

**The “Quiet Economy”: An Ethnographic Study of the  
Contemporary UK Charity Shop**

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**September 2013**



## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to examine the proposed professionalisation of charity shops through a better understanding of the intricate operations that take place on the shop floor. The main argument of this work is that professionalisation of this sector has been mediated by other factors, some of which are socially-oriented, and some of which are due to the problems inherent in the application of rational, bureaucratic systems within organisations. The research terms this mediation process the *quiet economy* of the modern charity shop: a subtle and nuanced system that operates uniquely within this sphere to negotiate and capitalise upon changes in the market.

Within previous literature, professionalisation has come to be associated with paid work, efficiency and 'business-like' activities. In particular, a link has been made between this and the quest for 'profit', something that is conventionally a characteristic of the private sector. The jarring juxtaposition of this alongside the universal assumption of 'charity' and its espoused values of virtuousness and ethical accountability makes charity retail a highly contentious topical issue.

The research uses an iterative ethnographic study involving participant observation in two case study charity shops, and supplementary interviews. Three features of the *quiet economy* emerged from the research: the unpredictable price negotiations, the diverse worker hierarchies, and the presence of intersectoral ties with the private and public sectors.

The findings of this research update and contribute to theories on charity shops, charity and work; policy debates about for-profit and non-profit organisations, and are likely to be of interest to those working in charity retail and the wider charity sector. This thesis offers support for its main argument by developing a greater understanding of how charity shops have successfully navigated this contemporary epoch by way of their own *quiet economy*.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express sincere appreciation to Prof. Sarah Nettleton for her assistance in the preparation of this manuscript. In addition, thanks to Dr. Merran Toerien for her support and advice and Dr. Dave Beer for his valuable input. Much love and thanks to my friends: Rosie Wallbank, Jennifer Morgan, Stephanie Weight, Katie Bishop, Josh Wynne, Cass Woods and Claire Beech for keeping me sane all this time, and to all my PhD colleagues in the Sociology Department at the University of York for the endless support and opportunity to vent throughout this long process. I also want to thank my mum and dad for the drive they gave me, and for helping me out when things got tough.

However, my most special thanks must go to the participants in the charity shops – the paid staff, volunteers, CSWs, NDPWs and senior managers, not to mention the customers - for kindly permitting the observation of their activities and making my research an enjoyable and thoroughly rewarding experience. I dedicate this thesis to you, and all the work that you do.

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

In accordance with the University regulations, I hereby declare that:

1. This thesis has been composed solely by myself
2. It is entirely my own work
3. It has not been submitted in part or whole for any other degree or personal qualification



# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

This thesis endeavours to understand the modern charity shop. Charity shops have been the focus of sociological studies previously, which have explored the way the charity shop has evolved and changed over time. Of interest to sociologists, marketing theorists and retail economists alike has been the impact of professionalising processes upon what is seen as a traditionally informal and disorganised space of consumption (Horne & Broadbridge, 1994b; Goodall, 2000a, 2000b; Maddrell, 2000; Broadbridge & Parsons, 2002, 2003; Horne & Maddrell, 2002; Parsons E. , 2002, 2004; Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007). In the past 20 years, charity shop literature has become increasingly more entrenched in professionalisation rhetoric; depicting the modern, urban charity shop as a behemoth of consumerism, driven by strong profit-making imperatives that share many characteristics with modern capitalism. As a result, tensions have been seen to emerge between the contradictory objectives of charity and capitalism.

This study aims to question the everyday realities behind assumptions of professionalisation within the charity shop sphere, and the subsequent problematisation of the ethos of charity when combined with the process of consumer capitalism. It also aims to understand where the charity shop resides within a conflicted Third sector due to these developments. Crucially, it hopes to understand the current perception of charity, and what this can tell us about consumption, philanthropy and giving, the impacts of bureaucracy and commercialisation upon society in general.

There are four research questions that this thesis aims to address. They are:

1. What processes are taking place at a micro level on the charity shop floor?
2. How do charity shop participants negotiate these processes?
3. Is there consistent 'professionalisation' in charity shops, or is the process nuanced?
4. What does this indicate about the professionalisation of charity and wider conceptions of charity in general?

## **1.1 Thesis Chapters**

The thesis consists of a four-part literature review, a two-part methodology, and four chapters of analysis and discussion.

**Chapter 2** examines how previous studies have charted the changes in charity shops over the past 25 years. Earlier works relied upon empirical data to assess how the charity shop was anomalous to other first-hand profit making enterprises in terms of worker demographics, employee structuring and motivations for work (Broadbridge & Horne, 1994a; Horne & Broadbridge, 1994b). These spurred an interest into how these irregularities were played out on the charity shop floor, resulting in a fragmentation of charity shop studies into diverse topic areas such as economics and management, marketing and sectoral finance. These perspectives focused upon the wider reaching impacts of charity shop professionalisation for the parent charity alongside analyses of the complex interplay of philanthropy and consumption in relation to bodily proximity (Gregson et al., 2000); gender roles (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007); retail practice (Gregson et al., 2002; Broadbridge & Parsons, 2002); volunteer motivations and behaviours (Horne & Broadbridge, 1994b; Maddrell, 2000) & customer motivations and behaviours (Williams,

2002; 2003). This chapter summarises previous work chronologically, highlighting the most interesting for more detailed discussion in Chapter 3. Initially, work in the area of 'alternative consumption' is considered, allowing an understanding of how the charity shop became embedded along with these spaces within discourses of second-handedness and their inherent 'messiness' (Gregson & Crewe, 1997). The literature review then focuses upon the significance of professionalisation in charity shops. Lastly, it introduces the argument of this thesis; that previous research neglects to complete the picture of how contemporary charity shops deal with the contradictions of charity and capitalism.

**Chapter 3** takes three areas of interest highlighted in Chapter 2 and delves into them a little further in an attempt to understand how we can theorise the contemporary charity shops from established theoretical perspectives. Initially, section 3.1 is a discussion of the societal role of the shop. It takes into account not only traditional theories of consumption, but also how a 'shop' comes to be a shop – what constitutes the 'shopper' and 'shopping', and how these normative assumptions come to be cemented into modern culture. The idea of the charity shop is then investigated using theories of second hand consumption and Marxist critique of capitalism vs. charity. Marxist theory is then elaborated upon in the context of charity branding, sign value and finally, an investigation of hedonism within shopping behaviour relating to the 'lure of the bargain' experienced within charity shopping locations.

In section 3.2, the literature around the concept of professionalisation of work is explored in order to clarify the use of the term within this thesis. The sociological significance of the 'professional' is first defined, then work discussing professionalisation in relation to volunteers, intersectoral ties and tax exemptions.

The final section of this chapter, 3.3, discusses literature that deals with 'charity' as a concept. Work on gift exchange (Mauss, 1970; Godelier, 1999) is described and used to help understand the numerous motivational factors inherent to 'giving' in the charity shop environment. This is investigated further in a discussion of the *charitable volunteer*, and the *charitable donor*. Both are contentious contrasts to theories of the gift, since both Mauss and Godelier maintained that no gift is given without the assumption of reciprocity (ibid.). Contentious notions of devotion and sacrifice are investigated and deconstructed, with the volunteers active participation in a charity considered also from a therapeutic standpoint, allowing volunteers to 'prosume' (produce and consume simultaneously) philanthropy and goodwill through their actions. The challenges faced by volunteers in the light of intensive modern retail practices are also discussed. The chapter concludes by relating Mauss' and Godelier's 'gift' concept to that of the charitable donor, those who give to charity shops. Both the donor and the volunteer are then theorised in this work to be 'philanthropic prosumers', who receive a reciprocal benefit from their donated time and goods in the form of a 'warm glow' (Andreoni, 1990).

**Chapter 4** is a methodological discussion, which begins in section 4.1 with the philosophical framework that directed the methodology chosen. It also details how the methods used were selected, and executed within the shop space. A phenomenological framework was developed iteratively throughout the process, although the need to study interactions on a relatively micro level was acknowledged early on in the research. The resulting ethnographic methodology used (participant observation and follow up interviews with key participants in the selected case studies) is critiqued and alternatives discussed, along with a depiction of the sampling methods and the means of access to the two research sites. Issues of maintaining distance, ethics, data management and dissemination opportunities are

also highlighted. There is a discussion of the methods used for data analysis, including the use of qualitative data management software, and the section concludes with a contextual synopsis of each of the case study shops, including a description of general location, layout and staff members.

The findings from the research are presented and analysed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. **Chapter 5** describes the process of haggling as an example of how the arbitrary value of goods is negotiated by charity shop workers, volunteers and even customers. The act of the 'haggle' brings forth tensions between customers and workers. It creates an alternative to the external market economy that is based around knowledge of inherent value, and pricing authority. This internal economy has been term the *quiet value economy*.

The introduction of 'price lining' (standardised prices for various categories of goods, each indicating a level of quality [Berman & Evans in Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 108]) has been a major impact of professionalisation in charity shops. As a result, there are issues relating to quality, condition and age of second hand items. These can create tensions when managers are required to hit target 'budgets' for the month with poor stock supplies. Equally, tensions emerge when customers feel that items are overpriced, due to the unspoken understanding that charity shops sell cheap goods. The anomalous role of shop staff as arbiters of value is particularly notable when haggling takes place, as debating over item value is uncommon in first-hand shopping locations. Whilst this act aligns the charity shop with previously-mentioned 'alternative' shopping spaces, there are continued attempts to rationalise and make calculable pricing in the charity shops. The tensions this creates and the difficulties of enforcement form the basis of this chapter.



**Chapter 6** focuses upon charitable workers and the multiplicity of roles that are taken on within the charity shop. The archetypal charity shop worker is presumed to be a volunteer, yet more commonly (as reported in studies by Maddrell [2000] and Parsons [2002, 2004]) charity shops nowadays have a mix of paid and unpaid workers, alongside Job Centre placement workers and members of the public undertaking Community Service. This heterogenous mix of 'employees' is another example of how charity shops, as they become professionalised in certain ways, also develop further irregularities that differentiate them from first hand shopping spaces. The research has named these novel changes in worker structures the *quiet hierarchy* of the modern charity shop.

This in turn influences the motivations and obligations associated with the roles each individual carries out. To clarify these distinctions, a generalisable typology of worker types is identified from the research: Paid employees, including managers, shop assistants and delivery drivers work under formal (specifically contractual) obligations; Volunteers work under conscientious (self-imposed) obligations; Job centre workers work under formal obligations (since they could have benefits revoked should they not fulfil their responsibilities) and community service workers are required to complete their work due to legal obligations. The diversity of obligations for charity shop workers presents an interesting contrast to past work on charity volunteer motivations (Horne & Maddrell, 2002; Maddrell, 2000; Broadbridge & Horne, 1994a; 1996); focusing instead upon the tensions inherent in a workplace where obligations differ for people who take on similar practical roles within a space.

**Chapter 7** discusses the physical manifestation of charity within the shop: the goods that are donated and sold. In particular, this chapter addresses the introduction of Gift Aid and Gift in Kind, two processes which have been implemented with state or corporate help,

in order to achieve further money from these donated goods. This has been termed the *quiet gift economy*.

Gift Aid is investigated, where donors are encouraged to add Gift Aid to any money their items might raise for the charity, providing they are a UK taxpayer. By involving donor databases, the process enables a rationalisation of the previously 'irrational' and unpredictable donation process. Bureaucratisation of the act of donating a bag of unwanted goods has vastly altered the way charity shops work, how they are perceived, and removed the promised anonymity of donation; now the donor becomes part of a database where their giving is monitored.

The former, Gift in Kind, refers to *corporate* Gifts in Kind: bulk donations of items given from large chain stores and companies. Governmental policy on donated goods from companies permits them to reclaim the VAT on such goods, which results in a mutually beneficial relationship for the charity shop and the corporation. The impact of Gift in Kind upon the charity shop has signalled a uniformity of goods in terms of quality and choice. The more orderly the stock, the more organised and rationalised the shop, which is indicative of the charity shop's burgeoning professionalisation. This professionalisation also has consequences for volunteers and other employees within the stores, who must negotiate the changing origins of the items they sell, and the bonds it enhances with the private sector.

**Chapter 8** is a discussion of the key findings from Chapters 5, 6 and 7. It draws out some of the thematic issues of the quiet economy that speak to wider debates in sociology. These include the performance of knowledges; the detraditionalisation of modern work; individualisation; exclusion, redemption and moral cleansing; the philanthropic superpanopticon; and the possibility for 'pure' altruism in the charity shop and in modern society. Through engaging with further literature, these theories elucidate how the quiet economy is

facilitated within the contemporary charity shop. The nature of the contributions to knowledge each area makes will become clear as the arguments develop within the thesis.

This is followed by some final conclusions about the role of charity in contemporary capitalism; suggestions for further study and potential implications for policy-makers and theory.

The professionalisation of charity is the key theme being critically discussed within this study. It will be examined through the lense of customer/worker debates over value; through the diverse worker hierarchies and the power struggles that ensue as a result; and lastly, via the involvement and use of governmental benefits and corporate donations. Debates about the role of charity within capitalism, the contemporary nature of work and the possible redemptive qualities of philanthropic endeavour all emerge as wider discourse from this micro-qualitative study. Understanding the contemporary character of the charity shop as a social, moral, commercial and intersectoral entity can therefore aid our understanding of some of the foundational elements of society today.

## CHAPTER 2

### Theorising the Charity Shop Sector: A Literature Overview

The charity shop holds a substantial amount of appeal for sociological researchers for a variety of reasons. It serves many purposes for society and for the third sector: as a community nexus; as a place of work; as a recycling hub; as a fundraising venture; and as filler for empty high-street space. They can come in many different incarnations, from a tiny signless shop set up within a church or community building, all the way up to chains of identikit merchandise-managed stores. The different forms a charity shop can take is complimented by the wide range of disciplines that have looked into the ways they work, including marketing, retail theory, cultural studies and social geography (Horne & Maddrell, 2002).

This diversity renders the charity shop difficult to singularly define. Research in the field of charity shops has been quite broad in focus, with human geography studies ranging from intimate depictions of bodily proximity in relation to charity shop clothing (Gregson et al., 2000); to management studies examining gender and managerialism in the shop space (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007); to their position within the context of the third sector as a whole from a marketing perspective (Goodall, 2000a). In spite of research interest in charity shops only really forming in the mid 1990s, the assortment of previous studies proves a challenge for the researcher due to the numerous nuances within the charity shop sphere that lend themselves to sociological analysis. Identifying a niche that had yet to be explored within the field was therefore a preliminary issue for this study, which necessitated a rigorous examination of recent work on charity shops.

Charity shops were acknowledged by many authors as interesting and ripe for study, particularly in relation to the distinct forms of consumer behaviour that goes on in them (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 12) compared to the more 'rationalised' and 'ordered' shopping experiences in department stores and other first-hand shops (Nava, 1997, p.47). However, the study of charity shops grew out of a wider interest in consumer behaviour, and particularly identity formation through consumption (McRobbie, 1989), the 'cultural project' of the self (McCracken, 1987), and ideas of a 'reflexive consumer' (Lury, 1996) who make conscious and knowledgeable decisions to enhance their own identity when they consume. This inspired a whole area of sociological investigation centred around practices of shopping and consumer capitalism within different shopping spaces, which will be further discussed in chapter 3. It also spawned the 'identity vs. necessity' debate: the tendency for theoretical approaches to emphasise either the cultural agency of the alternative retail consumer to shop in a way that constructs their identity; or their deprivation which necessitates a reliance upon alternative retail channels. This binary has come to dominate many of the debates around second-hand consumption habits, and has a tendency to cloud the other elements of interest that may occur in these settings (Williams, 2003).

This chapter will look at how the topic of alternative shopping spaces developed as a 'fertile one for study' (Horne & Maddrell, 2002), and why these contributed to a growth in charity shop literature from the mid-nineties onwards.

## 2.2 Theories of Alternative Retail

There have been a number of studies based around the sociological and economic diversity of alternative retail spaces in general; the goods sold and the motivations behind participation in the process. A definition of an 'alternative retail space' is given by Colin Williams (2003, p. 235) as "informal and/or second-hand modes of goods acquisition", and can encompass anything from a jumble sale, to a vintage shop, to a nearly-new childrens wear swap between friends (Clarke, 2000). Looking at alternative shopping options is of interest to sociologists because of an enduring tendency of theorists to privilege primary sites of purchase (Gregson & Crewe, 1997a, p. 243), thus neglecting how shopping takes place in more marginal spaces. As Miller et al. state, "[alternative shopping] is remarkably little studied. Perhaps this is because second hand goods are seen as historically more important than now. If so, this judgment is incorrect." (Miller, Jackson, Thrift, & Holbrook, 1998, p. 195). This section will outline key theories in alternative retail which look at the specific examples of the ragmarket (McRobbie, 1989), vintage and retro shops (Crewe et al., 2003), car boot sales (Stone, Horne, & Hibbert, 1996; Gregson & Crewe, 1997a; Gregson & Crewe, 1997b; Gregson et al., 1997; Crewe & Gregson, 1998; Gregson & Crewe, 1998) and alternative retail in general (Williams C. , 2002; 2003).

The distinct division of theoretical approaches to alternative retail into either necessity or identity-centricity is clear. On one hand, economic researchers are interested the inherent links to poverty, re-use, cost-cutting and locational ties to deprived areas (for example, Williams , 2002; 2003). On the other, qualitative studies have delved into the process of identity construction involved in participation in these spheres, looking predominantly at alternative retail spheres as

subcultural entities which form as a result of human agency (for example, Gregson & Crewe, 1998). Also encompassed by this are discourses of sustainable consumption and informed consciousness of the impacts of consumption (Cherrier, 2007; Morgan & Birtwhistle, 2009, p.192).

These two approaches assume a diametric opposition in terms of the role alternative retail spaces play. They take the stance that sites of second hand consumption (including charity shops) are set up either for 'poor people', or for creative, middle-class rummagers with time on their hands. When placed side by side, these studies seem lacking, and easily criticised for being overly deterministic. Charity shops are, like many alternative retail spaces, 'inherently contradictory' (Goodall, 2000a, p.105), therefore sensitivity is required when subjecting them to an overarching thesis as to their 'purpose' or 'role'.

Angela McRobbie's (1989) cultural perspective on shopping experiences at ragmarkets highlighted the importance of the second-hand market to early subcultural theorists, and reinforced the link between class, consumption and identity formation. She paints an evocative picture of alternative retail as being inspirational, expressive and even entrepreneurial, as well as fraught with irregularities. Despite an emphasis upon the consumer and auxiliary fashion rather than the space itself or workers within it, McRobbie introduced alternative retail theory to a wider theoretical critique of how consumer society is active and *reactive* to changes in the market.

Crewe, Gregson & Brooks (2003) also studied alternative retail, however they looked at vintage and retro sellers and their cultural repertoires. Their emphasis upon the process of selling rather than consuming highlighted the intimacy and closeness retailers in this sector feel towards their product. They introduced Hirschfeld's (1983) concept of 'emotional labour' to describe how work ties replace

kinship ties due to the sellers identification with their work. The notion of 'emotional labour' in relation to socially-oriented forms of work (for example volunteering; a key aspect of charity shop operations and the focal point for Chapter 6 of this thesis) proved to be very important to many alternative retail studies. Crewe, Gregson & Brooks were expanding upon earlier work specifically related to the car boot sale (Gregson & Crewe, 1997a, 1997b; Gregson et al., 1997; Crewe & Gregson, 1998; Gregson & Crewe, 1998) where research prerogatives focused upon performance, spectacle and role-playing between participants in this sphere, with particular emphasis upon how identities were formed around implicit '*knowledges*' of the way these sites work. The acknowledgement of the need for a specific knowledge or skill in order to use alternative retail sites effectively indicated that these particular spaces were more complex to negotiate than a first-hand shopping space. Thus, the presence of a certain 'working knowledge' was considered crucial to understanding the operations of alternative retail spaces.

Geographer Colin Williams (2002) also conducted a study of alternative retail spaces, looking specifically at bridging the boundary between economic and identity-formation ideologies around the topic. His critique suggested that a focus on the agency-lead, adventurous social inclinations of alternative shopping is not necessarily more intuitive than focussing upon needs-based incentives for the less affluent. He conducted 511 interviews, featuring households in both affluent and deprived areas, and the findings suggested that a far larger number of people in the poorer areas would use 'informal' shopping channels (19%) than in more affluent suburbs (6%) (p. 1902). This was contradictory to claims by recent researchers that more 'culturally sensitive' agency-centric studies need to be undertaken to challenge economic assumptions (p. 1900). Instead, Williams brought the focus to the 'idealisation' of newness and primary shopping sites (p. 1906)



and stressed that a socio-spatial awareness is fundamental before making sweeping assumptions about stereotypical charity shop users. He later re-affirmed his dissatisfaction with the binary approaches to the topic in another study in 2003, comparing different rural locations and emphasising the importance of accessibility in relation to types of shopping practices.

Williams' work, which came from a background in economic behaviour and geographies of exclusion, highlighted the importance of *location and space* in sociological studies into alternative retail. These studies, along with other work around second-hand shopping locations were implicit in reinforcing an area of interest that was ripe for sociological inquiry. However, the alternative shopping sphere is a borderless and ill-defined collection of temporary establishments encompassing diverse informal exchanges. Within this, the charity shop is unique due to its role as a fundraising entity for a parent charity. Many actions that take place within the charity shop mirror those in other alternative retail spaces; for instance, stock is formed from goods that are given away, like in a jumble or nearly-new sale. There is an element of 'searching' involved for customers, in order to find a desirable item.

However charity shops form a category of their own, in part because of the dynamic expansion they experienced in the late nineties which will be described later in this chapter, but also because the people who run them and work within them are there under an implication of doing 'charitable work' as opposed to 'profitable work'. Understanding the nature of the roles of volunteers and charitable workers is of undeniable importance to the empirical study of charity shops. Therefore, both location and the workers, as well as the implicit 'knowledges' mentioned by Crewe & Gregson (1998) were identified as crucial themes in studies that examined alternative retail in general terms. These are themes this thesis will return to again and again.

However, the field of sociological understanding narrows when charity shops themselves are put under scrutiny. They are an instance of alternative or second-hand retail unique within an already anomalous sphere. The following section charts their development, and the synchronous development of literature on the subject.

