completed a post-graduate diploma in personnel management, finished on day release from the company. For Robin, Sheffield was simply the latest stage in his master plan:

> it's the brand new design concept and because of all that, it's very high profile. So as a career move, it's a good one because you've still got a lot of contact with directors and a lot of people keep their eye on the store.
>
> (Robin, senior manager)

For senior management then, individual performers revelled in the opportunity to stage a display in the continuing gaze of head office. If a senior manager made a good performance in the Sheffield store, they could be selected by head office to move into a store management position.

For non-senior team members, the staging of a display held different connotations. Crang (1994) found that individual performers in restaurants staged a display that combined tactics and manoeuvres (hiding from the management gaze) and masquerades (appearing to do what one is not). Both these forms of display were also inherent to the everyday performances of the case study workforce. First, certain workers, such as park and ride worker Joe and warehouse man Nick, said that their spaces of enforced isolation created a barrier from the management gaze. As freezer man Roger stated, 'You can really hide from people in minus twenty-four situations.' Secondly, masquerades were an essential part of retail work – particularly in the back office. Back office supervisor Chris said that working with ICTs allowed him to create a cover for his masquerade:

> I can come in and doss for six hours, work for two hours and then go home … Because there's a lot of freedom in my job. The system takes care of most of it and then really we're only there for the last twenty percent and if it's not done, you won't get caught.
>
> (Chris, supervisor)

One other key tactic was also inherent to the retail superstore. Many workers claimed they could become easily 'bored' with their work. For these workers, tactics that could help create a personal resistance to boredom were essential. For example, store workers were prepared to take on supervisory positions for no extra remuneration as a strategy for resisting boredom. Shelly, for example, suggested that she would have been 'bored to tears sat on a checkout for thirty-six and a half hours'. Other secondary workers were keen to take on extra training and task rotation to resist boredom.

Despite individual feelings of boredom, certain customer-facing positions demanded the display of a personable attitude and a top-quality performance. Crang (1994) discovered that 'putting on a performance' was inherent to the restaurant workplace and waiters and waitresses played different roles depending on the social encounter (for example, lads or middle class snobs). This was a particular issue for the

retail store's customer service workers who would have to deal with refunds, exchanges, complaints and enquiries. Claire employed her own personal strategy for deciding which performance was going to be required:

> you just really have to use you own judgement if that's going to be an awkward customer or if the customer's quite happy with just getting a refund.
>
> (Claire, sales assistant)

Such constant performances in the public-eye can be tiring work because the retail worker has to co-ordinate self and feeling so that their work appears effortless (Hochschild, 1983). Inevitably, front-end retail workers can become alienated from their smiles, as the part of their performance that is essential to their job. One worker, for example, said that checkout work drove her 'crazy'. For this reason Joe was happy to be used in a supervisory capacity, where he used a CB radio and bleeper, giving change to staff:

> it's basically more interesting than sitting on a checkout all day. You get to do different things and you've got that element of trust really as well.
>
> (Joe, sales assistant)

External social relations: geographies of gender and age

External power relations also structured the superstore labour market. Following Jamie Peck (1996), social context and the spatiality of labour relations were vital. Labour control was not just dependent upon the demands of the employer – control was also dependent upon the consent of the workforce and the social context to which their employment relations were embedded. By looking 'over the factory gate', we therefore saw a series of external social relationships that were inscribed into the spatiality of the superstore workplace (after Lefebvre, 1991).

Gender relations in the case study store were constructed in the relationship between work and home (after Massey, 1984). Relationships from one space often dictated the course of social relations in the other. As Sparks (1987) suggested, flexible hours of retailing did suit some women workers. Single mother Ruth changed her hours

from night to day shifts, incurring a movement from a back office to checkout role, so that she could provide care for her daughter.

For other women, 'real' work provided relief from housework and an opportunity to develop social networks (after Holloway, 1998). Because of feelings of guilt, Holloway (1998) said that mothers often found it difficult to discuss wanting a break from their children. The same was not true here. Workers, such as Jessica and Shelly below, talked openly about their need for relief. Other researchers then should note the extent to which mothers use the flexibility of retailing (and service work) as a break from the home-space. For example, clerical worker Jessica said her job got her 'into a different environment and away from the dull environment' of the home. She said domestic conversation dropped to the level of her young daughter and she revelled in the opportunity to resist family contact:

> You know, he goes out with the lads every Thursday, he's done it for donkey's years and that's his way out. And he does Bonsai Trees and that's his other outlet, you know, he can sit for hours playing with his trees. Mine seemed to be doing the housework, menial tasks, go to bed and get up. And now I go to work for two days and it breaks up my week completely and I still have my grown-up days and my children days. Once you're away from your front door and you've closed it, your environment's different.
>
> (Jessica, clerical)

Supervisory worker Shelly, meanwhile, used the flexibility of the superstore's working hours to break her attachment to domestic labour. Rather than 'have Saturday off and spend it cleaning and cooking' for her husband and children, Shelly took a day off in the week to 'make time' for herself.

The flexibility of the retailing workplace allowed some employees to ensure that gender relations between the work and home space were constructed to their consent. In addition to relief (a break from the home space), retail flexibility was used by, and affected, workers' external lives in a number of ways. These included (see below): temporary childcare; inconvenient hours for relationships; progression and promotion; job desirability against revenue; and the benefit system and the standard of living. Further qualitative studies should note the replication of these relationships in other retail and service workplaces. Repeat interviews could test, using similar research

methods, whether the same relationships occur at different time intervals. Small focus groups studies, on the other hand, would allow workers to reflect upon the workplace/home-space balance and generate their own questions, interests and vocabularies (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). We turn first to temporary childcare.