### **2.3 A Chronology of Charity Shop Growth**

Some of the earliest work on charity retail came from retail theorists Suzanne Horne & Adelina Broadbridge, who began exploring a classification for charity shops for a working paper in 1993. This went on to fuel further research by them into charity shop volunteer demographics and motivations (Broadbridge & Horne, 1994a; Horne & Broadbridge, 1994b) and a landmark study on merchandise classification within charity shops was published the following year (Horne & Broadbridge, 1995). At this point, there had not been any sociological research into charity shops, and therefore much of their data was informed by statistics gathered from retail sector surveys and information from news articles. They came up with a simple classification for charity shops based upon the amount of donated goods sold separating those that sell solely, or a proportion of, new goods from the traditional stereotype of the charity shop as second-hand retailer. This categorisation of *specifically* charity shop goods signalled the nascence of professionalisation theories of charity retail, where a growing number of changes within the sphere necessitated more rigorous and in-depth sociological understanding. Many other theorists refer back to Horne & Broadbridge's (1995) earlier work as indicative of the period of augmented change charity shops were entering (Horne, 1998; 2000; Broadbridge & Parsons, 2002; 2003; Parsons, 2004; Brace-Govan & Binay, 2010)

Around the same time, charity shops experienced a startling level of growth as a unique retail sector, and as a fundraising outlet for charities. Over the course of a decade, the number of charity shops in the UK almost doubled from 3,200 in 1990 to almost 6,300 in 2002 (NGO Finance [2000] cited in Broadbridge & Parsons, 2002). The slow ascent in charity retail began when the early 1980s period of affluence boosted the supply of surplus used items in shops (Parsons E. , 2002, p. 3), which may have contributed to the 1990s boom in charitable retail profits, since this was a time at which the UK economy was stable.

In spite of this, the charity shop was not considered an especially lucrative fundraiser for the parent charity – in the 1990s they were seen more as a means of raising awareness than of acquiring profit (Horne and Broadbridge 1995, p. 18). Charities, therefore, were not reliant upon retail to support their cause. Hibbert and Horne (1995) suggested that charities suffered from ill-defined positions within the market – individual charity messages or ‘mission statements’ would tend to get lost due to the sheer number of organisations asking for money. They also recommended that brand development would be key to overcoming the homogeneity of charity, and the charity shop was the ideal tool for this kind of promotion, whilst not requiring the huge outlay costs of advertising campaigns (Hibbert & Horne, 1996). As a means of raising a charity profile, the presence of the charity shop was potentially coming to play a unique and crucial role.

Broadbridge and Horne note that Imperial Cancer Relief Fund and Oxfam (two of the largest charities at the time of their research) considered the income from their charity shops as second only to monetary donations in terms of the amount they earn for the charity (1995, p. 18). Therefore, in some instances, the charity shop was playing a significant role as a moneymaker for the charity. This role was clear for larger charities (Oxfam at the time had 850 shops) but the

variability of their value to the charity seemed dependent upon whether they were as Broadbridge and Horne described it, a 'retail multiple' or an 'independent' (*ibid.*). In highlighting the variability of *types* of charity shop, Broadbridge and Horne inspired the later work of Elizabeth Parsons (2002; 2004) on the typology of charity shops. This typology, as will be explained later in this chapter, came to underpin the case study selection for this research study.

Advancements in charity shops continued to arouse sociological interest as theorists attempted to qualify how and why the sector was developing. A key study conducted by Goodall, (2000) built upon the initial observations of commercialisation highlighted by Horne & Broadbridge (1995), examining how public sector values of "democracy, accountability, and notions of 'public' interest" (p. 106) struggled against private sector profit-led motivations. Goodall undertook a series of interviews with participants selected from each tier of the charity's managerial hierarchy from a number of different charities. The findings indicated how organisations valued managers who exhibited good 'people-management skills', along with other private sector managerial strategies induced to maximise moneymaking potential. Key to Goodall's argument was the fact that charity shops sold the *notion of charity* and its key values and by doing so they took up a rather "precarious position" (p. 107) juxtaposed between caring and capitalistic standpoints.

Also of note in his study was the focus upon workers within the charity shop sector and how they responded to being part of this potentially conflicting set up. Through his interviews, Goodall found that many managers in the charity sector had left the private sector to escape the associated factors necessary for profit: long hours, the pressure of high targets, and excessive workloads (2000a, p. 109), only to find these being inaugurated in the charity sector too. By examining charity shops in a sectoral context, Goodall emphasised the crucial role

of the public and private sectors in the growth of charity shops; particularly in relation to the techniques used by commercial business to aid development, such as managerialism, increased administration, and the rationalisation of work. Goodall's preoccupation with where the charity shop resides in terms of sectoral context became another key interest of this thesis due to the difficulties inherent in non-profit ties to private and public services

Goodall (2000b) extrapolated this work in an article published later that year which dissected the concept of '*professionalisation*'; a term that is often used unproblematically to describe the changes in charity retail<sup>1</sup>. He suggested that professionalisation was interpreted in three different ways by senior charity retail staff. It was either seen as 'strident commercialism' (thus corroding volunteer-centric values and highly rationalised), 'limited professionalism' (A degree of business-like attitudes are adopted whilst an awareness of over-professionalisation is retained) and 'vibrant professional voluntarism' (organisational democracy where paid managers act as supporting staff to volunteers) (Goodall, 2000b). By acknowledging the tensions of paid and unpaid co-workers, Goodall introduced the issues around *hierarchical work structures* that can be found on the charity shop floor, along with the problems inherent in implementing commercial management methods within a charity setting.

Around the time of Goodall's study, many other authors started to look at charity retail from alternative perspectives with the aim of examining how such a contradictory, disorganised and traditionally slow-moving sector could have become successful so rapidly. Social geographer Avril Maddrell (2000) investigated volunteer participation

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<sup>1</sup> Along with Parsons (2004) and Broadbridge and Parsons (2003), the term 'professionalisation' has been applied to charity shop developments by Goodall (2000a; 2000b) without critical examination of what this term means. This is addressed further in Chapter 3.

in 17 shops around Oxford, which she describes as being the “home” of the charity shop having been the location of the first ever Oxfam in 1947. The very first Oxfam shop sold donated goods to try and raise money for beleaguered Greek families in the area (*The Fundraiser* magazine, in Horne & Broadbridge, 1995). Maddrell’s study was one of the first to use ethnomethodology to study charity shop volunteers in depth and separate them from ideology surrounding the altruistic gift of work. Maddrell researched not only demographics and motivations behind the volunteers’ work, as Broadbridge & Horne had done before her (1994a, 1994b), but also their responses to the professionalising process, as well as bringing in the first references to *New Deal Workers* (unemployed people who are hired via the Job Centre and who work in order to receive their Jobseekers Allowance) and *Community Service Workers* (individuals who are required to help out in the shop to carry out their community service) in charity shop research (Maddrell, 2000, p.136). Maddrell’s brief discussion of these workers and their roles in the shop indicated an area of charity shop retail that had yet to be thoroughly explored.

Both studies by Maddrell and Goodall focus primarily upon those who participate in the charity shop sphere. This emphasis would come to be integral to the development of this thesis. Both examined the changing landscape of charity retail by comparing the organisation value structure to that of the individuals immersed within it. While these studies have laid the groundwork for sociological observation within charity shop settings, there is some scope for expanding upon their work. By developing empirical work that would include all the actors in the day-to-day practices of the charity shop - not solely higher-ranked paid employees, or volunteers - a richer and more nuanced analysis of participant involvement would be possible. This came to be another aim of this thesis.

Other theorists looked at customer experience within the shops and tried to explore what a 'typical' charity shopper might be like. Parsons (2000) studied this through participant observation and a survey of 592 charity shoppers in Bristol, with the aim of profiling the archetypal charity shopper. In particular, she noted how charities have become responsive to their customers' needs; developing niche marketing to different demographics. This included the locating of retro sections in more 'hip' areas, and targeted surplus stores in more deprived locations (p. 149). She also suggested that there is further scope for charities to 'exploit' the demographic profiles she discovered.

Gregson, Brooks and Crewe also undertook several studies investigating the charity shop as a specific locus of 'alternative' retail. Initially, they investigated ideas of bodily boundaries and risk within a disorganised space, interviewing charity shop customers to uncover the idiosyncratic ways people conduct themselves within the charity shop space (Gregson et al., 2000). Although this introduced some notions of ritual and process in making second-hand goods suitable for re-sale (something that is key to the later discussion in this thesis about the extraneous additional work involved in presenting charity shop goods for sale), they were primarily concerned with contamination, boundaries of taste, and individual perceptions of disgust at the bodily proximity of others. This emphasis upon corporeality indicated that personal *boundaries* and *liminality* (Douglas, 1966) are crucial when dealing with the cast-offs of unidentifiable others as they highlight the strength of feeling associated with the appropriation of second-hand items. The experience of 'managing' second-handedness and its boundaries is a definitive constituent of charity shop processes.

A later study by Gregson, Brooks and Crewe around discourses of retail management (2002) built on the discussion of professionalisation by Goodall and other earlier theorists. They studied

how managerial language in charity shop contexts affected the laid-back and social environment previously fostered. In this work, Gregson et al. discussed the charity shop as a 'project' from a retail geography standpoint, linking the unscripted interactions that take place within the shop space to the multiple discourses thrown up by professionalising a previously informal space. Their emphasis upon potential exclusion of volunteers in this discourse supported the earlier work of Williams (2002; 2003), which theorised that customers participated in alternative (second-hand) retail due to exclusion rather than choice.

Chronologically, at this point the growth in charity shop theorising mirrored the increase in their economic status. Charity shop economics were progressively scrutinised in the fields of retail management and non-profit organisation theory representing the development of the concept of charity from something that is seen as fundamentally 'outmoded' (Gregson, Crewe, & Brooks, 2002, p. 1665), to something dynamic, modern and hugely profitable. Nettleton and Hardey wrote that charities in general had become "increasingly *professionalized*, and drawing on commercial and marketing techniques, [...] a significant sector of the economy" (2006, p. 445; emphasis added).

A number of researchers studied the socio-economic factors of this change (Bryson, McGuinness & Ford, 2002; Parsons 2002, 2004; Chattoe, 2006; Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007). Frequently these studies would draw on the work of Suzanne Horne (2000), who first adopted McNair's "Wheel of Retailing" to depict the process charity shops had to go through to develop into professional top-down managed business enterprises:



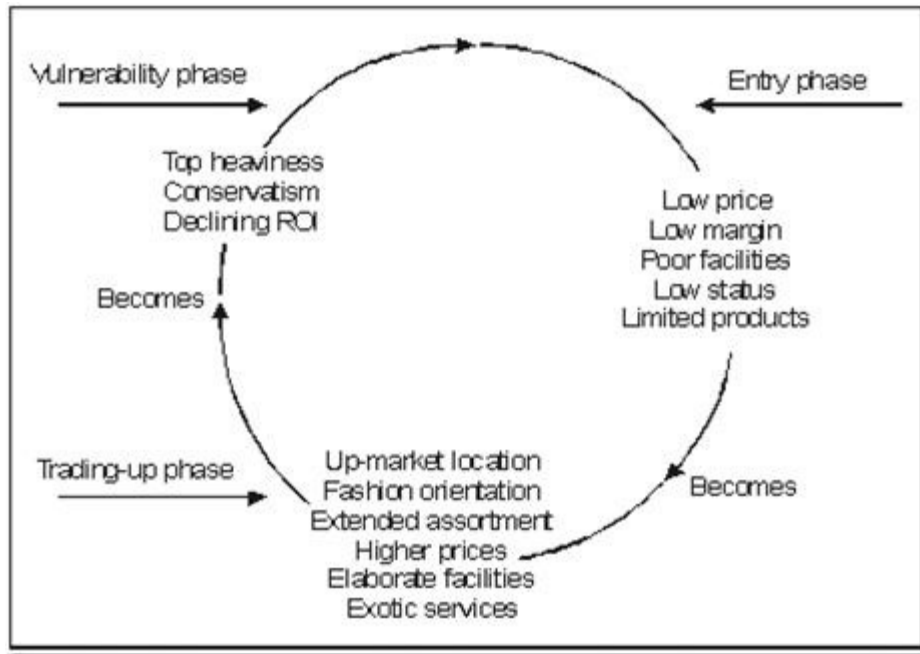


Figure 1. The “Wheel of Retailing” by M.P. McNair (1958)

Initially, many charities would open a shop within the Wheel’s Entry Phase. This meant it would have low community status, low prices and low operating costs. It would be mostly staffed by volunteers and rely upon donations. Virtually no money would be spent on shop displays and merchandising. This charity shop would fill a gap in the market; it may have a high social role but overall would make minimal profit (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 31). Once the shop began to improve the quality of donations, displays, customer service and the general smooth running of the store, it would move into the ‘Trading Up Phase’. By the time the shop reached the ‘Mature Phase’, its future would become uncertain. The shop would be left vulnerable due to the possibility of price undercuts from new, entry-level retailers, and conflict between the shops central management system and its role as a provider of social welfare (*ibid.*).

The “Wheel of Retailing” analogy is used by Horne to highlight the tensions of combining philanthropy and commerce, in order to

emphasise how a successful balance can only truly be sustained when shops are in the 'Trading Up Phase' (Horne, 2000). Since one of the primary motives of the charity shop is "to provide a method of raising unallocated funds" (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 25), providing a social service to a community must sometimes give way to profitable business strategies.

Horne & Maddrell published their pioneering text "Charity Shops: Retailing, Consumption and Society" in 2002. It was the first book to aim to comprehensively overview the conflicting values of charity and profitmaking that are present in contemporary charity shops. As well as re-establishing the "Wheel of Retailing" as an important descriptor of the changes taking place in the sector, Horne & Maddrell examined some definitive characteristics of commercial retail within the context of the charity shop. These included; an analysis of supply and demand, materialisation of profits, staffing issues and pricing strategies, with reference to the impacts these have upon wider issues. These issues included consumption habits, giving, environmentalism, moral judgements, performance, stigma and exclusion, motivations, collective socialisation, bargain-hunting, disposal strategies, global localities, and identity formation. They concluded that the future of charity retail must cross over into internet marketing; due to the low overheads, vast consumer cohort, opportunities for charity promotion and access to new customer groups (2002, p. 134-5), and painted a gloomy picture for the future of charity retail in its physical form. By describing the charity shop as part of the 'shadow state' due to the high level of public funding they rely upon (p. 121), the outlook for them in a Conservative Big Society-oriented government intent on cutting unnecessary spending seemed uncertain.

However, they stress several aspects of their research that support the idea that charity retail will continue to expand and be of

relevance for researchers. They emphasise the importance of charity shops as a site of persona creation (for the philanthropic volunteer and for the budding managerial apprentice, as well as for customers through their purchasing) (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 120) and their subsidiary role for the environmentally-conscious as a site of ethical disposal (p. 123; 128). Also, in a globalised context, Horne & Maddrell suggest that charity shops provide a local space through which support can be offered across the world – for example, the perception that donating or shopping at your local Oxfam will have positive ramifications for the needy overseas (ibid. p. 129-30) thus filtering important global issues down to a local space (Beck, 2000a). Whilst the latter two aspects suggest that charity shops play an important role in substantial global issues, the former remains a micro impact felt at individual shop level amongst the charity shop volunteers, employees and shoppers. These personal imperatives can be extrapolated to the wider issues discussed (for example, Horne & Maddrell describe how mothers of birthing age are more likely to recycle their clothing through charity shops, perhaps due to environmental concerns for their children in later life [2002, p. 123]) but on shop floor level, the ‘charitable worker’ remains a significant player in the current third-sector retail evolution.

Elizabeth Parsons, writing from a marketing and retail studies perspective, was instrumental in theorising the development of charity shops, in particular classifying them as increasingly ‘professional’ retail environments. Her analysis of the ‘people vs. profits’ debate (2002a) that has continued as the shops have become increasingly commercial, provides some of the grounding for this thesis albeit from a different discipline. Using statistics provided by MINTEL and NGO Finance, Parsons charted the changes in the sector and interviewed paid staff within the shops, focusing upon the difficult duality of the ‘charitable capitalist’ role that was mentioned at the very start of this literature

review as one of the defining components of charity retail theory. Her retail-centric perspective describes how business tools such as stock changovers, promotions, workforce training and long term business plans are played out within this diverse work environment and her findings suggest that 'acting charitably' and 'applying sound business acumen' is not as simple in the charity shop as it is in a first-hand shopping location (2002a, p. 8). This issue is further developed in her later work on a typology of charity shops (Parsons, 2004); the instrumental framework that served to direct case study selection and categorisation in this thesis.

## **2.4 Typology of Charity Shops**

Being dynamic and responsive to the retail climate, similarly to first-hand shops (Parsons E. , 2004, p. 39) also meant increased competition; not only between charity shops but increasingly with 'bargain basement' retailers like Primark, Poundstretcher and Wilkinsons. As a result charities had to work harder to raise funds, sometimes by dropping prices, or by radical aesthetic investments such as shop makeovers. The extent to which shops employ these measures depends on the type of charity and the size and structure of the organisation. Broadbridge and Horne (1995) attempted to classify the variance in types of charity shop and their level of professional operations but Elizabeth Parsons (2004) was the first to write specifically about typologies of charity shops. She defined three forms of charity retail outlets which are laid out below.

Firstly, she describes *Multiple Charity Retailers*. These encompass countrywide or sometimes multinational charities such as Oxfam or Cancer Research. These often have hundreds of branches and

are controlled by a central head office, or sometimes regionally managed. 82% of shops in this category have paid managerial employees (p. 34). Secondly, there are *Hospice Charity Retailers*, which may have up to 20 branches in one area but are organised to gather funds solely for one specific cause. They are 'local' organisations that garner impressive local support (One of Parsons' respondents, a manager of a small hospice charity, commented that support is strong for their cause because "they can see where their money goes and they have a warm feeling towards the Hospice, because ultimately they could use its services" [p. 35]). Finally, she categorises the remainder of charity shops as *Independent Charity Retailers*, which make up only 2% of charitable retail outlets and are usually individual shops sets up by local church groups or similar with a desire for tackling a singular issue such as localised homelessness or to raise money for a local service.

This typology is crucial for understanding how the modern incarnation of the charity shop operates on both a macro level in terms of; retail operations, store layout, and managerial profit strategies, and on a micro level in terms of; how customers are treated, the process of how clothing is donated and sold, and how both volunteers and customers interact within the context of a secondary sphere of exchange. Multiple Charity Retailers are, on the surface, better organised, more geared towards profitability and are run in line with a business model (p. 32); there is no real competition to them from locally-managed shops dependent upon volunteers.

The straightforward division of charity shops into a trinity depending upon their parent cause and how many shops they have gave an indication that Parsons believed different types of charity shop have 'professionalised' in different ways. The *Multiple Charity Retailer*, with many branches and some paid staff, will professionalise its operations more rapidly than the *Hospice Charity Retailer*, which may have up to 20 branches, and will usually be locally organised. Both will

professionalise more rapidly than the *Independent Charity Retailer* (2004, p. 34). By charting how diverse these shops are even within their own sector, Parsons appeals against generalisations that suggest professionalisation is simply a substitution of traditional charity values for those from the retail sector. Instead, it is far more complicated and indistinct. For instance, in her analysis, certain charities (mainly the latter two categories in the typology) are largely driven by local imperatives and this responsibility usurps their business agenda (p. 37). In short, the studies she has undertaken in the workings of the charity shop, particularly her 2004 typology, provide a strong foundation to future studies in this area. Although she does not eulogise the end of the traditional charity shop, she shows how it fits in currently with a vastly expanding sector and all pressures point towards a need to 'keep up'.

What Parsons' article lacks is a sociological narrative; something to tie her interviews with employees and her extensive statistical data together along with the experiences of those who are immersed in the day-to-day operations of the charity shop. Retail and marketing theory can tell us a great deal about how statistical growth of this particularly nuanced retail sector is played out but by looking at charity shops through a lens of contemporary sociological understanding in relation to charity, capitalism and work, we are able to extrapolate this change beyond the limitations of the shop itself to relate to current issues that abound in relation to inequality and social responsibility. The charity shop sector is indeed expanding more and more (there were approximately 9,100 charity shops operating in the UK in October 2011 – an estimated growth of 28.5% for the sector [Ainsworth, 2011]) in spite of an inhospitable economic climate. Thus, their sociological importance should not be underestimated.

## 2.5 Summary

Throughout this chapter, efforts have been made to chart how the charity shop has become a locus for sociological examination in the United Kingdom. Several themes throughout the various research studies have been identified when contextualising a study of charity shop operations. These have been detailed above and can be summarised as:

- The emphasis upon the entrepreneurial spirit prevalent in alternative retail spaces (McRobbie, 1989; Crewe et al., 2003) and the 'working knowledge' necessary to successfully negotiate the sale of second-hand goods that has translated over into charity retail.
- The 'identity vs. necessity' shopper debate, in which the degree of personal agency of the customer is in question. Although very popular in first-hand consumption studies, this perspective suffers due to an over-reliance upon a binary of cultural or economic arguments.
- Social exclusion, accessibility and the links this has with alternative retail spaces, in particular in relation to their geographical location.
- The effect upon 'charity' when juxtaposed with the capitalistic ideology behind shopping. This theme encompasses challenges to altruism within the commercialised shopping space but also the representation of the charity shop in contrast to the ethos and values of the traditional Third Sector. Increasing public and private sector dependence is evident in the contemporary transformation charity shops have undergone.
- Analysis of professionalisation, in the form of hierarchical structures, paid & unpaid co-work and the diverse types of

charity shop that have emerged due to the professionalising process.

By bringing the study of the charity shop from the fields of human geography, management and retail studies, and back towards the sociological underpinnings described above, this thesis aims to enrich the work of earlier charity shop theorists who paved the way for an intricate micro-analysis of charity shop processes. With the initial objective of offering some insight into the difficulties posed by combining the contradictory value systems of charity and profit-making, the following chapter will aim to contextualise the points of contention within the charity shop by looking at historical and current sociological research into the key areas below:

1. How contemporary theories of consumer capitalism have introduced a new appraisal of how shopping and consumption takes place.
2. What 'professionalisation' is and the current ideas around the impacts this has upon workers, hierarchies, volunteer motivations and 'new' kinds of work.
3. A sociological analysis of charity, and the charitable 'gift'.



## CHAPTER 3

### Conceptualising the Charity Shop

In the light of the small pool of current sociological work on charity shops, this theoretical overview will look at charity shops in relation to some more established aspects of sociological theory. Some overarching themes were identified in Chapter 2 from the charity shop literature, which are described below. The exploration of previous literature draws influence from some of the key areas of capitalism and traditional consumer theory; theories of work and professions; and the sociology of charity and 'the gift'. This chapter will be examining the literature behind each of these topics in turn.