As Holloway (1998) found in earlier research in Sheffield, some working parents' children were cared for informally by family and friends. However, Jessica felt uncomfortable even doing this – preferring instead to squeeze her four shifts into two longer day shifts so that she could draw minimal assistance from her extended family. Some female workers worked the night-shift and reduced contact with their partners so that they could spend the day with their children. Such strategies were used to ensure that their children were not placed in temporary childcare.

Other workers were not so lucky. The flexibility of retail hours also clashed with some workers' partners' hours. For example, clerical worker Jennifer was beginning to become annoyed by the fact that she worked late nights and weekends and her partner did not. Such issues became increasingly apparent as workers were promoted through the ranks. It was generally recognised that flexibility and 'understanding' were a prerequisite to company progression. However, a preparedness to work long hours and move around the country did not sit comfortably against the external social relationships of some lower-tier primary workers. And as such, these workers recognised that their options for promotion would have to be placed on hold.

Despite the supposed inherent flexibility of the retail labour market (Freathy and Sparks, 1996), we have already seen above that some workers believed that their hours clashed with familial domestic 'responsibilities'. Rose (1993) found that female workers demanded more flexibility with regards to work and childcare options so that they didn't have to take undesirable jobs. And some women in the research believed that there was a stigma attached to retail work. Unlike the men in the previous section who re-interpreted retail work as 'masculine', their work was not seen to offer proof of their female identity (Leidner, 1991). Sales assistant Ruth worked part-time and claimed her job was important because she didn't want to claim off the state for everything. Although better paid now than in her previous position as a receptionist she felt embarrassed to admit to people that she worked on a superstore checkout.

However, work in the superstore could also bring a much-needed source of revenue and pride. The insertion of a new service-based division of labour in Sheffield, a city suffering from long-term unemployment, provided new sources of employment

for men. Some men suggested that the job, rather than the embarrassment often associated with service work the in performance literature (see Leidner, 1991), had provided a sense of pride. After struggling to find work after being laid off by an engineering firm, Nick suggested that the superstore had given him a new opportunity:

> I enjoy it. I couldn't stick in the house all the time, going to town every bloody day and window shopping and seeing the same people
>
> (Nick, sales assistant)

Once in work, employees could also take advantage of in-house promotion schemes. 'Options' meetings were held within the store to present opportunities for progression into store management. For some workers though, the 'Options' for promotion appeared greater than for others. Departmental managers were keen to take advantage of in-store training programmes. Several secondary worker females with school-age children recognised that childcare responsibilities hampered their opportunities for progression. The effect of children on career decisions was not confined to secondary sector workers though. Store manager Kate was aware of opportunities to progress within the company but was happy to 'consolidate' in Sheffield over the next few years while her children remained young.

To some extent though, Kate was lucky. As McDowell (1997) found, professionals were able to make choices about when and where to work. For secondary workers in the case study store, 'choices' depended on which jobs they were willing (or had) to accept. Some employees worked unsociable hours because of the night premium. In clerical worker Arthur's case, he stated that this income provided a higher standard of living for his family. Other workers purposefully restricted their hours to not clash with additional benefits income. Sale assistant Ruth resisted taking extra hours or overtime because she was scared that additional pay would deprive her family of its credit entitlement. Fellow sales assistant Roger, on the other hand, was above the family credit limit. He had considered withdrawing from the labour market to receive credit but believed that he stood a better chance of getting a 'proper' job if he was in work.

What is really required then, is an increased attention to the variability of social character and the strategies workers engage (and bring with them) as they enter the workplace. Further research could attempt to build from this analysis through a more

specific form of questioning around some of the key social concerns raised through this research. For example, subsequent research could dwell upon the home in an attempt to gain more specific data about domestic relationships and particular local conditions. As well as the importance of local economic history, the researcher could scrutinise company policy, trade union activity and government regulation (both local and national) in an attempt to find more specific explanations for the relationship between gender, home and the workplace.

In addition to gender and home, workers' external social relations are also affected by geographies of age. And few geographers have attempted to unravel the meaning and spatial representations of age (Harper and Laws, 1995). Harper and Laws (1995) suggest increased attention to political economy and the relationship between labour demand and age. The retail workplace demanded flexibility from its workers. Certain employees' status (for example, students) allowed a degree of flexibility. However, attempts to categorise workers into neat, generic groups were thwarted by individual strategies. This research has shown that 'the young' and 'the old' are not all-inclusive bands that can be applied to the retail workforce. People of all ages have their own strategies for working which contrast with and contest stereotypical age-based assumptions and company expectations.

A group of 'young' students worked at the store. In comparison to the secondary workers whose employment provided financial survival, these workers wanted money for clothes, travelling and going out. Clerical worker Jennifer echoed the thoughts of others when she said, 'it's not something I want to do forever.' Education was a priority – and Martin and Farhan used the retail environment to work flexible hours around their lecture timetable. However, the postmodern life course (see Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991) teaches us that the life cycle is not linear and ages vary between time and place. 'Young' is not a generic term and not all workers use retailing for a source of part-time revenue. Twenty-four year-old part-time sales assistant Claire, for example, stated that she was being denied full-time work by the store's decision to not take any more full-time staff. The company's desire for flexibility was costing her full-time entitlements, such as share options and longer holiday.

So the meaning of age within the retail space, rather than being linear and divided into a simple life cycle (young, middle-aged, old), is actually ever-changing. Other retail researchers would be well-advised to take these considerations into account. In a similar way, older workers were keen to stay active and contribute to the workforce.

Back office worker Roy had been made redundant from his previous job at 58. After being out of work for six months, he was given a job in the store on security. Similarly to Mowl et al's (2000) findings, Roy resisted spending time at home because it accelerated old age. In addition, Mansvelt (1997) found that the social interaction associated to 'work' was often more satisfying than the activity itself. For secondary worker Maggie, the social activity was an essential aspect of the workplace experience. She said she met new friends and joined in social activities through the store. Other researchers should take note and appreciate that external social relations make a difference. Looking 'over the factory gate' to consider geographies of the home and age helps explain the social space of the retail workplace.