Firstly, the literature indicated an interest in the way items are bought and sold, and to whom, in the charity shop space. Many authors have looked at the types of goods sold in the shops (Horne & Broadbridge, 1995; Parsons, 2000; Horne & Maddrell, 2002; Gregson & Crewe, 2003; Chattoe, 2006) and the different types of customer that uses them (Gregson et al., 2000; Williams, 2002; 2003; Gregson et al., 2002) as well as a few focusing solely upon the donors who supply these goods and their reasons for doing so (Hibbert et al., 2005; Gregson et al., 2007). This preoccupation with the impetus behind charity shop supply and demand demonstrates how integral the 'shop' element is to our understanding of charity shopping. The nexus of the concepts of 'charity' and 'shopping' within the charity shop is one of the most controversial characteristics of the third sector. Therefore, part one of this theoretical review will be an introduction of traditional and more contemporary perspectives on consumer capitalism and shopping behaviour.

The second part of the chapter aims to address another prominent element of previous charity shop literature: professionalisation of work. Richard Goodall's (2000a; 2000b) and Elizabeth Parsons' (2002; 2004) work in particular state the changes in charity retail that have been 'caused' by professionalisation of the working operations of the shop. Before this can be empirically interrogated, these areas of sociological interest will be described, and in particular, the term 'professional' explicitly defined.

Finally, part three addresses the concept of charity within the 'charity' shop, and examines previous work around altruism and charitable behaviour. Within the scope of the previous literature in Chapter 2, more attention is paid to the 'shop' part of the 'charity shop' than its philanthropic attributes. Much of the research that has previously discussed the caring, community-minded 'charity' element has done so in direct contrast to its juxtaposition with shopping or business-mindedness. This is evidenced in the titles of many articles on the subject, for example "People or Profits?" (Parsons, 2002), and "Charity, Retail or Care?" (Parsons & Broadbridge 2007) and "Volunteerism & Professionalisation: Trends in Tension?" (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012). This indicates that the concept of 'charity' being played out in the charity shop space is being taken for granted by some theorists in much the same way as the concept of 'professionalisation'. Therefore, the concept of charity needs to be clearly defined in sociological terms, referring to the volunteers and donors participating in these altruistic acts. In particular, this section will look at work on the idealisation of the charitable gift, with reference to Mauss (1970) and Godelier (1999).

These background themes (consumer capitalism; professionalisation and the gift) will be used to set the sociological backdrop for theorising charity shops in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **3.1 Consumer Capitalism**

In spite of its nuanced qualities a charity shop, as its name states, is still a shop. The act of shopping, processes of consumption and the satiation (or lack thereof) of desires through exchange of money for goods within a dedicated space has been a preoccupation of social science for a long time, as theorists attempt to marry up the importance of shopping and engagement with capitalism to identity construction and individualisation in the modern era. The peculiar abstract nature of ‘going shopping’ since its separation from the more rational necessitation of need-fulfilment has become of more interest to sociology in the wake of increasing affluence and disposable income.

Therefore, the first part of this theoretical review will paint a picture of traditional and contemporary perspectives on ‘the shop’ in relation to consumer capitalism. From its roots in Marxism, through early perceptions of traditional shopping spaces to post-modern contemporaries, this section finishes with a summary of ‘prosumption’: a contemporary amalgamation of production and consumption, in which the consumer becomes actively involved in their own shopping processes. In charting the progressive understanding of consumption habits in the context of Western capitalism, the niche within which the charity shop resides (that of second-hand, or ‘alternative’ shopping) can be re-assessed and resituated in response to observed developments in this field.

#### **3.1.1 The “Shop” vs. The “Second Hand Shop”**

To begin to explore what constitutes a traditional understanding of a shop, it is important to clarify established notions of what it is 'to shop', and indeed, what a 'shop' is. Although the processes inherent in shopping are crucial to our understanding of developments in consumption habits, so too are the spaces in which they take place, and how society defines these.

Shops are in themselves an intriguing phenomenon; when the idea of charity enters into the mix they become even more complex and contradictory. Theories of consumer behaviour have formed a vast area of sociological interest, but studies of 'common' shopping and consumer behaviours draw their focus mainly from first-hand consumption sites: the shopping mall and the department store in particular (Laermans, 1993). Whilst the importance of these monolithic spaces of consumption is undeniable, depictions of smaller, intimate, more nuanced shopping spaces are sometimes overlooked due to a fervent emphasis upon progressive, supersized retail consumption, and an unspoken assumption that parochial shopping experiences are old-fashioned, backwards-thinking, and will die out in the near future.

There are numerous different kinds of shop, and in the past certain shopping locations have been researched due to their representation of the developments of modernity and the change in shopping practices. M.B. Miller (1994), Walter Benjamin (1999) and Susan Porter Benson (1986) wrote about the sensory "dream world" or "phantasmagoria" of the department store, and how this contributed to a newer form of fragmented and ultimately liberated consumerism for the affluent, whilst other authors have written about new forms of consumption available in the public shopping mall (Kowinski, 1985; Langrehr, 1991; Shields, 1992; Goss, 1993, 1999; Lehtonen & Mäenpää, 1997; Zukin, 1998). A large proportion of this work focused upon the

compelling nature of the sensory aspects of these shopping locales (Featherstone, 2007, pp.22-3).

There have also been several studies of novel or unusual shopping environments, including the sex shop (Perkins & Skipper, 1981; 1993; Tewksbury, 1990); the toy store (Williams, 2004; Baker, 2007), the independent record shop (Cooper, 2010) and in the field of second-hand consumption; the thrift store (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005) and the antique market or curiosity shop (Hollington, 1989; Parsons, 2008; 2010) to name but a few. However an investigation of what constitutes a shop; the processes, location, individuals, routines and administrative or organisational structures that are in place to enable the consumer activity so frequently theorised in sociological literature to take place; are often neglected due to their mundane nature.

Nevertheless, as Giddens has stated, “the analysis of the apparently trivial or ephemeral can contribute in a basic way to understanding the more durable features of social institutions.” (1987, p.12). Our understanding of what makes a shop is a social construct, and therefore must be critically analysed. By narrowing shopping into a ‘fantastical’ and fundamentally modern act, as many perspectives have done, the mundanity of basic, needs-oriented shop experiences are underprivileged (Miller, 1998). Also it fails to encompass the active role of shoppers, where they are not simply passively absorbing the experience of consumption, but exercising choices and remaining autonomous (Carù & Cova, 2007).

In Western culture, a shop (at least in the physical sense) comprises of a room or collection of rooms that are open to the general public, with items available to be bought. It will most likely have a till and a sales assistant. Money in physical or credit form will be exchanged for products. It may have other characteristics: a window display, tannoy system, customer services, changing rooms and so on,

but none of these are essential requisites for the label of 'shop' to be applied. Chattoe (2006, p. 157) suggests that first hand shop work involves the restocking of shelves, the wrapping of goods, the exchange of money, and may also incorporate "in-store announcements; extensive advertising or promotional material (including television or video); canned music; closed tills and complex queuing arrangements; distant 'service desks' (for returns or complaints); repeated rearrangement of stock; over-attentive staff on commission; and obtrusive security" (*ibid.*, p. 158). Fixed prices and regular staff are not integral, but generally a fixed location is; for instance, a typical form of a shop would not encompass a car boot or market stall, a street trader's stand or the house of person who has placed an advert for an item for sale in a local newspaper. Nevertheless, there are contemporary examples of intangible shops such as Internet retailers, mobile telephone apps, eBay shops and mail order businesses, which make a normative description of what constitutes a shop difficult.

With these forming an exception to the general rule, the physical manifestation of a 'shop' seems disarmingly crude. A Marxist perspective might define a shop as a conduit for capitalist forces for the purposes of subordination of the populous. In this context, the definition of a 'shop' becomes ambiguous when charity is involved. There is suddenly an intermission of discourses of philanthropy, recycling, consumer resistance, and object life histories. The charity shop's anomalous nature not only stems from its exclusion from analyses of first hand consumption, yet also its unique position as a locus of second-hand consumption which presents itself in a way not dissimilar to conventional first-hand shops. The simplistic definition of a 'shop' becomes complex by the charity shop's association with previously used goods, particularly in relation to discourses of charity (consumption as 'doing good') and deprivation (consumption as a necessity). How the charity shop is defined through these unusual

forms of consumption as distinct from other locales of consumer behaviour is therefore of utmost importance to this thesis. It would be categorised as a site of alternative retail – specifically a ‘second-hand’ shopping space, along with the car boot sale, the junk shop, the vintage market and the jumble sale.

The process of first-hand consumption in physical retail environments has been privileged in social science, and less attention has been paid to what happens to goods after this phase. Crewe & Gregson argue that marginal or resistant consumer behaviour, such as shopping in alternative consumption spaces, is undermined in such literature (Crewe & Gregson, 1998). Due to a focus upon the processes leading up to the purchase (production) and subsequent acquisition of goods (consumption), what happens after this event is frequently neglected (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986; Hetherington, 2004; Gregson et al., 2007). An object’s re-entry into the sphere of consumption and the trajectories from the store to the home and back again provide a compelling insight into how we identify and negotiate items ‘post-consumption’ and how we re-consume them. These subject/object interactions within areas of second hand consumption contribute to the complexity of defining what the charity shop actually is. The role of the object and its ‘illusory qualities’ in this scenario regularly takes precedence over the experiences of those dealing with them, something that undermines the very unique role that charity shop workers (and shoppers) play in the process.

Gregson & Crewe (1997a) posit that sociological work on consumption relies primarily upon theoretical accounts or rational economic models, and neglects to incorporate the ‘messiness’ of second hand consumption spheres, along with the unique qualities that segregate them from the orderly nature of first-hand consumption. This ‘messiness’ skews normative assumptions about shopping locales, and indicates how other discourses impact upon the primary first-hand

motive of profit. Instead of a comprehensive 'Production – Sale – Consumption' model, second hand consumption requires an act of dispossession (Ekerdt, 2009), necessary repair or restorative processes, and then 'redefinition' (Gregson & Crewe 2003) by the consumer who must create new meaning and value for the item. As a result, traditional first-hand consumer theory is still relevant, but must be contextualised to incorporate the degree of involvement of the participants in the charity shop.

Therefore, this study must begin with a grounding in traditional theories of consumer culture and shopping, built up with the nuances of the contemporary charity shop in mind.

### **3.1.2 Critical Consumer Theory**

Consumer theory as it stands often privileges the first cycle of consumption and therefore how this is applicable to alternative retail consumption needs to be evidenced. Consumption theorist Mike Featherstone's (2007, p.13) distinction between perspectives on consumer behaviour is helpful to understand how consumer theory has previously fallen into certain categories and how these are often taken for granted as the 'grand narratives' of shopping behaviour. Featherstone proposed that traditional concepts of consumer society revolve around three ideas: the manipulated consumer being force-fed a constant supply of unnecessary goods versus the polar notion of shopper 'freedom' and choice as a form of liberation (a predominantly Marxist perspective); the cementing of social ties and differentiation through the act of consumption (cultural identity perspective) and finally, a concentration upon the aesthetic and corporeal pleasures of shopping for the individual, where shopping becomes a leisure pursuit



rather than a necessity (Featherstone, 2007, p.13). By summarising each of these in terms of their relevance to alternative retail shopping behaviours, this section will show the extent and limitations of these three areas of theory in their application to the study of charity shops.

Marxist perspectives on consumer capitalism charted the move from traditional economies of exchange (focused upon the family and communal ties) towards a commodity-orientated culture where material goods became integrally representative of us and of society itself. The traditional charity shop, with its kindly elderly volunteers and image as a place for “purchasing goods at bargain prices” (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 101) may be a throwback to a traditional local economy, where prices and subsequent profits are orientated to benefit the society around them. However, the modern charity shop represents a departure from this locally dependent and supportive network. As the following section will illustrate, a Marxian reading of charity shops can infer that ‘charity’ is the illusion imbued in the goods sold in charity shops. In the act of ‘doing good’ that is not tangible or physically experienced, charity is passively purchased. It is the metaphysical benevolence sold and consumed in charity shops that characterises them in comparison to standard capitalist imperatives or ‘manipulative commerce’ (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010, p. 25).

### **3.1.3 Marxism and the Charity Shop**

In traditional Marxist theory, a product or a good is differentiated from a natural item due to the element of human labour involved (Lury, 1996, p.40). Consumption of these goods contributes considerably to how society is formed, and, according to Marx, starts to form the basis of human relations – not only do goods give a

'concreteness' to cultural understanding (Lury, 1996, p.14), but they also serve to *conceal* and detract from the social processes that are behind them, processes which are fundamentally based upon human relations. In relation to the charity shop, their money-making potential of is disguised by the omnipresent umbrella of goodwill – the kindness of volunteers, the generosity of donations and the prospect of 'helping others'. Purchasing in a charity shop is never associated manipulation or exploitation in real-life contexts, instead it is considered to be a 'good' act of consumption, something that is ethical and akin to recycling (Horne & Maddrell, 2002; Cherrier, 2007) rather than synonymous with the negative hedonism of first-hand consumption. Nevertheless, it is still a shop, and therefore is devoted to making profit, and hiding the processes necessary for it to do so from the customers who visit, even when those profits are going towards a named 'cause'.

The charity shop does not disguise the fact it is a shop; they request money in return for goods as any shop would, but they do have the additional selling point of being a benefactor for the less fortunate. The charity shop is not only selling goods to the customer, but the feeling of 'doing good' and contributing to a cause. The same is true of the experience of donating to the store. The sociological theory of altruism and giving will be drawn out later in this chapter, but for now, it is important to highlight the intangible impact of altruistic well-being upon a sold item in reference to Marx's 'commodity fetishism' (1867).

This term is an established sociological neologism used to describe the enchanting and enigmatic qualities that goods become imbued with due to their undetectable history. These 'mystery objects' have been described as replacing the actual relationships between people to become relationships between 'things' (Lury, 1996). To apply this in the context of the charity shop, the relationship between people (those who benefit from the charity and those who give it) has been

substituted by the exchange of a product, which forms the impression of indirectly helping others.

Commodity fetishism implies a slightly darker nature behind charity shop exchanges. Although a charity shop can be differentiated from other shops due to the positive application of consumption that it fosters, Marxist theory became the catalyst for a great deal of negative interpretations of consumer culture. Marx posits our dependence upon material goods and our seduction by the hegemonic forces of capitalism as a society succumbing passively to uncontrollable economic forces (Marx, 1867). Materialism is generally viewed with negativity (McCracken, 1988, p.xi), with the post 19<sup>th</sup> century consumer boom being criticised for dominating and undermining the masses and causing the disintegration of culture and art (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2007). Much of the early consumer theory contained an element of outcry at the manipulative, omnipotent and all-encompassing nature of modern consumption in direct comparison with traditional, pre-industrial consumption, which was treated as 'functional' and needs-orientated (Miller, 1997, p.44). The charity shop falls somewhere in the middle at present, fulfilling a functional role of providing discounted consumables to the economically deprived, whilst also utilising consumers and volunteers to further the cause the shop represents. Prices may remain low in low-income areas where shops provide a service for those who cannot afford higher priced, new goods (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 106) and charities frequently survey and monitor prices of small businesses, charity shops and other competition in the area and strategically price their items in line with this (*ibid.* p. 116). In spite of this, charity shops play a major role in alerting consumers to the charity 'brand' and raising public awareness of their cause (Horne & Broadbridge, 1995, p. 18), in effect they serve as advertisements. Goodall (2000a) describes how shops supplement commercial advertisements with 'standardised logos' that are

displayed in the shop displays and decoration, as well as on the bags provided with each purchase. Charities often employ a standard emblem or logo which is displayed on shop fronts and works much like a brand logo in the way an arbitrary symbol becomes innately associated with a cause; for example the pink ribbon for Breast Cancer Awareness, or the red poppy for the British Legion's Remembrance Day celebration.

This form of logo promotion is used frequently in profitable marketing campaigns by big companies, and was adopted by larger charities due to its successfulness at representing a brand. It is an example of the power of the 'commodity sign', described by Baudrillard (cited in Featherstone, 2007, p. 15), where the symbolism of charity escapes the material to become an entity in its own right. This results in 'sign value', a conception which functions as both exchange value and use value, yet is a metaphysical symbol compiled by methods of packaging, advertising, design and media promotion (Wernick, 1991, pp. 15-16). The signs are visualised as unremarkable abstractions until meaning is encoded within them by these methods, and this in turn promotes the sign's 'value'. Charity branding through symbolic imagery is becoming increasingly important as charities are subjected to professionalising processes. Indeed, charities have been seen to have some of the strongest and most universally recognised brands in the world (Saxton, 2008, p. 2).

This is emblematic of the 'society of the spectacle' that Guy Debord (1977) describes: the meaning of the object is distanced from its authentic formative processes by insubstantial aesthetic gloss in the form of ambiguous, disconnected free-floating imagery. In terms of the second-hand consumption of objects, this can be overridden by the 'life' of the object replacing the 'sign value' it may have had during first-hand consumption (Kopytoff, 1986; Appadurai, 1986). However, the development of charity branding in the shop context has the

opportunity to displace any discourses of protest or anti-consumerism, as we will see later in this chapter. The charity brand is omnipresent through the shopping experience, and discourses of charitable goodwill are advertised, bought and sold alongside the physical goods in store, by those who are selling them, by those who are sorting, cleaning and displaying them, by those who are donating them, and by those who are buying them. Debord's statement that "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images." (1977, p. 12) underlines the crucial fact that the imagery of charity we consume is distant from the true reality of it. Contemporary social theorist Slavov Žižek (1992) used Lacanian theory to define this as our sublimation into 'the imaginary' and 'the symbolic', which denies access to the true (often traumatic) order behind these signifiers and what they inherently signify. Žižek's understanding of the concept of charity supports this: he posits charity as a necessary constituent of modern capitalism, thus the visual, symbolic representation of charity must be overemphasised in order for its existence to continue (Žižek, 2009a). What Baudrillard, Debord and Žižek have in common are their concern with the distortions, mimicry and deception that the over abundance of these *simulacra* bring about.

Zygmunt Bauman (1987) gave much credence to a Neo-Marxian view of consumers as part of an uncontrollable and manipulative economic system by highlighting its inequalities in his binary interpretation of the modern consumer. Some are liberated, welcome to choose and spend money freely in the accumulation of things – they are the *Seduced* and the *Free*. Others are restricted by lack of economic capital and therefore suffer exclusion from the process and in some cases, surveillance by the system – they are the *Repressed* and the *Flawed*. The power to 'opt out' and deny consumption is not incorporated into Bauman's depiction of consumers, and by not

accounting for these idiosyncratic factors he devalues society (Davis, 2008, p.108) and human agency in general. This is a critique that is frequently levelled against Marxist consumer theorists, particularly due to their tendency to privilege the importance of the origins of production. As has previously been noted, alternative shopping spaces necessitate a consumption rather than production emphasis.

The charity shop could be seen as anomalous to Marxist consumer theory; their customers are not being seduced by the capitalist market and the fast obsolescence of novel goods (Campbell, 1987). It also takes the form of a peripheral shopping space that has been seen as part of an alternative resistance economy (Healy, 2008). It falls somewhere in the middle at present, fulfilling a functional role of providing discounted consumables to the economically-deprived, whilst also, in some ways, exploiting the remnants and left-overs of capitalism.

### **3.1.4 Social Distinction: Identity vs. Necessity**

Featherstone's second aspect of consumer theory concerns theories that consider how consumption habits and behaviours distinguish certain social relationships, and define individuals and difference. Within the second-hand consumption sphere this is key, as the cultural meanings and potential stigma attached to them are far more potent than with generic first-hand shopping locations. Equally, for participants within the charity shop space, the concepts of habitus and identity formation in this typology are characteristics of shopping that extend beyond the necessity of low-priced second-hand shopping.

Social distinction theories of consumer behaviour began with early works by Veblen (1925), in turn were developed by Bourdieu,

and grew into the identity-consumption theories favoured by cultural turn theorists of the late 1990's. The work of Thorstein Veblen (1925) on 'The Leisure Class' sought to distinguish how consumption was an impetus for emulation and differentiation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier. Displays of indulgence were only possible for those of high economic status, and therefore reinforced their class position. Whilst the 'nouveaux riches' needed to use their wealth to "assert their social pretensions" through acts of consumption, the lower classes were obliged to attempt to imitate those who were above them as best they could (Lury, 1996).

Even as recently as the last decade, Williams (2002, p. 1905) noted that in deprived areas those who bought items second still idealised and preferred the purchase of 'new' goods, even when not able to afford them. The idea of having clothing and goods that define and conform to our allotted status was built upon by Bourdieu in his seminal work "Distinction" (1984) where consumer behaviour formed part of the wider 'habitus', or social conditions, of one's class. This process is reciprocal, because in order to conform to a certain habitus one must already have the designated capital required. This can be economic (in the form of money or investments), cultural (education, ability, knowledge) or social (intra-community ties and family links). The consumption practises and decisions undertaken therefore depend upon a combination of capital; to read Tolstoy's *War & Peace* would gain an individual more educational and hence cultural capital, perhaps even some social status – but Bourdieu would maintain that a certain amount of this capital would have to have been there *in the first place* for the reading to have commenced. His oft-quoted eminent point remains true: "Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier." (1984: 6).

There is a traceable line of thought between the work of Veblen and Bourdieu in both their character and their relative importance to social theory (Campbell, 1995). The conceptual link is the idea of

effortlessness; Veblen's status symbols were high in value only when they were acquired without visible effort. As he notes "wealth acquired passively by transmission from ancestors to other antecedents presently becomes even more honorific than wealth acquired by the possessor's own effort" (Veblen, 1899, p. 37). Equally, social habitus in Bourdieu's work must be something that is naturalised; when consciously cultivated there is a risk of accidentally betraying your previous inferior status. He describes "the naïve exhibitionism of 'conspicuous consumption', which seeks distinction in the crude display of ill-mastered luxury" (1984, p. 31) which belies impurity and unnatural status distinction. The mastery of 'the search' through the goods in charity shops and seeking out a bargain would again display the naturalised cultural capital of the shopper.

However, there is some evidence that Bourdieu's contemporary evaluation of tastes is applicable to second-hand consumption behaviour. Firstly, Bourdieu reverts Veblen's "trickle down" theory of tastes (in which the lower classes inherit trends and tastes from those above them, as later adopted by Simmel (1904) in his popular account of modern fashion) to incorporate the modern distaste for pretention, particularly in art circles. He writes "The essentialist merit of the 'common people' is that they have none of the pretensions to art (or power) which inspire the ambitions of the 'petit bourgeois'. Their indifference tacitly acknowledges the monopoly." (*ibid.* p. 62). An example of this is plainly found in the notion of the 'middle class bohemian' or the "well-bred understatement" (Wilson in Gregson and Crewe, 1994, p. 265) of the emboldened fashion student, playing at appearing dishevelled. It may also apply to the middle/upper class charity shop frequenter who enjoys the experience of 'slumming it', where as Jenß (2004) notes, the hope is that by investing in the regressive act of second-hand consumption and immersing oneself



within that 'world', a little of that authenticity will rub off on the wearer.