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Appendix 1: Question schedule for the first interviews

	Employment
	Could you first define your own role?
1	*(How long have you been here? Where did you come from?)*
2	How many people do you employ? *(Part-time/full-time? Male/female? Students/Over 50s? Ethnic minorities? Seasonal employment?)*
3	What are the different types of task within the store? *(Does the use of shift-working affect these tasks?)*
4	How many people work within each task?
5	What is your recruitment policy?
6	How do you advertise and recruit for vacancies? *(Are there any differences between shop-floor and management posts?)*
7	What kind of turnover do you have within the store?
8	Have you had a regular demand for workers over the last year? *(Is this related to turnover, seasonal vacancies, new activities and the use of technology within the store?)*
9	Does your store open on a Sunday?

	Organisation
1	When did this store open?
2	How many outlets are there within Sheffield?
3	And how many are there within the region?
4	What management functions are undertaken within this store?
5	Where is the company headquarters and is there a regional office? *(What is the relationship of the store to these offices?)*

	Technology
1	What technology is used within the store? *(What is this technology used for?)*
2	How is this technology used to link your store to: a) the rest of the company *(examples and names)*? b) outside companies *(examples and names)*?
3	Who is responsible for the design and choice of technologies and their application *(examples and names)*?
4	Does you company have an IT department at its headquarters? *(Do you have an IT manager within the store?)*

	Final questions
1	Could you identify one positive aspect arising from your store's current use of technology?
2	Could you identify one problem from your store's current use of technology?
3	Could you describe how the use of technology impacts upon your role within the store?
4	What, do you feel, are the good employment practices of the company?

If required, would it be possible for me to come back to you, and your store, for the purposes of my research?

Appendix 2: Summary of responses from the first interviews[1]

	Description	Contact	Form	Staff numbers	Organisational structure	Technology used	Return
1	Large, suburban superstore	Personnel manager	Taped interview	• 360 staff, turnover 15% • 80% part-time / 80% female	• Structure - managers, dept. managers, supervisors, shop-floor	• EPOS, PC, e-mail and mainframe	Yes
2	High-street store (clothes)	Store manager	Taped interview	• 50 staff • Predominantly female	• 2 other members of management	• EPOS & internal admin. • E-mail	Yes
3	High-street store (clothes)	Store manager	Taped interview	• 65 staff • Predominantly female	• 2 other members of management	• EPOS & internal admin.	Yes
4	Small, suburban supermarket	Personnel manager	Taped interview	• 110 staff & 3 managers - 80 part-time, 78 females	• Managers in-store - store, personnel, trading and section managers	• EPOS, E-mail and mainframe • PC (for the last 4 months)	Yes
5	Small supermarket	Personnel manager	Taped interview	• 103 staff • 70% part-time	• Small hierarchy - just senior staff, dept. managers & shop-floor	• EPOS, PC, e-mail	Yes
6	Large chemist in shopping centre	Personnel manager	Taped interview	• 150 (250 at Christmas) - but also 30 agency staff	• Management structures vary depending on the size of the store	• EPOS, PC and e-mail	Yes
7	High-street newsagent	Store manager	Taped interview	• 60 (75 at Christmas) • 10% perm. / 10% male	• Structure - store manager, 2 customer service managers & shop-floor	• EPOS, PC and e-mail	Yes
8	Large superstore in out-of-town shopping centre	Recruitment admin. manager	Taped interview	• 704 staff & 42 managers • 407 part-time, female • 100 Xmas temps	• Structure - store director; senior, dept, support and trainee managers; team leaders; staff (graded from 1-5)	• Windows '95 on PC, EPOS, E-mail and mainframe	Yes
9	High-street chemist	Personnel manager	Taped interview	• approx. 120 staff • 18 Xmas staff, 20 males	• Structure - manager, senior staff, supervisor, assistant supervisors & staff	• EPOS, PC, e-mail, mainframe	Maybe
10	Large, suburban superstore	Personnel manager	Non-taped interview	• 435 staff - 102 full-time, 189 part-time & 71 students	• Structure - manager, senior staff, dept. managers, assist. managers, clock-paid supervisors and shop-floor	• EPOS and e-mail • No PC in the manager's office	Yes
11	Large, central superstore	Human resources	Non-taped interview	• 292 staff - 2% full-time • No seasonal employment	• Structure - manager, senior team, controller and assistant controllers	• IBM controlled systems • E-mail	Maybe
12	Large, suburban superstore[2]	Personnel manager	Taped interview	• 320 staff - around 60% full-time & 65% female	• Structure - manager, senior team, section managers, supervisors, staff	• EPOS, PC, e-mail and mainframe	Yes
13	High-street store, clothes	Personnel manager	Postal response	• 147 part-time, 35 full-time & 90% male	• Structure - general manager, deputy manager, senior team & shop-floor	• EPOS, PC and mainframe	Maybe
14	Small, suburban supermarket	Personnel manager	Postal response	• 155 staff - 121 part-time, 98 female and 37% turnover	• Management structure - store manager, senior functions & staff	• EPOS, PC, e-mail and mainframe	-

[1] This information is only provided in note form and staff numbers, organisational structures and technology details are provided as a rough guide to each store.

[2] Selected as the case study superstore.