What is clear is the emphasis upon the visual and embodiment – appearances of luxury, the implication of expense and the suggestion of status through deportment; not to mention the impact this has upon individual identity. Veblen's argument that conspicuous consumption is not always intended to be visual and for the benefit of others (1899, p. 103) hence the buying of expensive undergarments or toilet roll, may explain the reticence and shame involved in purchasing from second hand shops, even when there is certainty that the item is new and unsoiled.

### **3.1.5 Exclusion**

This leads on to another integral element of both of Featherstone's first two categories of consumer theory: the links between exclusion, and being unable to participate in the consumption process due to restricted resources. Informal shopping sites such as charity shops presuppose a form of 'disadvantaged consumer' for whom other options are not available (Eversley, 1990, p.13). Douglas & Isherwood (1979, p.12) have written about consumer taste as being confined by 'fences', which act to exclude certain people and include others. Equally, they describe 'bridges', whereby taste markers can actually help the transgression of social boundaries. The idea that second-hand shopping is an outlet for individuals who are restricted economically seems sensible, however as Bourdieu's account makes clear, those of lower classes are in a sense liberated from the need to impress and 'be conspicuous' anyway, by their social positioning (although this perspective has been widely criticised for being

deterministic – contrary evidence can be seen in the empirical work of Williams et al. [2001] and Williams [2002, 2004]). The second-hand consumer sphere should in theory be protected by a ‘fence’ that, whilst perhaps restricting the consumption of the poor, also prevents invasion from the rich due to the stigma attached. Therefore it is the use of second-hand shops by those from comfortable economical backgrounds that has been viewed as compelling for authors such as Gregson & Crewe (1997a) rather than the more needs-based discourse of the ‘excluded’ shopper who has no option but to be thrifty. New ‘positional goods’ (Hirsch 1976) may not be new at all, but they can in some ways usurp traditional expensive purchases as a form of conspicuous consumption, privileging the cultural capital need to find a ‘bargain’ over economic capital, or perhaps even privileging the charitable values over those of consumer society. To re-interpret Appadurai’s “conspicuous parsimony” (1986: 30), the desire is now to disguise obvious wealth in frugal shopping activities. This undermines Veblen’s ‘trickle down’ model, and has resulted in it being appropriately re-envisioned as a “trickle across” (King in McCracken 1988, p. 95) or “trickle round” model (Trigg, 2001) where tastes are transmitted and received from all classes in the hierarchy. This would be an indication of what Bourdieu deemed the dynamic nature of combinations of cultural and economic capital, and how status becomes fluid as a result (Bourdieu, 1984, p.114). As has been noted earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 2, some contemporary studies of second-hand shopping privilege this idea of shoppers as ‘identity managers’, rather than looking at the mundane reasoning behind them (McRobbie, 1989; Gregson & Crewe, 2003; Palmer & Clark, 2005).

All of this is in spite of the fact that charity shops have an intrinsic socio-spatial connection with deprived and run down locations. They are traditionally known for their ‘filling in’ of empty spaces where other traders have been forced to move out (Parsons E. ,

2002, p. 4), usually in less desirable or profitable parts of town. They make use of disused 'feral spaces', or unpredictable urban locales, in cities (Whatmore & Hinchliffe, 2003). They indicate a positive employment of vacant space; they breathe new life into urban 'dead zones', mimicking the revival of disused items as 'newborn' commodities within their shops.

There has been a perception that charity shops that crop up in more lucrative areas are 'lowering the tone' (Paddison, 2000, p.169) enticing in shoppers that are primarily cheap or discount-oriented who are not especially desirable to other retailers based in the area. There have been some accounts of 'nimbyism' (a "not in my back yard" mentality) regarding charity shops, from larger companies who feel that their presence negates their own profit-making potential (*ibid.* p. 162). This illustrates once again the juncture between commercial values and those of the charity (whose formal objective is fundraising for their mission, not to undercut or undermine other businesses).

As a result of this, charity shops existed up until recently primarily in marginalised areas, and received their highest footfall here (19% of shoppers in poor neighbourhoods shop for second-hand goods, as opposed to only 6% in more affluent suburbs (Williams C. , 2002, p. 1902). Thus as Williams *et al.* summarise (2001, p. 218), the social economics of shopping is frequently forgotten in favour of an emphasis on identity management, choice and 'mix and match' lifestyles (Mort, in Williams *et al.* 2001, p. 206). Crewe, Gregson and Brooks discuss how city areas that were previously neglected enabled second-hand retail communities to spring up and thrive, and that regeneration projects, and the resulting commercialisation caused a "pressure towards mainstream conformity" (2003, p.95). This is changing now for some charity shops: as promotion of the charity name and brand are coming to the forefront, they are spending more money on locating shops in places where visibility is high, so the

charity has a 'shop window' to exhibit to the general marketplace (Paddison 2000, p. 162). This shows that again charity shops are implicated in the post-modern tendency towards branding and imagery discussed earlier.

Therefore, even when considering the numerous objectives at play within the charity shop sphere, we must exercise caution when ascribing even established and traditional theories such as those above with this particularly nuanced locale.

### **3.1.5 Hedonism: Shopping for Pleasure**

Returning to Mike Featherstone's (2007) typology of consumer theory, the final area of interest is the sensory enjoyment of the experience of shopping and the emotional ties formed by this process. The development of shopping from an act of obtaining necessities to an act that is undertaken purely for leisure is believed to have coincided with the onset of industrialisation and mass consumerism. Theorists who work in this area posit a distinct difference between "doing the shopping" (acquiring consumables necessary for existence) and "going shopping" (engaging in selective purchasing of non-necessary items) (Campbell, 1997, p.173). This is also described by Falk & Campbell as the "shopping for" and the recreational "shopping around" (1997, p.6). The latter is a less ordered, more adventurous and voluntary means of consumption, and is more frequently attributed to shopping parades, department stores, and large shopping malls where there is a sense of the carnivalesque (Featherstone, 2007, p.22) and a wild cornucopia of possible 'wants'. This sense of disorder and disorientation is exciting and exotic for the shopper, it permits a feeling of "dreaminess", "self-illusory hedonism", "playfulness" and "impulsiveness" (Lehtonen &

Mäenpää, 1997, p.144). Chattoe (2006, p.158) suggests that in charity shops this also occurs, as there is a high level of 'engagement', which emerges from "the increased richness of shopping activities in these contexts".

Colin Campbell's discussion of modern autonomous imaginary hedonism (1987) is one of these perspectives on consumer behaviour. It describes how the individual delays and defers the pleasure of purchase through daydreams, window-shopping and a characteristic 'longing' (p. 87). As a result of this, Campbell says, we suffer from a "continual extinction of wants" (p. 38), since the pleasure we glean comes from the illusion of an item, and not from the physical consumption. This results in a powerful desire for the 'novel', since anything new has the *potential* to fulfil the illusory dream we have mentally created (p. 89).

The potential for illusory power in goods is augmented when goods are second hand in several ways. Crewe, Gregson & Brooks (2003, p.143) describe how meanings are created within second hand goods through 'historical reconstruction' – prospective buyers inscribe a history onto an item based on its perceived age and used. This is a form of negotiation that is made when one is coming to terms with the presence of previous use in an item – rather than consider the proximity of the body of another, buyers will romanticise past ownership. One customer within their research said she bought a "Lovely Jackie O suit" (Crewe et al., 2003, p.143), thus creating an illusory link between an item of clothing and a style icon of days gone by.

Shopping for second-hand items can be equally disillusioning. The reality of an item can never live up to the potential we envisage (Campbell, 1987, pp. 86-90). Similarly to Benjamin's (1999) 'dream world' depiction of the department store, where 'allegories' have

replaced the actual objects on sale, we buy into our self-created yet impossible daydreams. Imagining we are Jackie O in a second-hand suit can never actually come to fruition. Daydreaming that an old 1950s dress will turn us into Marilyn Monroe will only prove an embarrassment if the dress is ill-fitting, damaged or falling apart due to age. Campbell stresses the importance of the 'self-illusory' nature of this process: it is not an imposition by industrial forces; a manipulation by signs or symbols; nor is it the result of a desire to imitate others. Instead it is internally created, and internally relinquished. In fact, Campbell (1987, p. 91) suggests that advertisements and the other tools of capitalism discussed in the above section on 'sign value' are merely depicting this process, rather than spurring it. We enjoy the visual cues provided by product marketing, since they aid our illusory 'dream-scape'

It is pertinent to mention here that charity shop advertising and branding plays little or no role in this: the charity marketing will as a rule only sell its charity values and the cause itself. They do not generally depict any of the items sold in their promotion. This accentuates the fact that what they are *actually* selling in charity shops is the cause and the charity's participation in it. The goods as physical and tangible items are of minimal importance; what matters is the metaphysical illusory ties charity has to altruism, benevolence and the creation of a 'warm glow' (Andreoni, 1990) for the shopper who can feel they have contributed indirectly via their purchase.

According to Campbell, the existence of wants is never-ending. New desires are created by developments and improvements, and the 'built-in obsolescence' of goods. Campbell describes the 'inevitable gap' and 'discrepancy' that forms between reality and daydreams (Campbell, 1987, p. 95), preventing us from escaping the endless cycle of dissatisfied 'wants' and new desires. The experience of second-hand consumption is an extension of this process; when all first-hand

avenues have been exhausted and no longer provide novelty or excitement, the erratic and effervescent second-hand world can be very enticing. In a more mundane sense, even obtaining these new desirable goods in second hand form holds more excitement for the shopper, as they have the thrill of finding a bargain, likened to getting a 'fix' or a 'high' (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 44). Alexandra Palmer describes this as our "victory over the fashion system" by evading the disillusionment of mass consumption (2005, p.199), when actually it merely becomes a part of it, as she states in the opening of her article "vintage is now part of mass culture" (p. 197).

The dream world of shopping is a place where an orgy of sensations can be enjoyed even when one has limited means, as Lehtonen & Mäenpää (1997, p.143) note, "Shopping as a pleasurable leisure activity does not necessarily require a great amount of money". In second-hand sites such as the car boot sale or flea market, the process of 'rummaging' is a gratifying pastime in itself. This pleasure is heightened by the likely possibility of 'hidden treasure' – novelty disguised amidst clutter and rubbish. For this reason, longing is often concealed, particularly in second hand locations where prices are not set such as jumble or car boot sales (Gregson & Crewe, 1997a, p.25) to ensure that prices are not inflated by the vendor's knowledge of your desire. The unpredictability of such spaces has been likened to that of the traditional fair, where the space itself forms "a source of fascination and desire" (McCracken, 1987, p.22). Clarke also likens the 'nearly new' sale to an Eastern Bazaar, where there is constant hustle and bustle, lots of noise, and 'frantic' purchasing (Clarke, 2000, p.85).

Many second-hand consumption spaces adopt this kind of chaotic, tumultuous shopping environment, due to having less restrictions and impositions than in first-hand markets. The charity shop is not so different; in fact, Palmer suggests that the 'disarray' in charity shops is what makes them appealing (2005, p.204). There is a

distinction to be made between the experience of browsing and the experience of buying (Bloch, Ridgway, & Sherrell, 1989) in these spaces, as the two are not necessarily concomitant. The 'experience' of these shops is not always related to directly related to shopping as we know it, as described in the work of Carù & Cova (2007) who look at experiential consumption as something that is co-developed between consumers and companies to be fully immersive and not limited by the short-term act of purchasing. The willing co-operation of consumers in this process is becoming more and more integral to the way goods are sold to the public. The (often contentious) umbrella term for this progressive approach to consumer theory is 'prosumption' (Toffler, 1981) – the combined act of consuming and producing which enables individualisation of bespoke consumer services and goods. The following section will describe how prosumption could be a feasible future of consumer behaviour, and how in particular it compliments literature on charity shopping experiences.

### **3.1.6 Prosumption: The Future of Consumer Capitalism**

A comprehensive overview of consumer capitalism is made more difficult in the wake of Internet shopping and the enormous economic impact of e-commerce in recent years. A quick online search reveals that many charities have already ventured into this market; with several large national charities selling second-hand, donated goods online, in addition to bought-in and branded items (for example Oxfam - [www.oxfam.org.uk/shop](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/shop) and Cancer Research UK - [giftshop.cancerresearchuk.org](http://giftshop.cancerresearchuk.org)). This may have consequential effects on the charity shop floor in years to come; however, high street charity shops show no sign of downgrading in spite of their increased online presence. Recent research has found that for every shop that closed



down, roughly two more opened up (Ainsworth, 2011). So whilst their physical manifestation is still going strong, their online presence indicates a continued and progressive awareness of their changing economic surroundings. In addition to utilising the Internet as a tool for advertising (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, pp. 130-1), the charities can save on overheads such as staff, shop rental, bills and the costs of stock rotation if they sell goods direct from their warehouses.

Another means of contemporary adaptation that charities have employed is their diversification into niche marketing, for example; Oxfam dedicated bookshops or BHF used furniture depots. By specialising in this way, the shops can appeal to a certain shopper audience and offer a wider range of choice in a specific area (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 134), which in turn allows for simpler organisation and auditing of goods that are sold (due to their classification by distribution to a particular 'type' of shop). This also lends itself to professionalisation and enhancement of customer service, efficiency and ultimately shop turnover.

Both of these strategies (e-commerce and niche marketing) are established first-sector developments that have encroached upon third sector retail operations. One way that this is possible is due to the willingness of consumers to participate in new forms of shopping experience, something that is epitomised by the sociological concept of the *prosumer*.

The term was first coined by futurist writer Alvin Toffler in his work "The Third Wave" (1981). Toffler stated that "millions of people [...] are beginning to perform for themselves services hitherto performed for them" (p. 267), and that work was shifting from a visible to an *invisible economy*, with much of the work undertaken by the consumers themselves. He gave numerous examples of this: home assembly furniture; DIY; direct-connect phonecalls; self-service in fast

food restaurants, at supermarket tills, in the bank (including online or telephone services), at the petrol station and so on. He also gave the example of the pregnancy test, which can now be purchased and conducted at home without the need for a clinician or laboratory testing.

This all represents a switch from work for *exchange value* (to make goods saleable or desirable to others) to work for *use value* (for the self, friends, family or community) (Humphreys & Grayson, 2008, p. 9). This is a classical Marxist differentiation as to how value is created in an item, and both the producer and the consumer play an active role in this. Value, in economic terms (exchange value) does not have to relate to the personal esteem one holds for something (use value) (*ibid.* p. 3). By increasing the role the consumer plays in producing the item, the use value can be increased for that person. A good example is the 'salad bar' concept favoured in American style restaurants. If you dislike cucumber, you can opt not to have cucumber but instead load up on tomatoes. If you are given a generic side salad, you do not have any input into the ingredients and may not enjoy the salad quite so much. Prosumption is sold to the consumer as something positive, increasing their choice and the customisability of goods (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

In spite of this, prosumption still requires an element of 'putting the customer to work'. Ritzer (1993) described this in the form of the fast food customer, who is required to play the role of waiter, sandwich maker, salad maker, and bus boy. Other examples include; participation in reality TV shows (Andrejevic, in Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010); intrusive chat shows such as the Jeremy Kyle Show; and amateur pornography. The emphasis upon empowerment and choice (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010, p. 25) is undermined by the accusations of exploitation that go hand in hand with many of these aspects.

The Internet is held up as a fundamental representation of prosumption in its purest form, particularly in relation to the user generated web content of 'Web 2.0' (Beer & Burrows, 2007; Ritzer, 2011). The Internet is described by Ritzer & Jurgenson as being "currently the most prevalent location of prosumption and its most important facilitator as a means of prosumption." (2010, p. 20). eBay is one of many examples of Web 2.0 era user-generated online exchanges, where the website's company merely facilitates the sale of goods from one consumer to another. Grinnell (2009, p. 578) notes that, in reference to the community 'help' boards on eBay: "very few actual eBay employees participate; the content and answer providers are fellow eBayers". Web 2.0 is part of a wider trend of the global phenomenon of 'individualisation' (Beck, 2000a; Grinnell, 2009) where the networking nature of the Internet allows people to actively involve themselves in the formation of their own consumption, and tailor it to their interests. eBay, as an example, can email you when an item you are looking for is put up for sale, through the use of folksonomies and key word searches. The entire system is organised around capitalising upon the skills, effort, raw materials and commitment of time of the people who frequent the site.

Keen (2007) describes web content created by users as merely being shrill background noise, overwhelming, uncontrolled and disorganised in a similar way to the disorganisation of the traditional charity shop. Yet the fact that Web 2.0 and prosumption seem to have been inextricably linked by recent theory certainly paves the way for prosumption theory to be incorporated into other genres of social investigation.

A critique of prosumption as a liberating force is put forward by Humphreys & Grayson (2008), who state that the role of the consumer is not massively altered by their role in the production of an item, and neither is the role of the producer. Adapting and honing goods to your

tastes saves on company costs and customers are willing to pay more money for items that privilege their involvement (2008, p. 9-10). This is particularly pertinent in the charity shop, where the fundraising prerogative requires that costs be kept to a minimum and consumers actively accept the level of 'work' they may have to put into their own purchase (for example, cleaning). The idea of buying back your own labour is not viewed with so much negativity when the profits behind it are directed towards charitable causes. Thus, although the experience is seen as increasing the involvement of consumers in the capitalist process, ultimately it does not free them from its shackles.

As with many definitions, the charity shop exists somewhere in the periphery between the two substitutive terms for prosumption suggested by Humphreys & Grayson: "Collective Production" and "Company-Consumer Production" (2008, p. 15) The former describes consumer collaboration with other consumers to create things of value for their own community, and the latter describes consumers collaborating with companies, with the end goal of creating exchange value. Charity shop volunteers and customers enter into an exchange where their work attempts to create use value which will benefit the subject of the cause, yet the inclusion of paid staff, job descriptions, profit targets and the other trappings of professionalised business emphasise more of a company/consumer collaboration, with the end aim being to increase the amount of money made.

Collaborative consumption can be evidenced in the charity shop in relation to the involvement that volunteers (and customers) have in the way that the shops make money. Volunteers and customers give either their time and labour, or their unwanted goods generously, but this is a mitigated process that represents a reciprocal relationship in which they themselves are consuming the benefits of participation in this sphere. In Section 3.3 of this thesis, the idea of how giving to

charity can be examined sociologically in relation to volunteering and to donor behaviour is explored further.

### **3.1.7 Summary**

Discussions of consumer capitalism revolve around the assumption that the act of purchase is the key interaction that should be investigated. By using Featherstone's (2007) summary of three key strands of traditional consumer theory, we are able to examine how sociological work on shopping changed alongside changes in the shops themselves. However, it is clear that these stances favour the first-hand shopping experience. Alternative retail or second-hand shopping theory is separated into a category that denies the presence of exploitation or fetishisation of Marxist logic, instead focusing on the identity-formation/social differentiation model favoured by Bourdieu (1984), or on the 'pleasures' of the shopping experience described by Campbell (1987; 1995). Concepts of the 'excluded' consumer (Williams 2002, 2003) or the prominence of 'signs' and visual simulation (Debord, 1977) in contemporary alternative shopping experiences go some way towards levelling the balance for theories of second-hand consumption, as these address the inequalities and prevailing commercial developments that have been observed in the literature mentioned in Chapter 2. Equally, the movement of consumer theory towards the notions of the prosumer and 'putting the customer to work' corroborates with the charity shop ideologies of reciprocity and the labour involved in re-valourising pre-worn items.

The theoretical backstory of consumer capitalism contributes a great deal to our understanding of what a charity shop is. It captures the importance of societal exclusion and inequality in shopping

behaviour, and the vast changes in shopping culture that has necessitated the adoption of professionalised retail strategies. The latter point is something that has been illustrated in many of the contemporary studies on charity shops mentioned in Chapter 2 (Goodall, 2000b; Parsons, 2002; Broadbridge & Parsons, 2003) and more broadly in work on third sector development. Therefore, the following section will attempt to assess the relevance of the concept of the professional, and how professionalism and professionalisation came to be terms favoured by charity retail theorists.

## **3.2 Professionalisation**

As is clear from the literature described in Chapter 2, the classification of worker roles coupled with a preoccupation with systematic and rational operations in business is a definitive element of the change that theorists like Goodall (2000a, 2000b), Parsons (2002; 2004) and Parsons & Broadbridge (2007) have observed in charity shops over the last twenty years alongside their sectoral growth. They have all described this change in operations as an ongoing process of 'professionalisation'. But whilst the use of the term 'professional' has been present in sociological research for many years, it is usually employed to describe the work of the classic professions – teachers, doctors, lawyers and so on. Other descriptors have been employed in relation to the growth of the charity sector in general, including commercialisation, managerialism and marketisation. As this chapter will show, professionalisation is not simply a descriptor of how work has changed, how charity operations have changed or how the ethos of charity has changed. It is a term that embodies the variety of small- and large-scale organisational changes that have taken place, from the shop floor all the way up to the governing bodies of charitable organisations.

### **3.2.1 Why 'Professionalisation' of Charity/Shops?**

Many terms have been associated with charity shops in relation to their increased growth, and their change in practices and adaptation in order to enhance the money they earn for a cause. Some writers describe this as 'Managerialism' (Weisbrod, 1998; Roberts, Jones, & Froehling, 2005; Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007; Kreutzer & Jäger, 2011); others describe it as 'Commercialisation' or 'Commercialism'

(Tuckman, 1998; Young, 1998; Guo, 2006) or 'Marketisation' (Salamon, 1993; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). Others have used the more vague descriptor of 'business-like' (Dart, 2004). The terms 'Professionalisation' and 'Professionalism' have been particularly favoured by marketing authors such as Elizabeth Parsons (2002), organisation theorists like Ganesh & McAllum (2012) and Hwang & Powell (2009) and social geographers such as Richard Goodall (2000b) when writing in relation to how charity has developed from a 'thrift' or 'jumble sale' set up to a rational retail environment (Parsons E. , 2002, p. 3). For the purpose of this research, the term 'professionalisation' will be used to define more organisational structure and processes, whilst 'professionalism' will "highlight practice and identity" (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p. 153) for the individual worker.