Appendix 3: Qualitative sampling matrix for the case study store

	Senior managers[1]	Section managers	Admin.	Warehouse	Price check	Stock control	Customer service	Checkout operators	'Flexible' workers	Others
Day Full-time Male	Robin (Personnel)	Kevin (Checkout)		Nick	Simon	Chris		Joe		Gary (Meat) Roy (Security)
Day Full-time Female	Kate (Manager) Vicky (Customer) Lucy (Trading)	Diane (Checkout) Melanie (Checkout) Catherine (Training) Fiona (Stock)	Barbara (Wages) Lindsey (Cash) Nicola[2] (Reception)		Jennifer	Pamela	Sarah	Shelly[3]		Tina (Garage)
Day Part-time Male						Steven	Martin	William		Farhan (Ambient) Roger (Frozen)
Day P/T Female			Jessica (Reception)		Ruth			Claire[4]	Maggie	
Night F/T Male						Arthur				Ian (Ambient)
Night Full-time Female										Karen Mary (Ambient)

[1] On demand, senior team members (and section managers) are also expected to undertake night-shift responsibilities.

[2] When interviewed, Nicola asserted that she actually fulfilled a checkout-based role.

[3] When interviewed, Shelly asserted that she actually fulfilled a reception-based role.

[4] When interviewed, Claire declared that she spent a large proportion of her time on the customer service desk.

Appendix 4: Question schedule for the case study interviews

	Closed questions
	Closed questions
1	Sex?
2	Age?
3	Ethnic origin?
4	Registered disabled?
5	Where do you live *(postcode)*?
6	Did you move to the area for the purposes of the job?
7	At what age did you leave school?
8	Do you have a degree?
9	Are you currently undertaking any study?
10	What is your job title?
11	What tasks do you do within the store? *(Using what technology?)*
12	Are you a member of a union?

	Open questions
	Open questions
1	When did you start working with the company? *(Doing what role?)* *(Have you been promoted since you've been here?)*
2	Did you work anywhere before? *(Why did you leave your last job?)*
3	How did you get this job? *(Why did it appeal to you?)* *(Were any of your skills (technology) useful?)*
4	For each task that you do within your job: a) what do you do? b) what issues arise? c) how is technology utilised within this task?
5	What and who are you responsible for? *(Does technology play a part in these relations?)* *(Do you have contact with any other stores?)*
6	Who do you answer to? *(Does technology play a part in these relations?)* *(Are there any specific issues surrounding surveillance / freedom?)*
7	Are you satisfied with your current conditions of work: a) pay/benefits? b) hours of work? c) tasks/responsibilities? d) use of technology?
8	How important is your job to you? *(Technology?)*
9	How important do you feel that you are to the company? *(Technology?)*
10	Why do you do your job? *(Technology?)*
11	Do you enjoy your job? *(Technology?)*
12	What do you think you'll be doing in two years time? *(Technology?)*
13	Any other points that haven't been raised that you think I need to know? *(Technology?)*

Appendix 5: Interviewee profiles

1 Farhan

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	19	Asian	None	Sheffield S8	A-levels	No	15.00

Having originally finished his A-levels in the preceding academic year, he had learnt that his final grades were insufficient to secure a place at the University of Liverpool to study dentistry. He had then applied to the store because of his requirement for extra money whilst completing his A-levels. He handed in his CV and within a week had been given a job. He started work at the superstore in November 1997 and although initially given a temporary Christmas contract, his position was inevitably made permanent. He had previously undertaken a Saturday-job in a small but basic supermarket. He asserted that this had provided valuable experience but his interaction with technology during his previous job had been minimal.

2 Steven

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	20	White	None	Sheffield S11	GNVQs & BTEC	Yes USDAW	19.00

Following his original interview, he was told that no suitable positions were available and that his name would be kept on file. However, the subsequent night, he was contacted by phone and offered employment. He had consequently worked for the company since the opening of the store. He had previously been working as a barman and was bored with his vocation. However, he did suggest that the product and customer care skills of his previous job were useful within the retail workplace. He also said that his computing knowledge emanated from PC-based interaction at college.

3 Arthur

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	44	White	None	Worksop	Ended at 16	No	36.30

After leaving school, he completed a two-year general catering course in Sheffield. He subsequently moved into hotel management and finished a two-year training course with a group of privately owned hotels. He then fulfilled various roles within a number of hotels before becoming assistant manager of a small hotel in Buckinghamshire. Following this, he joined a major restaurant owner and worked for the organisation for eight years. He progressed from assistant manager to manager and inevitably ran a steakhouse in the centre of Bradford. However, having managed to turn the steakhouse into a profitable business, the corporation sold the restaurant to a brewery and he was made redundant. At this juncture, he made a switch into retailing. Having started as a trainee manager with a large retailer, he worked his way through to store manager. The company employed him for eleven years, until August 1995, when a particular area manager, with whom he had personal difficulties, dismissed him. Accusations were made against him, including misappropriation of stock and gross misconduct. He went to a tribunal of unfair dismissal and the barrister concluded that the company was 75% in the wrong. He was offered his job back but declined and, after being unemployed for about 15 months, gained a position at the superstore prior to store-opening.

4 Ruth

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	40	White	None	Sheffield S8	Ended at 16	No	16.00

Having left school, she entered a dental hospital as a dental nurse and then went into a private practice for two years. However, poor remuneration sponsored her application to an engineering firm and after a series of promotions, she became a buyer for the foundry. She was the only female employed in full administration and, alongside a software company, was responsible for the introduction of a full computer system. Unfortunately, illness after pregnancy led her to leave the labour market for thirty-six months. During this time, her buyer-contacts dissipated and her position within the

engineering firm disappeared. She finally gained employment in an estate agency via a European and Governmental 'back to work' scheme. However, poor pay led her to look for other employment. Having seen an advertisement, she applied for office work within the store and was told that no jobs were available. Nevertheless, she was subsequently contacted, following the withdrawal of another individual, and was offered a position within the price-check department. She worked for the company from store-opening and fulfilled part-time hours. However, she asserted that her hours were inappropriate to her personal circumstances and she consequently moved to checkouts to avoid night work.

5 William

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	30	White	None	Sheffield S5	Unfinished degree	Yes USDAW	18.00

He started a degree in Psychology at Sheffield Hallam University but had to leave after a year because of financial complications. He subsequently felt disillusioned and wished to return to education. For the three years prior to his degree, he had completed various schemes and studied several subjects at college before opting to start his degree course. In reference to his current position at the superstore, and following a series of failed applications, he had remained in his entry position and, due to his desire to study, was not aiming for promotion.

6 Lindsey

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	28	White	None	Sheffield S7	Ended at 16	No - she left	36.30

She had previously worked for a block manufacturer, undertaking telephone work, receiving sales, quoting prices and dispatching orders. Having subsequently travelled around the world for two years, she wanted to return to work in a similar field. After seeing an advertisement in a local paper, she started working for the company (on a three-month contract) at the recruitment office in the town centre (whilst the company recruited people for the store-opening). She was then offered a position in the cash

office. Since taking a position in the store, she had not been promoted and had no desire for elevation.

7 Nick

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	23	White	None	Sheffield S14	City & Guilds	Yes USDAW	36.30

After leaving college, he trained as an engineer through a company apprenticeship. However, he was laid off after six months because of falling demand. He then finished his course at college but could not find alternative employment. Therefore, when the position at the superstore became available, he chose to switch career direction. He started working for the company when the store opened. Having seen the range of jobs advertised, he applied for the position of fresh-food stock controller but was told he would be best-suited to a position in the warehouse. However, he stated that he inevitably aimed to return to college, and engineering, in an attempt to 'better himself'.

8 Maggie

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	46	White	None	Sheffield S8	Ended at 15	Yes USDAW	18.15

She started working in the store at the beginning of 1998. For the preceding eleven years, she had worked in a local greengrocer's shop. This employment ended when the owner retired. Although upset, she claimed that this culmination of employment provided her with the opportunity to start afresh. She asserted that she had consequently become desperate to obtain employment and her son, who was already working in the store, asked the management about potential vacancies. Having been alerted to the possibility of employment, she was called for an interview and given work. She claimed that some of the experience from her previous employment had been useful, particularly with regards to customer rapport. However, the vast difference in scale between the greengrocer's and the case study superstore, including the use of technology, had obligated a considerable period of acclimatisation.

9 Jennifer

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	24	White	None	Sheffield S11	History degree	No	36.30

She had recently completed a four year degree in Edinburgh and moved to follow her partner, who was completing PhD research in Sheffield. She had seen the company's advertisement in a local newspaper and then attended a store open day. She subsequently applied for an administrative job and started working with the company when the store opened.

10 Joe

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	20	White	None	Sheffield	City & G's and BTEC	No	36.30

He left school at 16 and then completed a City and Guilds in recreation and leisure and a BTEC at college in Ilkley. He chose not to go to university and moved to Sheffield after travelling in the Middle East for 10 months. He moved to Sheffield because there was a spare room available in his sister's rented house. When looking for work, he applied to the case study organisation because he had worked part-time for the company whilst at college. With regards to his return, he had originally been told that there were no vacancies within the store. However, the store inevitably required temporary part-time staff over the Christmas period. Store management contacted one of his housemates who stated that the offered hours of work were unsuitable. However, the housemate recommended Joe and he was subsequently offered a job.

11 Pamela

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	36	White	None	Sheffield S18	Pre-nursing course	Yes USDAW	36.30

She started working for the company ten years ago at another Sheffield branch. However, after five years, she became bored and changed her career direction. She

consequently worked in Sheffield Children's Hospital for two years. She exhibited regret when referring to her return to the company. However, she asserted that she had become divorced from her husband and had made a decision to return to a comfortable working environment that included most of her friends. She subsequently chose to move to the case study store in an attempt to increase her job-satisfaction. Whilst working for the company, she stated that she had fulfilled several different positions (part-time on the checkouts, full-time on produce, a produce supervisor, stock control assistant and price check worker).

12 Mary

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	41	White	None	Sheffield S5	Ended at 15	Yes USDAW	36.30

She first applied for a position after reading a newspaper advertisement but was told that there were no full-time vacancies. Three weeks later she received a phone-call from the produce section manager and was given a job working on the day-shift. However, she subsequently changed to the night-shift because later working hours suited her childcare responsibilities. Her previous jobs had all involved cash-handling. She spent fifteen years in vending with two different companies and was then made redundant. She then worked at two different petrol filling stations, the first for nine months and the second (to which she moved because of its closeness to her home) for three years. She left this second petrol filling station when she was offered a job at the superstore and had worked at the case study store since its opening date.

13 Chris

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	34	White	None	Sheffield S10	Unfinished degree	Yes USDAW	36.30

He failed to complete his degree and left university in 1995. He then returned to his parental home in Exeter, looked for a job and was employed by the company. He worked on produce for eight weeks before transferring to Burton on Trent as a store baker. He fulfilled that role for just over a year and then moved to Sheffield, when the

store opened, in his current role. As a baker at the Burton store, he had become a supervisor and he also fulfilled those responsibilities in the Sheffield store. He asserted that he believed that moving to the bigger store at Sheffield had enhanced his promotion prospects. In additional, his girlfriend was living in Sheffield and his parents owned a student house in Sheffield (and they allowed him to live there rent-free). He stated that he had actually wanted to become a bakery manager but was unsuccessful and was instead offered an office-based position.