The term 'professionalisation' encompasses many of the descriptors that can be identified in charity shops, and can be seen to depict the change in charity retail over time for three reasons:

1. It has been previously employed by key third-sector sociological theorists when discussing charity retail developments, although rarely problematised. It is described as the gradual change from 'idiosyncratic' to 'systematic' operations (Goodall, 2000b, p.44).
2. Unlike managerialism (which focuses upon workforces and employer agency) and commercialisation (which draws its focus from outputs such as marketing and branding, and end-point acts of sale), professionalisation encompasses a large number of the features seen in these two categories, as well as a change in organisational values, strategy, and rationality as a direct response to late-modern capitalism (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p. 153).
3. Professionalism and professionalisation are too often used unproblematically when they are both extremely ambiguous and not fixed. Thus, there is an opportunity to critique the



claims of Parsons that professionalisation is “stifling the very cultures which encourage sales.” (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007, p. 558) and that there has been a definitive move within the sector from a social to a commercial orientation (Parsons E. , 2002, p. 6).

To get a clearer understanding of what is meant by ‘professionalisation’ and ‘professionalism’ within this research, this chapter will now aim to unpack the convoluted meanings behind the term and understand the issues presented by using the term ‘professionalism’ alongside traditional conceptions of charity.

### **3.2.2 Definition**

Goodall (2000b, p.43) suggests that the concepts of ‘professional’ and of ‘charity’ have similarly positive connotations – they both equate to being something *good*, or beneficial. Nettleton and Hardey wrote that charities in general have become “increasingly professionalised, and drawing on commercial and marketing techniques, have become a significant sector of the economy” (2006, p.445). However, the idea of charity shop professionalisation remains contentious and oblique. Varying definitions in management, marketing and sociological literature means that a coherent definition of the term is difficult to pin down. Understanding the root of the term in social theory is therefore necessary before any application can be made within this thesis. Defining what ‘professional’ means in this way will reinforce and underscore the arguments made by previous charity shop theorists on this highly variable concept.

The background for theories of 'the professions' has its roots in the concept of work, which has been a focal point of social theory for hundreds of years. Early demographer Alexander M. Carr-Saunders classified the five main professions as the clergy, the armed services, medicine, law and education (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933). He defined a professional as someone who "brings asymmetrical knowledge to the service of his client, and thereby exercises power over his client. Therein lie the duties and obligations of a professional to his client" (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933, p. 499). This contestation that professionalism has its roots in knowledge, power, duty and responsibility formed the basis of early sociological reasoning on the topic of work. It also highlighted the role that professionals play on behalf of the state, as education, law, medicine and the armed forces are predominantly public sector services.

The sociology of professions and professionalism began with the view that professional ethics were a primary stabilising factor in society. Traditional functionalism favoured the 'collectivity-orientation' (Parsons T., 1954), and altruism (Marshall, 1963) that was regarded as an integral trait of professionals. The moral responsibility of professional groups (alongside civic, familial, individual and interpersonal responsibilities) were crucial to the maintenance of the *conscience collective* (Durkheim, 1950, p. 10), that is, society functioning with a union of ideals and values. Professions and professionalism were regarded as crucial in the prevention of societal dysfunction.

However, later functionalist contemporaries were critical of the professions and their increasing reliance upon bureaucracy and managerialism. Robert Merton was one of the first to highlight the dysfunctional aspects of professionalism. Using Veblen's notion of 'trained incapacity', he described certain sets of skills and abilities that can operate as 'inadequacies or blind spots' (Merton, 1957, pp. 197-

198), which could then become problematic as the societal milieu underwent change and the learnt skills were no longer applicable. C. Wright Mills (1956) was also critical of the routinisation of professions, whose work he saw as becoming more and more embedded in administrative procedure, rendering them managerial authority (ibid. p. 112) as opposed to power drawn from knowledge and skill. The inherent problem, as suggested by Mills (1956), was that modern societies were under a degree of pressure to systematise business in a way that was formulaic and easy to moderate. This understanding of systematic business and administration stymieing ability is one of the underlying issues relating to professionalisation of the third sector (Goodall, 2000b).

Mills' observation emulated the Weberian model of professionalism, which was grounded in ideas of rational bureaucracy, but distinguished itself from the functionalist rhetoric of the 'cohering effects of an extended division of labour' (Grint, 1998, p.107). Weber extolled the bureaucracy of labour based around the American system of "scientific management" (1946), which we now know as Taylorism, based on the work of industrial engineer Frederick Taylor (1947 [1911]). This approach aimed to achieve the highest work output by the application of a systematic regime, which was chosen by scientifically deducing the 'best way' to complete a task simply, quickly and cheaply (Edgell, 2006). Taylorism favoured the economic implications of management of work, but he did not see the possibility for adverse social effects – in fact, Taylor himself believed that scientific management would make workers "happier and more prosperous" (1947 [1911], p. 143).

This process of the 'formal rationalisation' of work (Du Gay, 2000, p.4) fell down for Weber, however, when related to worker autonomy. His concept of a Western bureaucracy relied upon a set of four determinants that formed the structure in formal institutions:

efficiency, predictability, calculability and control (Ritzer, 2011, pp. 24-25). Bureaucracies were dependent upon a 'hierarchy of offices', in the sense of office as a position of duty or responsibility for the worker (ibid.). It was those who held these offices who were the professionals, and designated who else was a professional and who was an 'outsider' by self-defining the criteria for membership (Weber, 1978, p. 342). What resulted was the "emotionally detached, and hence rigorously "professional" expert" (Weber, 1977, p. 231) who served to depersonalise work, and thus alienate other workers.

Weber's preoccupation with the unwieldy nature of professionalism, coupled with the earlier trepidation with which late functionalists regarded the process of professionalisation, indicated that there was a widespread belief in its fallibility. The problem with predicting, calculating, and controlling efficient work-based behaviour is that it cannot be wholly or reliably predicted, calculated, controlled or efficient. The irrationality of rationality (Ritzer G. , 2011, p. 26) is encapsulated by Weber's description of his 'iron cage' of bureaucracy: when trapped inside a bureaucratic system, people are dehumanised and do not work as efficiently. Quantification can lead to a focus upon 'making the numbers', which encourages a fall in standards. Calculations and predictions that are incorrect can result in a loss of control of workers, and a lack of faith from customers (ibid. p. 27). Thus, the presentation of a professional as a 'moral authority' in the Durkheimian sense was subject to more and more criticism, and bureaucratic 'efficiency' was increasingly challenged.

Another element of this is the importance of professional authority and power in work relationships, something that was described in Friedson's (1970) work on medical professionals and their perceived dominance over the knowledge of others. This professional 'autonomy', as he terms it, extends beyond the profession to other similar occupations and gives them considerable influence.

Friedson's account suggested that contrary to functionalist perspectives, the presence of professions in society aided the imbalance of power in work, and reinforced the influence of elites who ensured that they retained a position of privilege. He emphasises, therefore, that a profession is entirely unfixed, and therefore has come to occupy a role in a society that is arbitrarily allocated. As McKinlay (1973, p.77) notes, there has been an "emergence of a mythology concerning professionalism", whereby what are seen of as professional traits are actually no more than social 'myths' which tell us very little about what professionals actually do. By virtue of these myths, the professions are able to claim "a universal validity for their public pronouncements" (MacDonald, 1995, p.8) which can again result in inefficiency or inability to fulfil their requirements. It is this power attributed to professionalisation that is problematic in non-profit organisations and sites like the charity shop, because they traditionally are seen to be democratic (Morris, 2009; Goodall, 2000b) and favouring equality amongst their workers, rather than privileging individual voices.

The process of professionalisation was also regarded with some criticism by neo-Marxists like M. S. Larson (1977) who felt that professionals monopolised status, and made it marketable due to its scarcity. This gives the professions a degree of structural control over economic markets as well as over knowledge and non-professional workers, and an opportunity to secure a monopoly over the means of production.

Larson conceptualised this process as 'the professional project' (1977, p.6) and did not see it as necessarily negative, although she found traditional functionalist ideas about the status of professionals as 'natural' or 'facts' problematic. Larson stresses the link between individual and collective action and its impetus for change and enhancement – in particular noting how professions must carve out

their niche within a society and then actively defend and maintain it (MacDonald, 1995, p.33). The unfixedness of professional status, therefore, comes to be another of the defining characteristics of professionalisation.

It is within the context of this contested interpretation of bureaucracy and the neo-Marxian view of professionalisation as a continuing project that this thesis centres an understanding of what constitutes the notable changes in work at the contemporary charity shop.

The present common-sense understanding of the root of the word 'profession' is that it will be *paid* (as opposed to voluntary), it will require some form of *specification* or *expertise* in a particular area (perhaps something that is formally audited through examination or training) and it also can mean general *competence* and '*business-like*' behaviour (ibid. p. 46-7). Hwang & Powell state that a 'professional' has become "synonymous with the qualifications for a particular role, independent of any conventional distinction based on training or certification." (2009, p. 269). Therefore, professionalisation necessitates the measurability of skills and abilities. It is treated as a 'vocation' as opposed to a job, and will frequently have a code of ethics, principles of good practice, sanctions relating to set professional standards, and even an elite professional 'subculture' (Whittington & Boore, 1988). In spite of the aforementioned 'collectivism-orientation' of professionalism (Parsons T., 1954), it can be incongruous with third sector organisations due to the presence of volunteers who are often limited in training, have no authoritative power in their role and are rarely required to possess any measurable specified knowledge or skill (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p. 153). The following section will examine the problems raised by this dichotomy of professionals and volunteers.

### 3.2.3 Professionalisation and Volunteers

The use of the term 'professional' to describe someone's employment, or job role, could be regarded as fundamentally contradictory to volunteerism. Both the terms 'professional' and 'volunteer' refer to a position of work that necessitates the completion of a task. The former suggests the positive attributes of ability, responsibility, qualification and precision. The latter can imply honed interpersonal skills, strong motivation, passion, and commitment. But both have negative connotations: to be professional may represent impersonality, an oppressive audit culture, and an unequal distribution of power. Equally, volunteering is sometimes associated with a lack of reliability and accountability (Wilson & Pimm in Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p. 154) or even 'pseudo-work' (Pearce in *ibid.*).

The common sense view of charity shops suggests that they are dependent on taking on volunteers, regardless of their skill level; despite the fact they may be limited in what they can do, resistant to authority or have no previous experience (Maddrell, 2000). A lack of 'professionalism' is often conflated with a lack of competence, in the sense that 'professional' is associated with a certain level of paid status, eg. 'a professional athlete' (Goodall, 2000b, p.46). As a result, putting those who are deemed professionals such as paid managers alongside volunteers means that volunteer authority and expertise is undermined (*ibid.* p. 47). Nevertheless, volunteering shares some key characteristics in common with professional competencies, for example, responsibility for actions and distancing oneself emotionally in order to achieve a target or aim (Fournier in Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p.154).

Volunteers sometimes feel isolated and undermined by the changes made by paid retail 'professionals'. Maddrell describes how

volunteers object to expenditure on aesthetics such as shop displays or decor, although this can often be resolved by evidence of improved sales figures (2000, p.132) They are frequently resistant to the implementation of training, and there are constraints such as ability, physical mobility and limited hours. Maddrell also describes the increased pressure upon charity shop 'back room space' and how charity shop stock circulation methods (shipping out unsold goods to other stores for the same charity) can sometimes leave volunteers and managers with an overwhelming backlog of clothing to send out or put on rails (ibid.). Requiring the 'best' goods to be sent to high footfall areas whilst poorer, less populated locations are sent boxes of rubbish can foster feelings of resentment for all those involved in trying to make a shop a success. The increased workplace pressure and resulting disagreements with paid staff can result in standoffs between retail managers who desire professional development, and volunteers who cherish the established work regime they commit their time to.

A mediated example of such an altercation occurred in the TV programme 'Mary Queen of Charity Shops' (BBC, Saturday 27 June 2009), in which retail mogul Mary Portas renovated an Edinburgh Save The Children charity shop in order to make it more profitable. Her stringent methods left volunteers shocked and disenfranchised, to such an extent that several long serving volunteers handed in their notice. Another volunteer stated in the programme that one volunteer left because of the £15,000 refit: "She said she doesn't agree with all the money spent, she says it's ridiculous. She says we could've just washed the walls and washed the carpet" (ibid.).

Objections or even resignations over the 'wasting' of shop profits on 'unnecessary' promotional drives or shop makeovers come as a consequence of not seeing a desired return (i.e. money to the cause) on the gift of time the volunteers are giving. In this instance,



Mauss' (1970) theory of the gift<sup>2</sup> that must be reciprocated seems to be holding true, as in actual fact, charity shop participants *do* expect to be compensated in some way for their effort and exertion. They are seemingly content with their free contribution to charity, as long as the terms under which they signed up remain constant. In part, negativity may come from feeling undervalued in their work. According to McClelland's (1961) needs fulfilment specification, this is a challenge to the need for power, nurturance and even love from the parent charity. Partly, this is related to feeling comfortable within the charity shop environment and seeing it as a non-threatening space. As a result, even changes in staffing arrangements are treated with wariness. One charity shop manager interviewed by Horne & Maddrell is quoted as stating: "Outsiders are not always accepted easily" (2002, p. 95). It seems that volunteers, in exchange for their freely given labour, expect a certain standard from the parent charity in return.

This perpetrates the presumptuous image of the charity volunteer as an elderly person who will not welcome change, and in fact Horne and Broadbridge (1994b) did find in their study that the average volunteer was "female, white, over the age of 55, married or widowed, retired and without formal educational qualifications." (in Maddrell, 2000, p. 128). This does not account for the popularity of charity shop volunteering for young people or non-native English speakers, who may find the environment a comfortable space to learn employability skills or just to make friends. The volunteer as an active participant in the charity shop may have multiple motivations and imperatives, and this can also differ according to the type and size of the charity involved, the location of the shop (city centre locations may be more appealing/accessible to younger generations), the type of stock sold (trendier Oxfam Originals shops therefore will attract a

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<sup>2</sup> The issue of gifting and the expectation of reciprocation is discussed in Chapter 3.3

particular type of individual) and the other volunteers already recruited (it is likely to appeal less to younger people if the entirety of staff are over 60). Therefore compartmentalising them through their demographic profiles is limiting to an understanding of why people volunteer. With charity shops employing more paid and highly trained workers to keep up with a progressively competitive market, new strategies such as adopting transitional volunteer workers or those who come in on an ad hoc basis to fit in with the unpredictability of contemporary working hours (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, pp. 97-98) have been brought in by charities keen to keep up dwindling volunteer numbers, again diversifying the type of people involved in charity shop work.

On the whole, when there is proof of a substantial and adequate rise in profits, volunteers have been able to more readily accept the less favourable changes that come along with professionalisation (Maddrell, 2000, p.132). More broadly, however, the influence of professionalisation upon third sector boundaries is becoming a point of contention. The changing work processes have signalled concerns about the autonomy of charity shops and charities in general as distinct from the private and public sectors.

#### **3.2.4 Professionalisation and Intersectoral Partnerships**

Two issues that arises from increasingly professionalised operations in charity shops is the fact that they seem to go hand-in-hand with certain exemptions only available to non-profit organisations (such as rate relief and tax exemptions) and with partnerships with commercial companies who are for-profit and are able to benefit from the deal. It is considered common for non-profits

to either be in competition or co-operation with privately owned firms (Weisbrod, 1998, p. 4). A significant part of this involvement with external bodies revolves around the fact that professionalism is infectious – if the institutions or organisations that the charity wishes to have links with is professionalised, it requires the charity to professionalise its behaviour similarly. For example, the introduction of Gift Aid tagged on to donated goods (thus earning a further 25% on the item) in charity shops necessitated a substantial degree of bureaucratic administration.

Part of the reason for the lucrative nature of charity shops lies within its government classification: a charity shop selling donated goods does not definitively constitute ‘trading’ under the current terms of the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise and the Charity Commissioners. They are exempt from corporation tax on profits, have 80% relief on rates and pay no V.A.T. on the donated goods sold, with the remaining 20% of rates payable being absorbed by many local authorities (Charityretail.org, 2013). The close relations charities hold with the government and their reliance upon state allowances means that the two sectors are very closely intertwined – the line between charity objective and government policy being very fine indeed.

The fact that charity shops are so well supported by the government, receive such extensive tax relief and are so cheap to run has caused some problems within the retail sphere. Their presence has been considered detrimental by some local small businesses due to their preferable rates and ability to undercut on prices, which results in them “trading on an unfair footing” (Federation of Small Businesses [1995 in Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 35]). This debate had raged throughout the nineties, with many small businesses stating that they were being elbowed out of the market by charity giants such as Oxfam selling new products in their stores.

Due to all the complaints, in 1996 the Charities Advisory Trust launched a study into how much 'bought-in' goods profited the charity shops (Broadbridge & Parsons, 2003, p. 418). They found that only a mere 7.8% of shop turnover came from such goods, which included Christmas cards and small decorative gifts. Horne and Maddrell (2002) note that store turnover has been made up of at least 65% donated goods in order for the shop to receive preferential rates, however this doesn't account for new items that are donated by large chain stores in order for them to be able to claim back VAT on unsold goods, and Horne and Broadbridge (1995) noted that even charities whose stores sell entirely new goods (such as the National Trust) receive some tax relief.

Paddison (2000) has claimed that since 1996 the tension between local traders and charity shops has subsided, and this is supported by Horne and Maddrell's (2002, p. 61) claim that charity shops regularly work in 'co-operation' with local businesses. Part of the issue, Paddison notes, is that charity shops not only operate and compete intrasectorally, with other charity shops; but also *intersectorally*, with cheap first-hand shops (2000, p.162). This issue has been exacerbated by the prevalence of disposable fashion retailers like Topshop, H&M and Zara, which sell items that are usually worn less than 10 times (McAfee, Dessain, & Sjoeman, 2004) and more recently Primark, which sells clothes at lower prices than even some charity retailers.

The oppressive nature of the current economy could be responsible for stirring up old issues, as recently charity shops have been accused once more of undermining local businesses by undercutting them. Controversies remain – in particular for new businesses and start-ups in desperate need of the allowances and large rate discounts charity shops qualify for (Morrish, 2012). In spite of the positive interpretation of the detritus nature of charity shops using up the leftovers of capitalism, in popular media they are also portrayed

as ‘parasites’ that “feed off, and eventually kill, much-needed local commerce.” (Dejevsky, 2009). The perceived professionalisation of charity shops has served to intensify such grievances, as charity shops become less distinguishable from the private sector in terms of the formality of their operations. Thus the ethical impetus behind charity retail can be subverted when their role is considered alongside the reservations surrounding their public and private sector involvement.

There is little agreement upon whether contemporary charity shops are undercutting small businesses or merely benefiting from increased thrifting measures of cautious shoppers, at a time when many businesses are struggling in general. It seems there are certainly still misgivings within the second-hand sphere and small businesses towards the tax exemptions charity shops receive.

### **3.2.5 Summary**

The application of ‘professional’ practices as defined above is partly controversial because professionalism and professionalisation are themselves contested concepts that are viewed as simultaneously favourable and oppressive to wider society. This chapter has clarified the importance of defining professionalisation before attributing its process to charity shop operations. The concepts of commercialisation, marketisation, managerialism and other like terms have been shown to be similar definitions that refer to specific elements of professionalisation such as workforces, branding and economic impacts, however professionalisation has been the main term used by theorists writing on charity. The ambiguous nature of the term was explored in itself, and then the implications these changes are seen to have upon two key charity shop characteristics: volunteerism, and

intersectoral ties. The concluding section of this literature review continues the theme of looking at charity shops sociologically by exploring the idea of 'charity' within their context.

### **3.3 'Charity' in the Charity Shop**

Whilst a comprehension of the sociological backdrop to consumer capitalism and professionalisation of work are integral to understanding how a contemporary charity shop operates, there is another string to the charity shop's bow – the fact that the profits the shop makes are destined to go towards helping a charitable cause. The acquisition of 'unallocated funds' for their cause makes their earnings preferable to individual donations which may be constrained by the will of a corporate or individual donor (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 25), and with charity shop profits increasing a record 14.3% from 2011 (Last, 2012), their role as a fundraising entity necessitates a deeper sociological grasp of the prominence of 'charity', generosity and 'giving' in general. Thus, this chapter aims to elucidate what the term charity stands for in both the common sense and sociological definition. It will depict the importance of notions of 'the Gift' within charitable giving and discuss the main theoretical standpoints on gift exchange, in particular the work of Marcel Mauss (1970) and Maurice Godelier (1999). Then this chapter will investigate perceptions of two prominent forms of giving within the context of the charity shop: the act of volunteering, and the act of donation.

#### **3.3.1 Definition**

The term 'charity' is open to many interpretations. The original word is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (2013) as stemming from the Latin word *caritas*; from *carus*, meaning 'dear' or 'beloved'. Therefore, even at its root charity was tied implicitly to money, as the word 'dear' has the alternative meaning of 'expensive' or 'overpriced'.

A full definition of 'charity' is given below:

*"noun (pl. charities)*

1 an organization set up to provide help and raise money for those in need [...]

2 the voluntary giving of help, typically in the form of money, to those in need[...]

3 kindness and tolerance in judging others [...]" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013)

Within this definition the link between money and the giving of charity is made explicit. However, the multiple definitions indicate how, like professionalisation, there are several ways the word 'charity' can be interpreted. A problematic concept even in its traditional sense, charity (or more correctly, the *gift* of charity) is in urgent need of redefinition in the context of a contemporary economic and social landscape. Within this study, the collaboration of charity and capitalism is a main issue under focus, as it brings with it an interesting dichotomy of differing objectives, views, methods and interactions which need to be understood with reference to the stereotypes and previous theoretical standpoints marked out in this area by theorists such as Horne & Broadbridge (1995) and Horne & Maddrell (2002). To comprehend this in a modern setting, we return to the term as described by Toffler (1981) and Ritzer (2011) detailed in Chapter 3.1: the prosumer; and the charity shop participant as a 'philanthropic prosumer'. This chapter aims to address how the contemporary volunteer, along with the contemporary charity shop donor, is an example of a philanthropic prosumer: an individual who both produces and consumes the philanthropic operations of the parent charity. Sociological interpretations of philanthropy and giving, therefore, owe a great deal to this understanding, and shed light upon how the



proclivities of charity shop participants are integral to the running, and professional development, of the shops themselves.

Initially, we must scrutinise the background literature of charitable giving – that is, the sociological interpretations of what constitutes a ‘gift’.

### **3.3.2 The Charitable Gift**

Giving as a concept in social theory is encapsulated by the seminal text *The Gift*, by Marcel Mauss (1970). Mauss declared benevolence in gift giving to merely be “formal pretence and social deception” (p. 2). Prestations and counter-prestations (or the act of giving, and reciprocating by giving in return) are treated by Mauss as being fundamentally obligatory; there is an assumption of reciprocity within all exchanges, even those that are inferred to be charitable. What is actually taking place is the formation of ‘spiritual bonds’ between people – it is not the one-way transfer of tangible goods so much as it is an unwavering trust that binds and directs future behaviour within the exchange. Mauss extended this to symbolic return in the form of offerings to gods and deities, with the assumption of prosperity, peace or good health as a result.