14 Jessica

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	39	White	None	Sheffield S18	Ended at 16	No	15.00

She had previously worked, for about seventeen years, for a major clothes retailer in Sheffield city centre. She left to have a child but returned to discover that her departmental manager would not provide acceptable hours of work. She subsequently saw an advertisement for the new case study superstore in a local newspaper. She spoke to a manager, was invited to a bulk interview and was subsequently given employment. She claimed to have fulfilled almost every position within her previous place of work. At the case study superstore, she applied for a position in shelf-filling and checkouts but was pleased to be offered a receptionist role. She started working for the company when the store opened and had remained within the same role.

15 Roger

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	32	White	None	Sheffield S8	City and Guilds	No	18.30

His first job, after leaving school, was with a confectioner. This was followed by work on various building sites across the country. Inevitably, after a period of prolonged unemployment, he started a City and Guilds course. Whilst at college, he became interested in computing. He would have relished the opportunity to have developed this interest through further education but he asserted that a series of financial constraints prevented this transition. At the culmination of the college course, he was required to

apply for a series of jobs. Although prepared to take any work, the management eventually offered him a position in the store after a third interview. He started work on June 30th 1997 and had subsequently remained in the same role. Both he and his partner worked part-time shifts which negated the need for childcare for their young daughter. However, he asserted that he would have preferred full-time hours.

16 Barbara

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	34	Black	None	Sheffield S17	A-levels	Yes USDAW	36.30

Prior to being employed by the case study superstore, she worked for a large children's toy store in Sheffield and a major high-street bank. Whist employed by the bank, she worked in the Sheffield office, clearing cheques via computer, and then in Leeds, transferring large amounts of money via computer. She started working for the company, before the store opened in late 1996, at the company recruitment centre in Sheffield. Here, she worked on the reception desk and assisted with the processing of application forms. She was subsequently employed within the store and fulfilled part-time obligations in the laundry. After a management request, she transferred to the wages department in February 1998. She then decided to move to part-time hours to increase the contact-time with her young son. This transition also reduced her reliance upon grandparental childcare and provided an opportunity to commence a part-time Italian course. She hoped that this would inevitably lead to a subscription on a travel and tourism programme.

17 Roy

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	60	White	None	Sheffield S12	Ended at 16	-	36.30

A motor mechanic by trade, he was made redundant at 58 and feared that he would be unable to find work. His fears were intensified through his need to provide financial support for his disabled wife. However, after being out of work for six months, he saw

a newspaper advertisement and applied for one of the store's 'general vacancies' at an opening evening. After an interview, he was given a position in security.

18 Karen

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	38	White	None	Sheffield S2	Ended at 16	Yes USDAW	36.30

She had held several different jobs and was previously employed by a local electricity company. However, this was a temporary position and she was keen to take the opportunity to obtain full-time work within the case study superstore. She had previous retail experience, in a supermarket canteen and then in the bakery working nights, and she was happy to return to a comfortable working environment. She started working for the company when the store opened and had remained in the same position.

19 Shelly

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	37	White	None	Sheffield S8	Ended at 16	Yes USDAW	36.30

Having left school at sixteen, she went to work in the clerical department of another food-selling retail company. She left this position to have children and subsequently worked as an evening-shift hospital cleaner (while her children were young). She followed this role with a position in the non-technology based payroll department at a DIY store. She took voluntary redundancy after seven years as her job was being 'restructured' and because she welcomed the opportunity of a one-off payment. She then spent three months working for a catalogue-based superstore in Sheffield city centre. She left this position to join the case study company. She had originally applied to a local and smaller store but was only offered fifteen hours work per week. Instead, her application was forwarded to the case study store and she was interviewed (and then rejected) for a position at the petrol filling station. She then attended an induction event and started work when the superstore opened. She originally worked in a checkout role and subsequently moved onto reception.

20 Tina

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	42	White	None	Sheffield S8	Ended at 17	Yes USDAW	36.30

Having initially completed some training at Chesterfield, Mansfield and Nottingham, she started with this store when the petrol filling station opened (prior to the full opening of the store itself) in December 1996. Having been out of work at the time, she saw the jobs for the petrol filling station advertised in a local newspaper. Prior to this position, she had controlled her own motor spares business, worked in stock control in a motor components factory and had latterly worked in a small newsagents. She left the newsagents because of the long hours of work which fitted badly with her social life. However, she believed that the skills gained within the newsagents proved useful when dealing with the public in the superstore. In addition, her experience of computers proved helpful during her initial attempts to utilise the superstore's systems.

21 Martin

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	20	White	None	Sheffield S8	Complet-ing degree	No	11.15

He required part-time work to provide financial support through education and applied to the store after seeing an advertisement in a local newspaper. When the store opened, his first position was on checkouts and after about six months, he made the transition to the customer service desk. He was completing a degree in photography and the opportunity to use the customer service desk's photo-developing technology prompted his desire to move department.

22 Gary

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	38	White	None	Sheffield S21	Ended at 16	Yes USDAW	36.30

Before being employed by the company, he had worked for a local family butcher for eight years. The shop folded when a supermarket opened nearby and he was then unemployed for two years. During this period, he asserted that he applied for many jobs and finally secured part-time employment with the company at the Chesterfield branch. He started work three years ago as a general assistant in the meat department. He took the decision to move to Sheffield because he could take on full-time hours and could receive the meat cutter's premium.

23 Claire

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	24	White	None	Sheffield S10	Geography degree	No	25.00

After completing a degree in Geography and Environmental Science at Bradford University, she returned to her parental home in Sheffield. A university friend, who was completing the company management training scheme, alerted Claire to job vacancies at the new Sheffield store. She started working with the company when the store opened and initially intended to stay temporarily. However, as other work became more unlikely, she took the decision to move from checkouts to the customer service desk.

24 Simon

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	25	White	None	Sheffield S8	Retail course	Yes USDAW	36.30

He had previously worked in an Indian restaurant, a night-club and had left his preceding job at a hotel over a 'conflict of interests'. After being out of work for three months, he completed a retail training course. He believed that this knowledge provided him with an advantage when he applied for work at the store. He started working for

the company when the superstore opened and had subsequently remained within the same department.

25 Sarah

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	35	White	None	Sheffield S8	Ended at 16	No	36.30

Prior to working for the company, she had been a self-employed shopkeeper. Ironically, she asserted that it was stores like the case study superstore that had led to the downfall of her business. However, she did confer that the promise of a regular income, less working hours and set holidays proved very attractive. She initially, but unsuccessfully, applied for a position at the petrol filling station. Several weeks later, she attended a meeting at the company recruitment centre in Sheffield. She subsequently received a telephone call and was asked to attend an interview (based on her unsuccessful petrol filling station application). She was offered a position, closed her shop and started working with the company from store-opening as a grocery assistant. In April 1998, she saw an advertisement on the staff notice board for a customer service assistant position. She applied for the role and was selected from a final choice of three candidates.

26 Ian

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	32	White	None	Sheffield S2	Ended at 16	Yes USDAW	36.30

He applied to the store in response to a job centre advertisement and started work in the summer of 1997. Since working for the company, he had not moved department or received a promotion. Prior to working at the store, he had a series of jobs including retail work, warehouse work and cook.

27 Nicola

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	32	White	None	Sheffield S8	Ended at 16	Yes USDAW	36.30

She started working for the company five years ago. She transferred from another smaller, local store to this superstore after applying for a position through the company recruitment centre in Sheffield. She worked on the checkouts at the smaller store and was promoted to a supervisory position at the new store. In moving stores, she also changed from part-time to full-time hours because her daughter had grown up and she was bored of being at home. Whilst on part-time hours at the other store, she had also worked for ten years as a youth worker. However, she was forced to relinquish this responsibility when the case study store could not provide a set shift pattern. She asserted that this had proved disappointing and that she had to seriously consider whether the extra money from the new job could justify this personal sacrifice.

28 Kevin

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	30	White	None	Sheffield S8	Ended at 18	-	36.30

After leaving school, he worked as a builder with his father and then became a policeman for twelve months. However, he was weary of the responsibility and instead chose to move into retailing. He started working with the company at the Barnsley store in 1988. His first role was as a price check worker, followed by a promotion to price check controller. He remained in that role for seven and a half years until a reorganisation of job titles led to a new role as a checkout manager. However, he also suggested that whilst working for the company he had 'been round every department, done everything, worked all hours and been all around the business'. He finally moved to the case study store when it opened because he lived in Sheffield and he believed that he had outgrown the smaller confines of the Barnsley store.

29 Catherine

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	24	White	None	Doncaster DN4	Ended at 16	Yes USDAW	36.30

She started working for the company in 1989 immediately after she left school. The management in the Doncaster branch offered her a part-time cashier's job and within eighteen months she had become a supervisor. After a role reorganisation, she was promoted to the position of checkout manager and fulfilled that role for five years. Two years ago she decided that she wanted to become a training manager and this prompted her decision to apply to the case study store.

30 Fiona

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	27	White	None	Derbys. D55	Ended at 17	Yes USDAW	36.30

She starting working for the company in 1987 when she was still a student. She moved from checkouts onto wines and spirits, before going back onto checkouts as a checkout supervisor and finally moved onto stock control. She left Alfreton to move to the Sheffield store when it opened because of the opportunity of a better job. The case study store provided her with her first section manager's position.

31 Melanie

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	31	White	None	Sheffield S11	Ended at 15	Yes USDAW	36.30

She had previously had a series of jobs within retail (checkouts, cash office, price check and shop-floor) and, more recently, catering. She asserted that she left catering because of the monotony of the tasks and the requirements of shift-work. She subsequently wrote a speculative letter to a smaller branch within Sheffield and started working with the company seven years ago as a part-time checkout supervisor. She became full-time after a year and later moved to the case study for the opening of the store.

32 Diane

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	26	White	None	Sheffield S43	Ended at 16	Yes USDAW	36.30

After leaving school, she joined a firm of solicitors through a YTS scheme but was sacked for moonlighting at a bakery. She subsequently started working with the company in 1989 as a checkout operator. Over a period of time, she moved into stock control and was multi-skilled across the various departments within the store. She was inevitably promoted to the role of garage branch administrator and later moved from Chesterfield to the Sheffield case study store in a section management role. She moved because her previous store had expected her to effectively fulfil the role of a section manager without financial remuneration.

33 Robin

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
M	24	White	None	Sheffield NG3	Degree & PGDip	No	Full-time

He started working part-time for the company during his A-levels as an eighteen year old. Here, he worked in Banbury, Oxfordshire and started as a member of the night-team filling shelves. When he went to university, he received a transfer. He completed a degree in business and quality management at Nottingham Trent University. It was a four year sandwich course within which he undertook one year's management training with the company. During that year, it was made clear that he could return to the company at the end of his time at university. After finishing his degree course, he returned full-time and completed the remainder of the management training course. He received his first management post in Nottingham and inevitably moved to the Sheffield case study store. In addition, he had just finished a post graduate diploma in personnel management (completed through day-release). He stated that he had been able to fast-track the programme from four years to one because of the relevance of his degree content, the level of his personnel training and the classification of his degree (he received a first). He also believed that he had been singled out for a faster promotion route through the company. As a particular exemplar, he highlighted how he had been

lifted from the store-based management role for a year and had been used within a head office programme. He asserted that the rest of the team had been 'very, very long established well respected, well experienced managers'. He was given an opportunity to remain in a head office role at the end of that year. Here, he would have received a company car and a six thousand pounds a year pay rise. Instead he chose to move to Sheffield, with a two thousand pounds pay rise and no car. However, he suggested that he made this decision to complete his retail knowledge and to protect his long-term future with the inevitable aim of becoming a store manager.