There are essentially three parts to gift exchange in Mauss’ writing: Giving, receiving and reciprocating. These formed the basis of the economic and social system of a society and subsequently formed a structural base for networks and social ties (Kosalka, 1999). To neglect any of these elements was direly unconventional within the context of his writing, and a non-reciprocator would risk sanctions for their error.

This conception of giving provokes a rather cynical view of giving in general; particularly when charitable actions are deemed as being part of an exchange that will also benefit the giver. Godelier (1999, p. 12) describes a 'twofold relationship' of both solidarity and superiority embodied within gift giving. Solidarity, Godelier claims, forms as the social distance between individuals is lessened by the giving of gifts; on the other hand, superiority persists due to the indebtedness of one party to another. This actually increases the social distance between the giver and the recipient – resulting in a situation of 'duality and ambivalence' (ibid.) when gifts are exchanged.

Jacques Derrida (1994) countered this argument with his description of the free gift; an act of giving not treated as a gift by the recipient or the giver, which does not presuppose any reciprocation. In fact, this 'pure gift' is more akin to a charitable gift in the form of volunteering or donating, since no overt acknowledgement of 'gifting' is made between the giver and the recipient. Opposed to Mauss' view that gifts were unavoidable and obligatory, Derrida regarded the type of gift he describes as a fundamental ontological impossibility, precisely because the intention behind giving a gift or the awareness of receiving one renders the exchange as no longer a gift:

*"For there to be a gift, not only must the donor or donee not perceive the gift as such, have no consciousness of it, no memory, no recognition; he or she must also forget it right away [a l'instant] and moreover this forgetting must be so radical that it exceeds even the psychoanalytic categorality of forgetting"* (Derrida, 1994, p.16)

Put simply, the intent to give a gift or the knowledge of receiving one takes away a gift's inherent character. Yet, not acknowledging this character in any form also renders the gift as null, since neither party is aware of the exchange. This contention as to the character of the gift runs through to contemporary sociology, with pro-social standpoints

being dominated by the wealth of rational capitalist structuralism inspired by Mauss' work. Bataille (1988) highlighted how gift giving affirms power and status as a rationally acting individual as opposed to an object within a capitalist system. This position is confirmed by Godelier's (1999, p. 12) contention that gifting is essentially hierarchical – it either sets in place an inequality between the giver and the recipient, or it expresses and subsequently legitimises it. The legitimatisation of inequality through the charitable gift is the basis for much contemporary ambivalence towards the concept of charity (Žižek, 2009a; 2009b), whereby charitable 'giving' removes the guilt inherent in participating in an exploitative capitalist system.

In fact many economists including Claude Levi-Strauss, Peter Blau, Alvin Gouldner, Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Emerson have built their theories around the assumption that self-interest governs all forms of gift giving (Light, 2007, p. 14). The difficulty comes when trying to extract the benevolent actions of an individual from their personal motivations. Derrida's 'gift' could perhaps affirm the naturalistic manner with which charitable behaviour is a 'gift' that is given to a cause – where no personal gain is made for the giver, and the recipient cannot ever acknowledge, thank or reciprocate those who have provided the gift. However, he deemed such a thing to be impossible. Therefore, the two most concrete forms of giving within the charity shop: that of one's time, and of one's possessions, are deconstructed below in relation to the personal gain (or relief from capitalist guilt) they provide, along with some contextual discussion as to the extent of charitable giving on behalf each. These are:

- The Charitable Worker – and the gift of their time, work, dedication and care.
- The Charitable Donor – and the gift of used goods to charity.

### 3.3.2 The Charitable Worker

Research interest into volunteering grew in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when an increase in disposable income and community awareness resulted in a meteoric rise in the number of people willing to give their time for charity. Studies that were conducted throughout this period (Hatch, 1978; Humble, 1982; Lynn & Davis Smith, 1991) focused upon the distinction between ‘formal’ vs. ‘informal’ volunteering (volunteering for organisations or groups vs. volunteering your time for a friend or relative) and were largely quantitative. Although the distinction between these two is important (often people do not consider ‘informal’ means of volunteering as an active volunteer role), there are further distinctions to be made.

From the 1980s and onwards, an emphasis by the government was made upon “active citizenship” and involvement in local and national issues. This may have been the result of the ‘changing political milieu’ (Marinetto, 2003, p.107) and the dramatic neoliberal turn that took place during this era. As a result, there was a marked increase in volunteering across the board, with the number of people engaged in ‘formal’ volunteer roles increasing by 7% over the previous decade (Lynn & Davis Smith, 1991). Horne and Maddrell (2002, p. 85) relate this to a return to an ethos of ‘care’, perhaps as a backlash to the 1980’s era of cutthroat ‘profit maximisation’ within the world of private business.

Volunteering was described as “any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups), other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment” (Lynn & Davis Smith, 1991, p. 16). It is actually a relatively common practice in contemporary society also, as indicated by the 2008/2009 UK Citizenship Survey

(Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 2008) which found that 64% of the respondents had volunteered informally within the past 12 months, with 41% having formally volunteered with charities, local organisations or community projects. A study by Wuthnow (1991, p. 200) found that amongst those who did not volunteer formally in any capacity, acts such as giving money to beggars on the street (67%), caring for a sick friend or relative (58%) and helping another through a personal crisis (58%) were still proportionally high. These can be seen on a par with 'low involvement' charitable behaviour (Hibbert & Horne, 1995, p.8), much like to putting 10p in a charity box, as opposed to 'high involvement' behaviour which includes commitment and dedication and in some instances personal hardship (ibid.). The level of personal involvement an individual has with their charitable act varies and is frequently linked to personal motivations.

The extent to which people volunteer for charity is difficult to comprehensively measure. There have been varying figures for charity shop volunteers since many are assigned roles informally or work on an ad hoc basis. However several studies have gauged approximate figures which indicate that the number of charity shop volunteers grew exponentially over recent years. There were around 50,000 charity volunteers in 1993 (St. Leger in Horne & Broadbridge, 1994b) which had grown to 125,000 17 years on (Goodall, 2000b). This figure had risen to an estimated 180,000 in 2012 (Morrish, 2012). This means there is a phenomenal market value to volunteer hours for charity fund raising. If the average charity shop volunteer were to work four hours - the benchmark number of hours per week found by Maddrell (2000, p.128) - at a minimum wage, with most shops operating on roughly 6 to 12 volunteers (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 83) then it could cost the charity up to £278.40 per week, resulting in a average outgoing per year of nearly £14,500. In reality, volunteers regularly put in more than

4 hours, with some committing to over 12 hours per week (Maddrell, 2000, p.128) and more recent studies have suggested that the 'average' shop has 23 volunteers working varied shift patterns (Morrish, 2012). These volunteers contribute to shop profits with a bare minimum of outgoings (with the exception of an allowance for tea and biscuits and other negligible expenses) and often possess a level of devotion to their role that cannot be replicated by paid workers who may be tempted by more lucrative job offers. Charity shop volunteers are an example of 'intensive volunteering' (Lynn & Davis Smith, 1991) where people voluntarily give their time for more than 20 days a year – as opposed to those who participate in individual fundraising events such as sponsored runs or charity auctions.

Volunteers in charity shops also vary in their roles and tasks. In contrast to shop work in first-hand retail outlets, which has been described as comprising of "little more than shelf restocking, wrapping up goods and taking money" (Chattoe, 2006, p. 157), helping out in a charity shop encompasses many different tasks and requires a range of expertise. Collection of donations (in the form of bag drop pick-ups) as well as re-distribution amongst shops in larger charity chains; sorting and identifying things for sale; cleaning and in some cases, restoration processes; coding, pricing and displaying of goods, not to mention the actual act of exchange at the point of sale, are all integral to the unique operation that takes place in the charity shop itself.

This concept of 'multi-tasking' seems at odds with the traditional stereotype of the charity shop worker as an elderly person who is set in their ways. In fact, it sits more comfortably with the notion of the prosumer described in Chapter 3.1, as somebody accustomed to adapting and honing their skills dependent upon what is required of them. This form of work is viewed as 'empowering' to the prosumer (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010, p. 25) because they are free to choose when and how they work. Whilst the charity shop promotes an

image of flexibility and adaptability towards its workforce by comparison to the perceived rigid work hours and fixed roles of paid work, the contemporary charity shop's merger into the capitalist economy calls for a review of this perspective. Broadbridge and Horne (1996) commented that volunteer managers are sometimes absent for more than 3 quarters of the working week, with amiable volunteer colleagues covering their roles on an ad hoc basis. Paid managers, which are now the norm, are required to complete a working week of 5 or sometimes 6 days just like any normal paid employee. Therefore it is vital when theorising about the flexibility and pleasure inherent in working in the charity shop sphere, that attention is paid to its nature as a place of formal employment for some individuals, and informal for others. It is the contentions around this aspect of charity shops that lead to debates about whether charity shop volunteering is truly altruistic, or whether other motivations such as work-based training, self-fulfilment, or boredom relief are at play. The capacity to be charitable exhibits itself in many forms, and it is the way in which volunteers respond to this (in particular how they embrace the 'warm glow' sensation) that infers the true feelings behind the act.

Some volunteer studies have attributed philanthropy to religious affiliations, particularly in the USA (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 72) and previously it has been found that church members tend to be more 'charitable' in terms of time and money (Radley & Kennedy, 1995, p. 697; Light, 2007, p. 3). This is treated frequently as another example of volunteering as a form of 'pro-social behaviour' (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Frey & Meier, 2004) and empathy for others. Philanthropy is frequently tied to notions of kindness as a basic and intrinsic element of being human (Kidd, 1996, p.181) thus lending itself more to psychological or even biological theory rather than a sociological analysis. Yet there is a link between how we respond to the need of

others, and our own need for gratification. For this reason, psycho-sociological analyses of altruism are useful.

James Andreoni has written extensively on the social construction of altruistic acts. He describes how the sensation of a 'warm glow' stemming from having 'done their bit' is often enough of an incentive for altruistic behaviour (Andreoni, 1989, p. 1448). Although his approach tended to examine charitable giving in the form of monetary donations rather than volunteering, fundraising or informally giving help to others, he makes a compelling point in his work – that the 'warm glow' acquired from donating to charity is just like acquiring any consumer good and provides the same pleasure as buying a new dress or going for a nice meal (Andreoni, 1990) The fact that Andreoni equates the joy of consumption to that of giving is of vital importance here, because the giver is effectively *consuming* the 'warm glow' derived from the act of charity, in the same way as they consume tangible goods. An economist at heart, Andreoni does not elaborate on the social implications of this purchasable benevolent aura, nor on the extents to which the effect stretches; economic sociologist Donald W. Light (2007, p. 17) questions just how much pain, risk and sacrifice one would endure to achieve this sensation, for example, would one forsake livelihood or family? The value of this intangible sensation of pleasure is not measurable and therefore related theory will always be limited.

The assumption of a compassionate or pious charitable volunteer is somewhat deterministic – there are multiple reasons as to why individuals choose to give their time. This has been widely investigated, with many authors attempting to identify discursive frequencies behind the reasons why people volunteer. Radley & Kennedy (1995) identified a typology of giving, with personal empathy for the cause, and obligation to the charity or incorporation within it being the main contributors to altruistic donor or volunteer behaviour.



An elaboration of this is provided by Davis Smith (2000) who suggests some personal (or egoistic), motivations, rather than socially governed (or altruistic) like those described by Radley & Kennedy. These include mutual aid, service to others, participation in governance, and advocacy. Therefore, volunteer behaviour and charitable action can be highly dependent upon the satisfaction of personal needs and desires, and the extent of these varies from person to person. McClelland's (1961) typology of need fulfilment is developed and applied to volunteers by Horne and Maddrell (2002, pp. 78-9). Their application is detailed below:

The basic needs of an individual include:

- Need for affiliation (the ties to the charity described by Radley and Kennedy above)
- Need for achievement (the personal satisfaction of volunteering)
- Need for power (the conflicts over paid managers and central control)
- Need for play (the charity shop provides an opportunity for chatter, dress up, etc.)
- Need for nurturance (the development and support of the charity body itself, and other volunteers)
- Need for construction (explanation and interpretation of the world)
- Need for difference (a break from the norm, or some variety in life)
- Need for safety (to feel secure in a place of work)
- Need for love (to be cared about by co-workers, customers and managers)
- Need for esteem (to be respected by the people around you, and the charity itself)

- Need for self actualisation (fulfilment of your potential, for example gaining work experience or developing social skills)
- Need for self transcendence (to push oneself beyond ones limits)

Therefore, volunteering, and specifically volunteering in a charity shop, frequently has reciprocal benefits for both the volunteer and the charity. Generally within charity shop research, a fundamental focus of volunteer studies is upon what encourages them to volunteer and what they get out of it. Yet an alternative perspective remains that sometimes the knowledge that the situation is improving for those in need is satisfaction enough, without any of the esteem, actualisation or enjoyment that working towards this brings. The work of psychologists Batson & Shaw (1991) reinforces this, as their experiments found that an overwhelming number of people acted upon altruistic impulses when helping other people as opposed to egoistic ones, despite being also tested for innate selfish tendencies such as avoidance of criticism and desire to gain praise. Their empirical work involved putting participants into experimental situations where they were able to either help, or not help, another person. The experiments (which varied in terms of the issue that required help; from a lonely girl requiring a 'chat' to another participant receiving electric shocks) would either remove the option for help halfway through (thus removing any 'reward' the individual might feel for helping) or the option for the 'victim' and experimenter not to know that the participant hadn't helped was given, along with a reward. For the most part, individuals were found to act in order to improve the welfare of others in most cases, as opposed to either revelling in their own goodwill, or opting to hide their 'lack of help' (1991, p. 108-9), and also indicated that participants had a positive change in mood when the

'issue' was alleviated, regardless of the impact their own help had had on the situation (p. 117).

This work is supported by that of Monroe et al. (1990) who researched the rescue of Jews during the war in Nazi Germany. Using diaries and interviews, they found that the rescuers would risk their own lives and in some instances, those of their children to save Jewish families – and again she found that recognition, praise and feelings of guilt did not factor in their motivations to do so. Instead they were motivated by a 'shared perception of a common humanity' (1990, p.117). This gives a profoundly reassuring result as to the kindness of the general populace, but psychological work on the motivations for charitable behaviour highlights more a *combination* and importantly, an *equilibrium* of altruistic and self-oriented behaviour, as a result of the desire to help others being strongly associated with the desire to improve psychological wellbeing (Frank, 1996). This is supported by the work of Wuthnow (1995, p. 75) who conducted national surveys of volunteers and found that 64% of those who had given their time did so because "It makes me feel good about myself when I care for others" and 32% thought that "if I am kind, others will be kind to me." Therefore, one must be wary of assigning either altruistic or egoistic motivations to volunteering incentives.

Volunteering within the charity shop also holds very close links to shopping and donating in the shop (98% of volunteers will also donate goods [Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 61]), so it is useful to examine the volunteer in synthesis with the role of the customer and the donor in the shop, to see how shopping habits, disposal strategies and 'charitable behaviour' tie in with one another. Light comments that to compassionately give your time is to seek to de-commodify social life and "leave something of one's self in another or object or relationship." (2007, p. 9) to recognise less fortunate individuals in a way that market forces do not. He highlights how charitable action

*forces* the non-profitable (the disabled, the poor, the needy) into the public realm, and into the economic market that formerly ignored them. However, it is pertinent at this early stage to acknowledge a point made by Laughey (2010, p.109) with reference to internet prosumers: “what is being produced by prosumption most of the time is nothing more than unpaid work for the benefit of existing structures of ownership, management and power.” Thus, we must be cautious when decreeing that the ‘volunteer as prosumer’ is not being manipulated by the increasingly business-orientation of modern charity.

Notions of sacrifice are often applied to assumptions about volunteering – there is an unspoken assumption that doing something for others is, in some way, taking away from time we might spend on ourselves or doing something we enjoy. One must sacrifice precious time with the end aim being an external beneficiary. Yet volunteering as a form of sacrifice is predominantly a conservative, religious American perspective (Wilson, 2000, p. 219). The liberalist view on volunteering regards it more as an active choice undertaken with careful consideration of the impact and scope of the work involved. People are particular about the causes they support – and this is far more explicit when individuals are giving time than when they are donating money or goods. Hibbert & Horne (1996, p. 9) found that situational, rather than motivational factors, often dictate which charities receive monetary donations; for instance, a person shaking a tin under their nose in the high street or a ‘charity mugger’ (a term created to describe an aggressive charity employee who tries to solicit direct debit sign-ups on the street) can influence whether people donate money or not.

The same is not true for people who volunteer their time, which often comes from a comprehensive decision making system (although Horne & Maddrell (2002, p. 76) have noted that some charity shops

benefit from volunteers who are not aligned with any particular cause due to their location and relative proximity to them. A charity shop within walking distance will be frequently chosen due to 'ease of access' when there is no real affiliation with a cause). Wilson notes that "Unlike the spontaneous help given to a victim of an assault, where it is necessary to decide rapidly whether or not to take action and the encounter is often brief and chaotic, volunteerism is typically proactive rather than reactive and entails some commitment of time or effort." (2000, p. 216).

Investigating this is dependent upon how we understand this form of 'mediated giving' – that is, the conscious decision making involved in choosing where to give one's time and money. As the experience of volunteering is often regarded as personally therapeutic for those strongly affiliated with a certain cause (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 81) as in the case of the hospice that cared for a loved one, or because the charity researches into a medical condition of which the volunteer is or knows of a sufferer, the proactive role of a prosuming philanthropist cannot be ignored. The volunteer actively chooses and commits to a charity based upon experiences from their personal life.

There is a great deal of volunteer loyalty to particular causes: childrens charities, local hospices, cancer charities and Oxfam are widely supported (p. 79) which suggests that these causes are held to be important by the general populace, and in need of help. Religious beliefs also result in strong charity cause affiliation, with 57% of people reporting religious commitments as a reason for their volunteer behaviour (Wuthnow, 1999). Maddrell (2000) reports a high volunteer loyalty for locality (ie. charities that are prominent within the local community) and contrastingly, far locales, predominantly the third world. Thus, proximity to an issue is hugely important motivator for giving, whether due to immediate proximity (and thus the potential effects the issue may have upon the life of the individual) or distant

proximity (the globalised concern for those who are in less affluent or developed countries).

Motivation to volunteer is often inextricably linked to the individual cause, and people will be extremely selective in this respect. The preference for who is 'deserving' and who is not is highlighted by what Nettleton and Hardey (2006) describe as the "religious imagery of the 'needy'" – a highly selective allocation of empathy and compassion with certain socially-sanctioned 'good causes'. By being selective in where they contribute based upon personal life experience and emotional connection to a cause, the volunteer is effectively using their charity work as a form of self expression. Colin Campbell's notion of the 'craft consumer' (Campbell, 2005) is an apt depiction of the role undertaken – where individuals put aspects of themselves into their work, and the connection helps to reduce the alienation experienced when you are distanced from the meaning and purpose behind work. Although strongly linked to the amount of leisure time and disposable income at hand (2005, p. 40), the volunteer/craft consumer brings passion and proficiency to their work as a direct result of their active involvement in a cause of their choosing. It goes without saying that any cause may be construed to be as good as the next, but selectiveness can still be observed, and accentuates the diversity of motivations involved in charitable behaviour.

Horne and Maddrell cite the statistic that 63% of volunteers were looking to simply "do something useful" and "meet other people" (Whithear in Horne & Maddrell, 2002, pp. 79-80). This is the other side of therapeutic volunteering – it provides an outlet for loneliness and boredom to be relieved. This view was overwhelmingly a 60+ perspective (ibid.), but it tells an interesting story about volunteering in a contemporary world where the workplace becomes the heart and soul of life. It also brings into question the idea of the 'gift' as something that does not expect reciprocation, as do the theories of situational

altruism (Hibbert & Horne, 1996), volunteering motivation (Wuthnow, 1995, 1999) and 'warm glow' consumption (Andreoni, 1989; 1990) mentioned above. Mauss' (1970, p. 1) comment that "In theory such gifts are voluntary but in fact they are given and repaid under obligation" underlines the way in which the charitable gift (in the form of volunteer work) has potential for repayment in the form of social interaction, training, self-expression, and a 'warm glow'. At least in terms of the work that goes on in charity shops, volunteers can be seen to be fulfilling many of the needs that McClelland's (1961) typology requires, thus negating the idea of pure altruism or philanthropy in volunteer work. The understanding of how volunteers are proactive in selecting how they volunteer is integrated into the idea of producing and consuming described in Chapter 3.1 in relation to the contemporary prosumer (Toffler, 1981). The volunteer prosumes though giving their time, and doing so selectively – they wish to see the outcomes of their work in a specific area that they have chosen, whether that area is geographical (fundraising for a local hospice) or demographic (medically-specific charities, helping the elderly, etc.). The degree of active involvement the volunteer prosumer has in the selection of their recipient goes on to subsequently impact upon the degree of 'warm glow' they experience, due to the proximity that the recipient cause has to the way they structure their own identity.

This reciprocation of the charitable gift extends beyond the workers in the charity shop to the customers in terms of their donations and consumption in the charity shop. The following section will describe how donors and consumers benefit from the charity retail experience and how the process is not wholly one-directional.

### 3.3.3 The Charitable Donor

The charity shop has been found to be the primary choice for householders looking to dispose of unwanted items (Hibbert & Horne, 1996). Seventy-nine percent of people do so simply because they want to 'support the charity'; however a further 48% felt it was merely a convenient opportunity for disposal (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, pp. 65-6). The reasons behind material donations to charity shops can be subjective: those who donate are not an easily identifiable or homogenous group, and their motives for doing so are socially and contextually situated. One particular charity has noted that shop *donors* do not tend to also be *shoppers* in the store, the perceived reason being that if unwanted items are being disposed of there, then the other stock would be seen to be equally undesirable (Horne & Broadbridge, 1995, p. 22). However, more recent work has found that two thirds of charity shop customers are also frequent donors (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 66), which suggests that once the shop is entered to make the donation, browsing is a natural occurrence.

Similarly to the charity shop volunteer, a charity shop donor/shopper can be deemed a form of prosumer, as to buy from a charity shop is technically a donation, but to *give unwanted objects* to a charity shop is also. In both cases, the act of being charitable and the 'warm glow' may be consumed. Edward Chattoe equates the products sold in charity shops as coming "not from producers, but from consumers" (Chattoe, 2006, p. 153) positing the two as interchangeable, or even synonymous. Therefore, the producer-consumer role within the charity shop space should not be underplayed, as it forms an integral cog in the system of how gift exchange in charity shops plays an important role in their function.



The charity shop participant still makes an active decision to donate their used goods as opposed to getting rid of them elsewhere. There are many other outlets for the disposal of unwanted goods. They can be given away or swapped through informal channels with friends or family members (Clarke, 2000). They can be resigned to rag traders, recycled or sent to third world countries through 'bag drop' collections. They can be sold at car boot sales, in newspaper adverts, in shop window adverts, or more recently on eBay, Amazon marketplace or through Internet adverts on websites such as VivaStreet, Craigslist or Gumtree. Alternatively, if the item is imagined to have negligible value, it may just be thrown in the bin. However, it is more common for people to look for 'strategic' methods of disposal or dispossession first, where some value can be derived from the item either for the owner, or for other people (Ekerdt, 2009, p.70). It is the search for value in their waste goods that makes the charitable prosumer so unique.

Although little research has been done in this area, the notion of 'strategic' donation is touched upon by Chattoe (2006, p. 155) who notes that consumers may act to actively 'increase the revenue' from their item. Items that are deemed 'too good' for the charity shop will end up elsewhere, as shown in Clarke's (2000) work on the 'trafficking' of nearly new children's clothing. In one of her case-studies, a respondent's American sister-in-law posted over thrice-annual parcels of clothing which had been given to her own children as gifts from generous grandparents. The items the British respondent received were those her sister-in-law felt 'too special to sell' – for instance, a fur coat for her little girl – however she would happily sell a majority of them at garage sales rather than let them go 'to waste' (2000, p. 87). The nicer items, therefore, avoid the 'callousness' of the sale and are informally gifted to a relative. This is frequently the case with anonymous charity shop donations also, when an item is considered 'too nice' or had too much money invested in it to throw away. Clarke

highlights an important issue – a feeling that ‘asting a perfectly good item will result in a negative self-view. This is the flipside of the ‘warm glow’ hypothesis posited by James Andreoni (1989; 1990), which claimed that the sensation of benevolence mimics the feeling we have when we have purchased something – we gain pleasure from it. If we waste something, therefore, we experience an opposite emotion, a feeling that we could have done more to extend the life of an item and possibly help others. We feel, as the custodian of an item, a responsibility to ‘exhaust’, ‘translate’ and therefore ‘stabilise’ the value of an item before it can be disposed of (Hetherington, 2004, p.169).

As has been discussed in the work of Appadurai (1986), objects develop a ‘social life’, which encourages personal ties and fondness for inanimate things. We connect with the ‘life history’ of an item, sometimes by incorporation into pleasant memories or by association with important life events. This is key to the concept of value within ‘used’ items, since it can result in exaggerated perceived value in some circumstances (for instance, Maddrell (2000) describes how volunteers frequently overprice their own donations to the charity shop they volunteer at). Nevertheless, these are items that people have given away, for free, as ‘gifts’ with no hope of any personal gain other than the much disputed ‘warm glow’. Altruistic motivations for charitable donations in general stress a focus upon personal ‘wellbeing’; a strategy for the removal of guilt, which has arisen due to buying something that remains unused, or for simply being more fortunate than those who may need it. Frank (1996) describes how both altruistic and selfish tendencies exist in all of us, and we satisfy both of these by donating to others, as it simultaneously improves the wellbeing of others, and relieves our own conscience, affirming our self-conception as ‘a good person’.

Both of these approaches presume a ‘pure’ altruism, which is limited in discussions of material charity shop donations by the charity

shop's status as a locale of disposal. Simply donating something to a charity shop to save wasting it does not infer an act of altruism, although it does imply a sense of ethical obligation not to waste. Buying from charity shops (and other second hand spheres) is likewise considered an 'ethical form of consumption' (Clarke, 2000) where customers can feel good about because the money is going to a good cause, and not contributing to the overwhelming number of new goods destined for landfill. Posnett and Sandier (1986) describe how buying from a charity shop is a 'joint donation'; instead of contributing to a first hand retailer and inevitably filling the coffers of anonymous shareholders, one receives a product *and* makes a donation to the charitable cause in the process.

It is wise to be wary of approaching charity shop donation as if it were altruistic, quite simply because people rarely acknowledge why it is they donate in the first place. If charity shop donations are considered to be a ritual of divestment and an act of ridding oneself of the unwanted (Gregson & Beale, 2004; Gregson et al., 2007; Gregson et al., 2009), there is little philanthropic imperative present. Certainly, charity shop donation in the form of bags of clothing could be seen as something normal, everyday, even subconscious; Rados [1981 in Hibbert & Horne, 1996] found that often donors are unable to state precisely why they made a donation to charity as the decision was done automatically without conscious thought. Young (1991) describes some charity shop donations as being the result of shedding unwanted aspects of the Self – a form of self-renewal that transpires alongside role transitions (for example, quitting a job). The old adage of '*out with the old and in with the new*' is thus considered to be more related to individual life changes and identification with certain lifestyles than with the recipient of the 'gift'.

However, when asked the reasons behind giving things away to charity, of those surveyed in a study in Oxford by Horne & Maddrell

(2002, pp. 65-6) 79% stated they did so because they wanted to support the charity. Forty-eight percent saw it merely as an opportunity to dispose of unwanted goods, and 37% based it on their desire to see goods being recycled and reused. There will be some natural overlap between these intentions (after all, one could wish to dispose of something and simply take it to the tip rather than the charity shop), but the majority response favouring the importance of helping the charitable cause could be explained by the dramaturgical theory of impression management (Goffman, 1959). The desire to appear to others to be a conscientious individual who has disposed of an item in a careful and meaningful way is exacerbated by the increased importance of disposal decisions due to the negative environmental and social impacts of overconsumption (De Coverly, O'Malley, & Patterson, 2003, p. 4). Yet again, the reciprocal elements of a seemingly generous, non-self-serving act are evidenced in the literature on charitable donors, and reinforce Mauss' (1970) assertion that a gift must be given with some expectation of return.

### **3.3.4 Summary**

This final section has aimed to review the literature on charitable giving within the context of previous sociological work on 'the Gift', psychological and motivational concepts of altruistic behaviour and sacrifice, and understanding of the rituals of dispossession and divestment within charitable donations. By looking at gift exchange within the context of two key participants in charity shop operations - the volunteer and the donor - the author notes the way both parties are linked by the act of 'philanthropic prosumption' that takes place when they make a gift of their time, labour or belongings to charity.

In summary, the previous literature on charitable giving epitomises the vague and indeterminate character of current sociological understanding of charity retail. When it is considered alongside the overview of consumer capitalism and professionalisation of work described in the previous two sections, it is clear that the charity shop remains an anomaly within all three contexts. The peculiarities of charity retail and its relationship with many varying areas of social importance have been examined. In 3.1, the importance of changing consumer behaviour, social exclusion, and also the increased importance of branding, advertising, marketing and other professional business techniques are identified in charity operations. In 3.2, these techniques and developments are investigated in relation to the impact upon volunteers, as well as extrapolated to the sectoral implications that a 'professionalised' charity shop may entail. In 3.3 these areas are all considered in reference to that unique charity shop attribute - the assumption of philanthropy that underlies the lay conception of charity. This attribute is considered in relation to both volunteers and donors, and the sociological relevance of the philanthropic prosumer is suggested as a tentative area for exploration due to the recurring theme of prosumption throughout the literature.

The next chapter will embark upon the research journey, with an explanation of the methodological processes undertaken.

## CHAPTER 4

### Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the rationale and limitations of the chosen research methodology, identify the philosophical grounding that underpins the methodological choices, and situate the study within established methodological approaches and the application of method.

The chapter will begin with an overview of the philosophical assumptions that inform the chosen methodology; in this case, an interpretivist, phenomenological or constructivist paradigm. The overview will contrast this perspective with those of a positivist, post-positivist and critical worldview to demonstrate why this paradigm was most ontologically and epistemologically appropriate to answer the research questions given in Chapter 1:

- 1. What processes are taking place at a micro level on the charity shop floor?**
- 2. How do charity shop participants negotiate these processes**
- 3. Is there a consistent 'professionalisation' in charity shops, or is the process more nuanced?**
- 4. What does this indicate about the professionalisation of charity, and wider conceptions of charity in general?**

The following section of this chapter will introduce the background to the researcher's study of charity shops and their development, and the methodologies that linked this field to the interpretivist approach used. Then, the third section will address the

research strategy used and the reasons for its selection: case studies investigated through the ethnographic research techniques of participant observation and supporting interviews. The fourth section of this chapter is about the research design and process. This will detail how access was achieved and the process of data collection and analysis. Finally, the research ethics will be discussed; in particular, the ethical implications in terms of anonymity, informed consent, protected data storage, and the consequences for further dissemination.

#### **4.1 Philosophical grounding: Interpretivism**

Sociological research is required to operate within a set paradigm that is chosen by the researcher. This paradigm informs the way data will be collected, interpreted and discussed, and the views on what elements of the field are of consequence and which are less so. The subject of the research plays a crucial part in the choice of paradigm and this helps to identify which methodologies will be best to 'dissect' it – in short the “questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p.195). To select a useful paradigm to explore charity shops sociologically, four of the most commonly used philosophical positions were considered, and the reasons for the selection of interpretivism is detailed below.

Positivism has been always been a dominant discourse in research projects, particularly in scientific settings. It aims to predict causal or correlated relationships, test established hypotheses and strongly advocates the importance of reliability, validity and objectivity in research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.112). For this reason the researcher must remain 'disinterested' or detached from the results of

their study to avoid researcher bias or manipulation (LeCompte and Schensul 1999 p. 43). The emphasis upon research distance, although plausible for the use of some qualitative methods, does not meld well with the micro study of a shop space, as developing an understanding necessitates some form of participation and involvement in the *processes* whether as a worker or a customer. Without this level of researcher involvement, the more subtle procedures and negotiations that are played out in the charity shop space might be rendered invisible.

Post positivism aimed to look beyond an 'observed reality' and reveal what was beyond it. Rather than dismissing it as mere subjectivity as traditional positivism may have (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p.18), it looks for patterns that lie behind observable phenomena. However post-positivism suffers with many of the same issues as its predecessor. although it adopts a more critical and less naïve understanding of the limitations of obtaining a snapshot of 'reality' through research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.111). Both approaches would fail to grasp the complexity and anomalous nature of the charity shop, and also the nuances that render the contemporary charity shop as different to its predecessors. It is the *a priori* assumptions about traditional charity shop operations that could not be examined by positivistic research. These assumptions, described in detail in the literature review, include the altruistic motivations of volunteers or third-sector accountability and democracy. This research aims to ensure that these theoretical standpoints are newly challenged by an in-depth examination of the charity shop space.

An alternative is using a critical perspective, which challenges the societal 'status quo' of dominant power relations. This is more frequently attributed to ethnographic work, as it works with the intention of revealing inequalities in the structures embedded within society, and evoking some form of societal change. Critical approaches



to research necessitate the presence of the researcher's own values within their research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110) therefore a degree of personal reflexivity is encouraged. Research is usually considered in relation to its temporal, geographical, historical, economic and cultural context, and in relation to the researchers own background (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, p.46).

Whilst a degree of critical thinking has been applied to the methods used in this thesis, particularly in relation to self-engagement and ongoing management and adaptation of the ethnographer's situation (LeCompte 1999, p. 12), the necessity for critical theorists to focus upon depicting the inequalities in power relations became increasingly unrealistic for this study. This is due to the fact that it permits only one voice and, as the research came to indicate, the charity shop is comprised of a cacophony of disorganised and often conflicting voices. The complicated processes of charity shop operations therefore require a mediation of a critical perspective – retaining elements such as researcher reflexivity and the contestation of accepted norms surrounding how we conceive of charity and charity shops; and weaving them into an established tradition of interpretivism: something Alvesson & Sköldbberg refer to as 'reflexive interpretivism' (2009, p.271).

Interpretivism is an approach that encompasses both 'phenomenology' (from philosophy) and constructivism (from psycho-social disciplines), yet interpretivism (or interactionism) is predominantly an anthropological or sociological term (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, p.48). The philosophical standpoint is that all knowledge of reality is created through social constructions such as language, shared understanding, tools, documents and so on, thus individuals are active and creative within its formation. This can be summarised by using G.H. Mead's (1934) understanding of pragmatic inquiry:

1. True reality (as perceived by empiricists) does not exist "out there" in the world but "is actively created as we act in and toward the world."
2. People remember and base their knowledge of the world on what has been useful to them and are likely to alter what no longer "works"
3. People define the social and physical "objects" they encounter in the world according to their use for them.
4. If we want to understand why people act (the actors), we must base that understanding on what the actor actually does.

By emphasising the importance of agency and dynamism, interpretivism lends itself to participatory research as the data specifies a need for social dialogue and interaction (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, p. 49). The intuitive development of research questions and creation/re-creation of data findings is common in this paradigm, although it is not devoted to emancipatory or activist motives in the way critical standpoints can be. Instead interpretivism and constructivism emphasise the importance of *understanding*, which assumes "multiple, apprehendable, and sometimes conflicting social realities" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.111) that are subject to flux and change. Given the aims of this thesis this approach is suitable because it mirrors the way charity shops operate – under multiple conflicting ideologies and with links to various covert and overt stakeholders. The stress upon researcher involvement and intersubjectivity is also appropriate, thus some degree of critical grounding has been retained within the methodological approach. The researcher's extensive background in charity shop volunteering and shopping, through which a contextual understanding of the assumptions surrounding charity

shops had already developed, is detailed in the following section, and explains a little more about why charity shops were viewed as an area ripe for study, and how the study of them can be seen as indicative of wider sociological changes to the concept of charity.

#### **4.2 Background from the Researcher**

*The primary drive behind this thesis was to understand the intricate processes at work within the modern charity shop. My own interest in charity began as a result of a stint volunteering in a Salvation Army charity shop in my hometown of Redditch, Worcestershire. The experience I had there was a colourful one; the volunteers had diverse motivations behind their intent to help out, and the dedication they had to their roles and to the cause was overwhelming. Equally overwhelming was the volume and diversity of donations, and the displaced and peculiar set-up of the shop, housed in a dilapidated old church on a neglected former high street.*

*I remember being fascinated by the strangely regimented methods they had for sorting and classifying the goods donated; how strict they were about tipping items out of the bin bags rather than reaching into them, for instance. One volunteer told me about finding medical syringes in an innocuous-looking bag of curtains. Also, how they had formed close social ties around their short, 4-hour shifts in the drafty old church. At times, the atmosphere in the shop was chaotic. There would be instances when I would arrive for my Saturday afternoon shift to find the back partition completely filled with black binbags; alternately there were times when we sat down for our fourth cup of tea and biscuit in the space of little more than 2 hours. The erratic pace, along with the erratic supply of stock, the intense feeling of volunteer*

*solidarity and the peculiar detachment this particular charity shop space had from the world of work and stress, all fostered an interest in that which I have gone on to study: the contemporary charity shop.*

*Stemming from this initial interest was a personal preoccupation with the participatory culture of charity shops, and the way customers, volunteers, managers and donors are immersed in the day to day running of the shop, with small, independent roles contributing en masse to unfettered profitability for the charities they represent. In terms of the methodology, inspiration came from the work of Gregson, Brooks and Crewe (2000), whose participant observation in their local branch of Oxfam yielded a fascinating insight into professionalisation and volunteerism in the shop. The hands-on ethnographic approach reminded me of my own experience in the charity shop, and I was intrigued by how different this 'professionalised' charity shop described by Gregson, Brooks and Crewe seemed to be.*

*Although they complemented this methodology with interviews and other secondary data, Gregson, Brooks and Crewe highlighted how the 'messiness' of charity shop spaces necessitates this hands-on approach in order to intensely scrutinise the 'micro-geographies' (Gregson et al., 2000, p.1670) and patterns of interaction that are taking place. They also provided a word of warning, describing the "seemingly ever-outward-spiralling momentum" of their project as overwhelming (p. 1662). This is a common feature of naturalistic micro-qualitative studies, where huge amounts of data can be amassed, and the research topic intuitively developed throughout, in extreme cases resulting in an entirely new area of study. Therefore, although the previous literature indicated how professionalisation was important in the charity shop context, I was wary of plunging in to study 'professionalisation' without critically assessing what this meant; particularly as my own experience was of working in a charity shop that had undergone virtually no professionalisation at all. The participant observation therefore was*

*initially undertaken without a conscious decision that professionalisation would be studied, although the case studies were selected to ensure that the typology described by Parsons (2004) was taken into account. The research questions formed as the observation progressed. This bears some similarities to the predominantly health science-oriented field of action research, whereby a “cyclical approach” to research management is employed, and methodology and theoretical associations develop along with data analysis (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p.85).*

*My personal experience of charity shops was that they were infinitely diverse, in terms of staff, shop layout, stock and many other elements of their operations. As a result, a qualitative method was most suited to studying the nuances of their operations. The obligations, motivations, hierarchical structures and general behaviours of charity shop workers that I had experienced were not systematic or ordered in a reliable way. A quantitative analysis of this, although able to calculate perhaps the economic ‘worth’ of the volunteer or the tangible growth of charity income over time, would neglect the individuality that can be observed through the day to day interactions on the shop floor. Through personal experience and interactions with volunteers and charity shop workers, I felt that these operations are best understood through participation in shop-floor operations, and immersion in the day-to-day activities that professionalisation and bureaucratic implementation are hailed to have generated.*

#### **4.3 Research Strategy: Ethnography**

From the interpretivist standpoint, a qualitative methodology is often favoured simply because it is viewed as inherently more ‘interesting’ when data gathering and conducting analysis (Silverman,

2010, p. 11). Understanding the way people interpret things is difficult in a quantitative study where research boundaries are restricted by categorisation by the researcher from the outset. Payne & Payne (2005) suggest several necessary elements of qualitative study, which includes use of inductive reasoning (not working to test a research question, but to allow your interests to develop through the data), non-representative samples (often small and very in-depth), and naturalistic research fields (in non-experimental settings). Observational records and interviews like those used within this study are not purely naturalistic; they are written down, recorded and transcribed by the researcher, therefore there is an element of solicitation and involvement by the researcher themselves, as is appropriate in interpretivistic methodological approaches. To be a detached observer in this setting would not have permitted access to many of the 'quiet' pricing negotiations, authority struggles and inter-sectoral ties that emerged within the data. Also there is no way for the researcher to control the setting, as is common in positivistic or experimental research (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, p.2). All of these elements suggest the necessity for ethnographic research.

Throughout the design, adaptation and execution of the research there was a strong influence from previous ethnographic studies in the area, as well as ethnographic methodology holistically. In all research it is imperative to retain 'theoretical sensitivity' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) and refer back to this relevant literature, experience and analytic procedures throughout.

Angrosino (2007, p.15) describes in detail how an ethnographic multi method approach may be beneficial to developing social science research questions – in particular the *multifactorial*, *holistic*, *personalised* and *dialogic* elements. Multifactorial data allows the findings to be complemented or contrasted through the use of methodological triangulation (in which several methodologies are used

in tandem with the same objective in mind), and is viewed as key to achieving enhanced validity in research (Denzin, 1970).

Use of triangulation both within-method (e.g. using diaries and interviews) or between-method (using quantitative and qualitative methods together) in turn contributes to holism, which permits the subject under study to be presented as fully as possible. The involvement of the researcher contributes to the latter two elements, as they are able to offer personal accounts and contributions to the observed phenomena, and are able to participate and comment upon the actions and interactions of those under study.

Ethnographic research is highly dependent upon relational work between the researcher and their subjects. Coffey (1999, p. 39) describes fieldwork relationships as both “professional and personal, yet not necessarily readily characterised as either.” A good rapport with research subjects can result in access being more readily gained and snowballing of responses, as well as enabling richer data to be gathered once subjects become trusting and comfortable with the researcher’s presence. Within the charity shop, working as a volunteer allowed access to what went on behind the scenes, in terms of managerial structures and company policies, but also permitted the researcher to become friendly with volunteers, workers and customers alike, and in earning their trust, form a reciprocal relationship. The nuances of this complicated relationship will be further discussed in the section 4.3.4 on negotiating access.

However, ethnography is not without its critics. An established argument against the use of qualitative data in general is that it yields less than objective representations of the world (Nadel, 1951). In a sense, being ‘impartial’ is not a prerequisite for sociological research – as Silverman (2010, p. 52) notes, giving the ‘whole picture’ is virtually impossible. Instead, we aim to provide an insight into a setting, within

a contextual framework that is reinforced by previous theoretical work. In this case, that work began solely as socio-economic theories of charity, second-hand consumer theory and discussions of philanthropy and giving. As the participant observation progressed, the data indicated the importance of contemporary theories of organisations, work, and value.

As the research aims of this study became clearer, the basic research question was whether the development of traditional charity shop operations and the interactions of volunteers and shoppers had amalgamated into a 'new' form of charity retailing, which challenged the established sociological concepts of value, volunteerism, work and charity. As a result, the methodology used to investigate this area necessitated a degree of immersion within the field, since ethnographies depend upon "intimate and reciprocal involvement with community members" (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, p. 10).

Even in the early stages of research prior to the concrete formation of research questions, ethnographic research was considered to be the most apt methodology to study the micro processes in the shop. Although the development of charity shops could be studied through the use of charity data and work structures, a positivistic approach would neglect the varying unscripted exchanges, unrecorded work and unspoken ties that exist within the shop space, and would distinctly undermine the aims of the thesis, which are to better understand the changes going on in the day-to-day practices of charity shop operations.

Ethnographic participant observation differs greatly from observation within an experimental setting (as may be used in positivist or quantitative studies), because it takes place within a real-life context and the interactions observed are, it is hoped, those of natural behaviours in natural situations. The researcher role that



developed over time spent in the charity shop settings was as a 'participant-as-observer', according to the distinctions made by Gold (1958, in Angrosino, 2007, p. 54-5). This means that the researcher involved herself in the work and relationships within the context to an extent that they felt as a normal volunteer would, and kept references to the research to the minimum, although the research imperative was stated upon commencement of the study. This differs from a 'observer-as-participant' role, where the research aims take precedence over all interactions, or the 'complete observer' role, where participants are rarely aware of the researcher's presence, or that they are being studied at all (*ibid.*). This approach is ethically unsound, and bears this similarity to the opposite end of the spectrum, the 'complete participant', where the researcher is fully immersed into the role and can run the risk of competing loyalties and attachments to other participants. This is the issue with the temptation for ethnographers to 'go native' (Burgess, 1984, p.20; Angrosino, 2007, p.55) and involve themselves too deeply in the situation they are researching. Ethical issues and concerns surrounding researcher objectivity will be explored in section 4.5, 'Ethical Considerations'.