34 Lucy

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil-ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	32	White	None	Sheffield S80	BTEC	No - she left	Full-time

She had worked with the company for fifteen years and her first position was as a part-time bakery assistant. She left school at sixteen and then completed a BTEC in Business and Finance. She received sponsorship through the company after approaching the store manager and regional development manager. After completing the college course, she successfully applied to be a branch systems operator. She subsequently became a price check manager, a role which she fulfilled for about four years. During this time, she held other responsibilities, including store audits and training presentations. Following this, she successfully applied to join the company's management training course and she completed her training in Worksop over a twelve month period. She then moved down to Wisbeach to become a customer service manager for eighteen months. From here, she moved to a new store in Ashby-de-la-Zouch as a customer service manager and she remained there for eight months. She subsequently held a combined customer service and ambient trading manager role in one of the Mansfield branches. After five months, she successfully applied to the case study store to be an ambient trading manager and had held this position since the opening of the store. She chose to move to Sheffield because of the high profile of the store, because of its impact upon her personal career development and because many of her friends lived in the city.

35 Vicky

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil- ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	28	White	None	Rother- ham	A-levels IPD MSc	No	Full- time

After finishing her A-levels, she left school and joined a high-street clothes retailer in Halifax. She left the store after six months because she was bored and started working for the company as a stock control assistant. She accepted responsibilities, such as staff trainer and first-aider, to aid her personal development and was inevitably promoted to staff trainer for Sheffield (covering three small stores within the city). When the company restructured in 1992, she was appointed as personnel manager for two of the stores. She continued in this role for two years and was then asked by the case study store manager (who was then manager of Chesterfield) to be customer service manager at Chesterfield. During this time, she completed a company-sponsored IPD and she subsequently completed an MSc in Human Resource Management at Sheffield Hallam University. Whilst at Chesterfield, she was identified as having the potential to be a regional development manager. For this reason, she was returned to a personnel function and moved to the Rotherham store to become a personnel manager. Six months later, she took the decision to come to the case study store as a personnel manager because of the store's high profile. Over the Christmas period of 1997, she became temporary customer service manager. It was subsequently decided that she would remain in the customer service position for a continued period while a new manager was trained in the personnel manager's position. However, she still aimed to become a regional development manager. This position involved the monitoring of senior team development within a regional, group-based context.

36 Kate

Sex	Age	Ethnic origin	Disabil- ities	Lives	Education	Union member	Basic hours
F	34	White	None	Doncaster DN11	A-levels and IPD	No	Full- time

She started working with the company whilst she was completing her A-levels. She left school at eighteen and secured a place at the University of Manchester to read philosophy and theology. However, she was also offered a trainee manager's position

by her store manager and she accepted that instead. Within this role, she completed various jobs throughout the store and subsequently moved into personnel. Her first senior position was as a personnel manager and she fulfilled this role within a series of different stores. She subsequently moved into a regional role and held responsibility for training and development. Four years ago, she decided that she wanted to move away from an advisory role and return to the store level to make an impact on the shop-floor. She therefore completed a fast-track refresher training programme and received her first store manager's position in Scunthorpe. A year later, she was approached by the company and accepted their offer of the store manager's position in the case study store.

Appendix 6: The research path

	Steps
	Steps
1	Project evolved from a University-funded studentship, the title of which was, 'The Information City: the role of new jobs and new skills'.
2	Freedom within this broad area - initial reading allowed real world observations to be formed. Decision to study retail due to the underdeveloped comprehension of the utilisation of ICTs within the contemporary retail workplace.
3	Intensive qualitative study - explanatory penetration through a specific understanding of the retail workplace. Desire to engage with, but not to confirm, theory and to explore, in-depth, a series of pertinent research questions.
4	'Wise first step' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) - explored the components of the project through the secondary literature. Tight pre-structuring not possible but acknowledged that entered field with certain orientating ideas.
5	Use of case study approach - exploratory analysis, where tight pre-structuring was not possible, of the contemporary retail workplace and this was undertaken through a specific configuration of the theory and case study analysis.
6	No hard and fast rules (Robson, 1993) - freedom when selecting barriers to research (Rose, 1991) and decisions were made concerning what was necessary to create a comprehensive understanding of the case.
7	Instrumental case study (Stake, 1994) - single case (superstore in Sheffield) examined to provide an insight into an issue. Case of secondary interest, plays a supportive role, essentially facilitating an in-depth understanding of the contestation between theoretical perception and workplace reality.
8	To highlight this reality, used embedded units of analysis (Yin, 1989) - attention given to the sub-units (workers) of the case. Logic of comparison was the different activities & experiences of workers across segmentations of the store.
9	Required careful sampling across the three major dimensions of time, people and context (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). After collating this information, a matrix was completed which provided the embedded units of analysis.
10	Interviewing used as the method to provide the multiple realities of the case (Stake, 1995). Used a series of closed and open questions within a semi-structured approach, which provided the opportunity to probe as necessary.
11	Construction of semi-structured schedule was a reflexive process (Jones, 1991) - constructed, re-drawn, tested and considered.
12	Completing the research within the case required a 'balancing act' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) - gatekeeper performed an essential role concerning access.
13	Analysis: familiarity - transcribed interviews; read transcripts in detail & emerging issues noted; generated loose concepts and referred to theory.
14	Analysis: categorisation - initial consideration of notes from familiarity process; attempted to create broader analytical categories, prolonged period of categorisation development; miss-match of analytical categories with theoretical understandings; re-submergence within the data and then the theory
15	Analysis: interpretation - in telling the story, rejected the idea of forming grand narratives from one case study (Scheurich, 1997). Instead, through a combination of theory and particular analytical evidence (qualitative and secondary), specific conclusions around an exploratory case were drawn.