This project employed two types of qualitative ethnographic method: participant observation and semi-structured interviews. In selecting where and how to conduct these, a close study of charity shop operations with some means for comparison was required. Therefore, the researcher chose to use a case study method to address the specific nuances of professionalisation in two very different charity shops.

### 4.3.1 Case Study Research

Stake (2000, pp. 437-8) describes a methodology known as an 'instrumental case study', which fitted the requirements and limitations of this thesis in terms of available time and breadth of research. An instrumental case study is designed to be indicative of wider issues, and the case described is not the primary focal point of the investigation in and of itself. Instead it serves as an *example* of a contemporary charity shop. Therefore, the shops featured in this study will be used to extrapolate to the interpretation of charity shops on a wider scale. That is not to say that the results are claimed to be generalisable, particularly as charity shops are by their very nature diverse. But any shop studied will have relevance to the population in discussion and represent a depiction of that group. As Hammersley et al. (2000, p.3) note, "the aim of case study research should be to capture cases in their uniqueness."

Stake (2000) suggests one way to select your purposive sample is by using a typological approach. The population is organised into categories, then one case study from each category is studied in depth. Elizabeth Parsons' (2004) typology of charity shops, described in section 2.4, was instrumental from the outset of this thesis as it stratified charity shops on the basis of how much they have perceivably professionalised. As a result, it was felicitous that Parsons made an early distinction within her work between Multiple Charity Retailers, Hospice Charity Retailers and Independent Charity Retailers, as these three work well for comparative study to see whether professionalisation is actually taking place within all forms of shop, or whether it is a radical expansion of one type within the market. A discussion of how case studies were selected based around Parsons' typology will continue in section 4.3.4.

To investigate the two case studies in depth, a multi-method interpretative strategy was planned, using a 6-month participant observation, and complementing this with semi-structured interviews with key actors identified within the field.

#### **4.3.2 Participant Observation**

When commencing an observation, Schensul et al. (1999, p.96) note that the ethnographer will not know precisely what they are observing, and stress the importance of not “prematurely imposing categories derived from pre-established external theory”. Although the research wished to investigate the extent of professionalisation upon various components of the charity shop on a micro level, the elements of this that were to prove particularly salient (the pricing negotiations, worker hierarchies and the first and second sector links) did not become apparent until the researcher was orientated to the setting. Field notes were recorded at regular intervals during the shift on a notepad and typed up afterwards in dated bullet-point format to distinguish separate events sequentially. In line with the recommendations of Schensul et al. (*ibid.*, p. 119), good observation practice was followed at all times. This included the recording of exact spoken quotes where possible, pseudonyms in all fieldnotes (with distinguishing information kept separate and secure), avoidance of low-level inferences from initial impressions, and personal feelings differentiated from those that are observed facts. Inscription was frequently used at intervals when serving a customer or completing a task was necessary. Inscription refers to “the act of making mental notes prior to writing things down” (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p.13) and perhaps jotting down an indicative word or phrase to elaborate upon later. This was followed by the writing up of ethnographic notes

using “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) to build a narrative of the recorded events.

One key difficulty throughout the research was maintaining the divide between being a researcher and being a worker/friend to other volunteers and managers. Whilst trying to keep up with notetaking during the hours worked, the researcher wrote up notes when there was no one around, or when there was no work to do. In part this was so the researcher wouldn't be seen as 'slacking off', thus a form of self-surveillance or self-monitoring was initiated (Foucault, 1979). This was in part because the role of researcher differed from the norms of a volunteer: they had additional responsibilities. Thus the researcher became “the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault, 1979, p. 202), ensuring that note-taking and observations were not made overt on the shop floor so as not to affect the outcome of any observable phenomena.

This was also because the note-taking process was regarded as “*seeming to make other workers in the shops feel uncomfortable*” [MCR *Fieldnotes*]. At one point when the researcher was writing down some notes, Derreck, the manager of the IHR shop joked “*Don't you go reporting back to your other shop about how we do things here!*” This sparked a degree of contention around anonymity and protection of individuals from being harmed by the research process, which will be discussed in detail in section 4.5 on ethical considerations.

The wariness of participants was pre-empted in the planning stage, since participatory research is dependent upon being accepted by the research subjects not just as somebody who is objectively studying your actions, but also as somebody who is *joining in* with them. Therefore, a certain, moderated amount of participation must be genuinely engaged in, as Lofland & Lofland (1994) note, you do not wish to be a 'Martian' in a situation, but one must be careful not to be a

total 'convert' either, as this risks negating the objectivity of your study. Goffman's theory of impression management (1959) summarises how one must present a positive 'front' applicable to the scenario they are engaged in. In context, that 'front' may not be one of a researcher but of a volunteer, a friendly ear, a fellow disgruntled colleague, a confidante, and so on. This approach infers some deception or covert behaviour (particularly in Goffman's usage of the term *manipulation*), but in fact it is more a requirement to fit in, and not upset the delicate balance of unspoken trust in interactions by making apparent the dichotomy of roles played. The result of "disruptions" of this is often embarrassment for both the researcher and participants (Goffman, 1959, p.212) which was experienced by the researcher herself when caught note-taking when she should have been tidying or undertaking other tasks. Therefore one must constantly uphold a 'delicate combination of overt and covert roles' (Adler, 1985, p. 27), in spite of both charity shops being initially informed of the research imperative.

The experience of undertaking this research revolved around developing the research questions through experience and field notes within the charity shop setting. Retrospective field note analysis led to the decision to undertake illustrative in-depth interviews with key participants at the charity shops. Although this was a diversion from the initial research plan, it has been acknowledged that developing methodologies in line with data analysis and theoretical iterations can be much more intuitively useful than sticking to a regimented methodological plan (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p.85).

### 4.3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviewing has been heralded by some methodologists as the means through which genuine access to perceptions can be gathered, whilst observation reveals only the distortions of these perceptions (Becker & Geer, 1957). Despite the popularity of work conducted within 'natural' settings, interviews and direct elicitation methods are useful for illuminating these findings and building upon them (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.108). The decision to undertake interviews within this research was influenced by the fact that participants within the field of research indicated subtle differences in their perspectives towards charity, charity shops and their own position within them, as well as further information about the more covert operations, interactions and discrepancies that went on there. This was suggested by the observational data, yet whilst participating in that environment the researcher was not able to gather anything more than superficial comments and hints. Since the more hidden processes that occurred in the charity shop setting were what the research aimed to uncover, the workers involved were questioned in relation to these more subtle operations, with a degree of focus upon pricing structures, worker relations and Gift Aid/Gift in Kind in particular, as these elements became of interest throughout the observation.

Nevertheless, the theoretical and empirical propositions that stemmed from the observational work were investigated in the subsequent interviews as a result of 'upwards inference' to theory, even during interviews, as opposed to a top-down, operational perspective (Wengraf, 2001, pp. 55-6). This would hopefully indicate more of the constituents of charity retail operations that were alluded

to through the observation notes, for example; the multiple identities of workers in their daily life, within the charity shop environment.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. These differ from a traditional structured interview format, where precise questions are formulated and ordered prior to the interview taking place, and there is no room for probing by the researcher, nor for adaptation of the interview whilst it is taking place. By setting an analytic code before the interview like this, “researchers minimize the extent to which research findings can be iteratively developed” (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p.88), which would be restrictive for a project with an interpretivist philosophical basis. However, during the semi-structured interviews, the researcher was required to monitor the situation and ensure that they remained in the role of ‘active listener’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.118; Noaks & Wincup, 2004, p.80) and did not allow the interview to lapse into a general conversation; the research prerogative should remain at the forefront of all discussions. This can be particularly difficult to maintain when a rapport with the participant already exists, as was the case with work colleagues and fellow volunteers. It was due to this reason that unstructured interviews were not chosen, since several participants were already known to the researcher, thus the interview could tend to wander into generalised conversation. The aim of a semi-structured interview is to combine the benefits of free-flowing information that you get from unstructured interviews with “the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative, textual data” (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p.149).

The interviews were semi-structured to allow for consistency across participants but also so that unexpected avenues of enquiry may materialise. This approach supported the exploratory ethnographic approach of the research which looked for themes and topics to emerge rather than anticipating them (Patton, 2002). The interviews

were planned using targeted yet open questions surrounding personal views on charity as a concept, charity shops, their role within them, and how they felt about specific elements of the operation such as haggling over prices, volunteering, Gift Aid, and Gift in Kind – four elements that had been identified as key through ongoing observation data analysis<sup>3</sup>. Wengraf indicates an important distinction within interviews where the researcher ideally should focus upon ‘interview questions’ or ‘prompts’ as opposed to ‘research questions’ or ‘theory questions’ (2001, p. 61). Theory questions are the overall directives of a study, but they are not composed in a language appropriate for interviewees. Indeed, the interview questions were not ‘theoretically defined’ according to Wengraf’s (2001, p. 77) typology, instead they were empirically defined; developing from hints picked up from my observational analysis that spoke to wider topics. An example of this is the generative question about Gift Aid that was asked to the manager of the IHR based upon my experiences with it in the MCR:

*“Have you ever considered using Gift Aid to earn extra money for the charity?”*

A snowball purposive sampling technique was used to find interviewees, from each of the case study shops. The institutional framework of both charities meant that speaking to the managers, and managers of managers seemed a logical research progression. A difficulty similarly highlighted by Ball (1994; Bardhi & Arnould, 2005) in his work interviewing government ministers. He concluded that interviewing those who had left office was more rewarding than those who were currently in office, as those with positions in government were less willing to reveal information. At times in my interviews participants struggled with issues of loyalty to their charity, their

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<sup>3</sup> This process of data analysis and coding is fully described in the Research Design section.



superiors, and to their role. An alternative approach would be to interview former shop workers who do not feel limited by these aspects however this would jeopardise the aims of the research to capture an up-to-date contemporary picture of the charity shop.

In terms of the practicality of interviewing, the questions were left open-ended to allow for a narrative discourse to emerge from the participant, but were structured around themes that had arisen in the observation data. These included 'the running of the shop', responses to paid staff/volunteers, Gift Aid, Gift in Kind, surveillance, the contrast between profit-making and charity, changes and the conceivable future for the shop. Interviews began with broader questions about how the participant defines a charity shop, which charities they support and their own volunteering experience. The questions were tailored differently depending on the participant's job in the shop. All question amendments were conducted intuitively based on what knowledge I had about the individual's role for the charity. For example, the following question was put to shop managers and the volunteer:

*"Describe the main roles you undertake in the shop."*

For the GIK manager at the MCR, and for the chief executive of the IHR, the question was phrased differently, as they do not work regularly on the shop floor:

*"Describe the main roles you undertake for the charity?"*

It was important to ask this question to discover where the workers saw *themselves* within the operation – particularly as this was a contentious element that emerged within the fieldwork data. Many of the questions for the shop workers were also inspired by the unstructured interview techniques used by Gregson, Brooks and Crewe (2002) and Parsons & Broadbridge (2007) when they spoke to shop participants. Goodall's (2000a) work on the sectoral context of charity

shops necessitated interviews with superior staff members, and his more regimented technique was employed for those higher in the shop hierarchy within this research study.

Each interview lasted approximately 2 hours, and was conducted on the participant's own territory (usually in the back room or an office in the shop) as this has been found to equalise the balance of power between interviewer and interviewee (Schroder, Drotner, Kline, & Murray, 2003) and make the setting more comfortable. Interviews were conducted on lunch or tea breaks, or before they had commenced work for the day. Some interviews with senior staff were conducted over the telephone in their own time. Sensitivity to the life and time constraints of employed participants was necessary (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p.135). In total, 6 in-depth interviews took place with the following shop participants:

Maria: Manager of the MCR

Mike: Gift in Kind Manager (North West division) at the MCR

Derreck: Manager of the IHR

Steve: Long-term volunteer at the IHR

Henry: Chief Executive of the IHR charity

Frank: Representative from the Charity Retail Association and Charity Shop Executive.

The majority of these participants were purposively sampled due to their interaction with the charity shop and the contentions that had been brought up by or relating to them through the observations. Although a larger number were invited to participate, the decline in volunteering at the MCR meant that none of the original volunteers who were working during the observation remained when the interview took place. Indeed, Maria too left shortly after the interview

to go on maternity leave. The attrition rate for volunteers at the MCR could be another indicative factor of the increased professionalisation of the shop space, particularly as new trainees, assistant managers and paid volunteer co-ordinators were hired in during the observation period, thus supporting Goodall's (2000b, p.44) contention that professionalism can be regarded as 'eroding' voluntarism. Equally, it could be seen as part of the temporary and precarious nature of modern work (Beck, 2000a; Beck, 2000b; Berardi & Empson, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

Upon selection of these three methodological strategies, the research process could commence. Shop selection and negotiation of access with the parent charities and the potential participants (managers and key charity stakeholders in particular) was the next necessary step in the research process.

#### **4.3.4 Negotiating Access and Case Study Selection**

The charity shop is a space that is open to the public, so access onto the shop floor would not have been problematic. To study patterns of interactions within the shop space, recording details whilst 'browsing' may have sufficed. However although non-participant observations would yield interesting results, they would not have allowed access to the processes going on behind the scenes of the charity shop – that is, the structures put in place by the individual charities in order to co-ordinate the running of the business through the organisation of volunteers, distribution of stock, and other day to day decisions that are made. To gather this information, a role *within* the organisation was required.

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<sup>4</sup> This idea is discussed further in the findings, both in section 6.5 and in the discussion section 8.3.

The decision to approach charity shops with the aim to work simultaneously as a volunteer and researcher was somewhat tactical, as it meant that whilst being immersed in the shop space observing, the researcher was still able to contribute time to the cause. In terms of sample selection this aimed to make the researcher a more desirable employee, and broaden the options to enable selectivity as to what kind of charity shop the research would take place in. On top of this, by presenting herself as an eager student with an interest in charity shops, the researcher hoped to appeal to shop managers who were interested in recruiting from a younger and more dynamic demographic, particularly due to her previous retail experience that has been detailed above.

The position of volunteer within a charity shop has been used in past studies as a means of access to the research field (Gregson et al., 2000; Gregson et al., 2002; Parsons, 2004) therefore the volunteer role is an established means of access in the field. There is also the relatively simple application procedure; both roles only necessitated a simple form to be filled in before work commenced. Those approached before fieldwork commenced ranged from area managers to individual shop managers and occasionally volunteers who worked in indeterminate roles within the charity's head office. Whilst going through this process, the varying ways in which volunteer recruitment is handled became clear; sometimes there is a careful bureaucratic regime, and other times with a leisurely "come in and see if you like the place" response. This was characteristic of the 'messy' nature of charity shop processes.

Acquiring a volunteer role therefore should in theory have presented few practical issues. Using the charity shop typology developed by Parsons (2004) that was described earlier in this chapter, a search began a viable location to commence research that fit into her category of Multiple Charity Retailer, as this is the kind of shop that

exists in the 'trading up' phase of professionalisation (McNair in Horne, 2000). Internet searches and personal knowledge of the local area was used. The search took place in and around a city located in the North of England. Particularly prominent were the Multiple Charity Retailers, of which there were several stores representing large charities within the research area. As a result of an email to an area manager, a national children's charity agreed to take the researcher on as a part time volunteer in their most successful UK branch. The shop was located in the city centre, and was extremely busy. Application and acceptance was quite a smooth process, and fieldwork commenced the following week.

Whilst carrying out one shift a week (roughly 5 hours excluding breaks) of observational work in the Multiple Charity Retailer shop, the search continued for an alternative case study to use comparatively, in line with the typology. However, the research plan failed to acknowledge the popularity of volunteering within the area. Volunteer positions in Independent and Hospice shops were found to be few and far between, with one local hospice retailer stating that, despite operating 12 shops in the area, they had a lengthy waiting list of volunteers. Similarly there were offers of 'holiday cover' or 'a part time unpaid managerial role' for two different animal welfare charity shops, which would not have been appropriate to take due to the research imperative. The researcher visited both of these shops, and found them to be ramshackle establishments, overflowing with goods piled on tables and scattered across floors, and with numerous staff members that seemed to blend in with the customers, such was the degree of rapport taking place.

Unfortunately, in spite of their compelling nature, their hiring techniques were crude, with one lady writing down the researcher's phone number on the back of a calendar on the wall (where it joined numerous other random names and numbers). Follow-up phone calls

were answered with equal levels of confusion, tempered with great enthusiasm for the research and the prospect of having a younger volunteer. A manager from a charity shop which fundraised for a local dog's home regularly forgot to call back, and the final phonecall with her a month after initial contact ended with her stating that she was leaving soon and the researcher could apply to be a volunteer manager there after her departure. In this way, several promising shop locations had to be abandoned due to the improbability of gaining access. At this point, the 'instabilities' of charity shop organisation described by Gregson, Brooks and Crewe (2002) seemed to be a genuine impediment to research access.

Eventually, a web search turned up a children's hospice charity in the suburbs. The hospice had a shop, which was not far from the hospice itself. The shop was run by a manager, Derreck; a gentleman in his 60s, and had numerous volunteers who were exclusively ladies aged 50+ from the local area. Upon applying, a period of 3 weeks passed before Derreck phoned to confirm that volunteering could commence one day a week. It was the only shop owned by that hospice charity (with the exception of temporary installations over Christmas in local shopping centres), rendering it an amalgamation of Parsons' (2004) Hospice and Independent Charity Retailers, as it held characteristics of both.

At this point it is necessary to clarify the significance of using a children's charity. Prior to acquiring access, the researcher was reasonably open minded as to which 'causes' the research would encompass, and conducted the search without limiting it by cause – instead using only Parsons' typology to stratify types of shop. The rationale behind this was simple: this was a study of the intricacies of the economic and social interactions between workers, employees and customers at store level and was not directly studying or monitoring the actions of the wider charity unless such information was being

used to provide context. Yet as the search developed, it became apparent that a comparative case study method provides clearer evidence of differences when the two cases yield some basic concrete similarities. Charity shops are a manifestation of fundraising endeavours, but by linking the locus of charity (in this case, children and their welfare) between the case studies, the research hoped to also be able to indicate if there was any difference in impact that this particular 'cause' had within the differing typological options. Children's charities, alongside medical research charities, have been the most popular in the UK in terms of contributions (NCVO, 2012, p.35), with a NCVO/TSRC Charity Commission study from 2009/2010 finding that children and young people remain the most prominent beneficiaries of charity work, receiving 58.2% of the benefits offered by the voluntary sector (Clark *et al.*, 2012, p.23). Therefore resulting research could be of heightened importance for policy makers, and more practically, the level of interactions between participants should in theory be intensified due to an assumption of strong dedication to the cause.

The participant observation in the two case-study shops overlapped temporally during the summer of 2010. The Multiple Charity Retailer (MCR) observation commenced in late February and ended in September. The Independent Hospice Retailer observation began in early July and ended in December. To make up for the shortfall in observation period at the Independent Hospice Retailer (IHR) two shifts were undertaken per week, totalling ten hours per week excluding breaks. The total observation time spent in each shop is calculated below:

	<b>MCR</b>	<b>IHR</b>
Weeks worked 5 hours	33	12
Weeks worked 10 hours	0	12
Total Weeks	33	24
<b>TOTAL HOURS</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>180</b>

*Figure 2. Observation Research Timescale*

As is indicated above, the researcher spent over 300 hours immersed in the shop environment; undertaking the same work as volunteers and observing the practises that went on. In addition to her previous experience of charity shops, this ensured a very detailed and rich account of the processes that took place, with reflections from the researcher that were informed both comparatively (between shops), and theoretically (from previous studies into charity shop practices).

An in-depth description of the two different case study settings (the Multiple Charity Retailer and the Independent Hospice Retailer) will be described in section 4.6.3, in particular, examining their spatial and locational elements and how the contrast with one another.



#### 4.4 Data Analysis

The analysis of both the observational field notes and the interview transcripts developed as a process during write up. Following the production of written-up field notes and interview transcription, preliminary notes were made by the researcher.

Wolf (1990 in Coffey, 1999) describes the experience of turning field notes into ethnographic analysis, and how revisiting her data alongside interview notes and informal scribbling actually helped her to find new areas of interest in work she was already familiar with. Producing qualitative research is rarely a static, unilateral practice (Coffey, 1999, p.141); it involves personal engagement and implicit reflexivity in the writing-up and the critical analyses.

Use of thematic analysis is common within sociological research where a hermeneutic framework is used. A 'theme' is described by Van Maanen (1998) as a category of context-specific elements that form a 'generalized type', which can then be contrasted with similar aspects of social life that have been categorised similarly.

A distinct flaw to thematic analysis is the fact that by grouping and labelling portions of data in this way, the complex idiosyncracies of that which is being observed can sometimes get lost. This issue is summarised by Miles & Huberman's (1984, p.21) contention that abstracting and thematically organising data is termed *data reduction* – it is narrowing down data into bitesize chunks that are selected intuitively based on the theoretical basis of the work. The researcher therefore must be aware that when addressing specific research questions (or interpreting new ones) through data analysis, one doesn't become blind to the tiny deviances that could be extremely pertinent.

The use of computerised analysis was undertaken mainly because of their ability to process large volumes of text at a time (Miall, 1990). In total, over 70,000 words of field notes were entered into the system, and using ATLAS.ti enabled cross-referencing and mass-coding that would have been a long-winded process if attempted short-hand. It also enables a more comprehensive and rigorous coding system. Although use of computerised data packages can be beneficial in terms of both speed and rigour (Silverman, 2010), it was not possible to code the data without reading and re-reading the text many times, as pertinent topics were often not mentioned by name (for instance, Gift in Kind was frequently referred to by Mike, the GIK manager, and Maria, the shop manager, as 'budget') so in vivo coding was at times unhelpful.

Initial coding identified many implicit and explicit references the issues of value, work and wider conceptions of charity. A mixture of deductive and inductive themes were used due to an expectation that the wealth of diverse data would provide unexpected themes that may not be initially apparent.

The process followed the outline proposed by Braun & Clark (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with six phases of conducting thematic analysis:

#### Familiarisation with the data

All the data was transcribed, anonymised and reviewed. Initial notes were made.

#### Generating initial codes

All transcriptions were reviewed and systematically coded and grouped per code. For example:

*"T: That's not an official part of your job..."*

*M: Exactly, it's something we have to deal with, eh? On a daily basis."*

This quote was coded under "informality" and "kindness".

### Searching for themes

Codes were grouped together under bigger themes, with coded data belonging to more than one initial theme. Eg. the codes identified above were grouped under "Social aspects".

### Reviewing themes

The themes were reviewed. It was evident that some themes were not distinct enough and others were collapsed. E.g., the theme identified above collapsed into a wider topic of "Obligations".

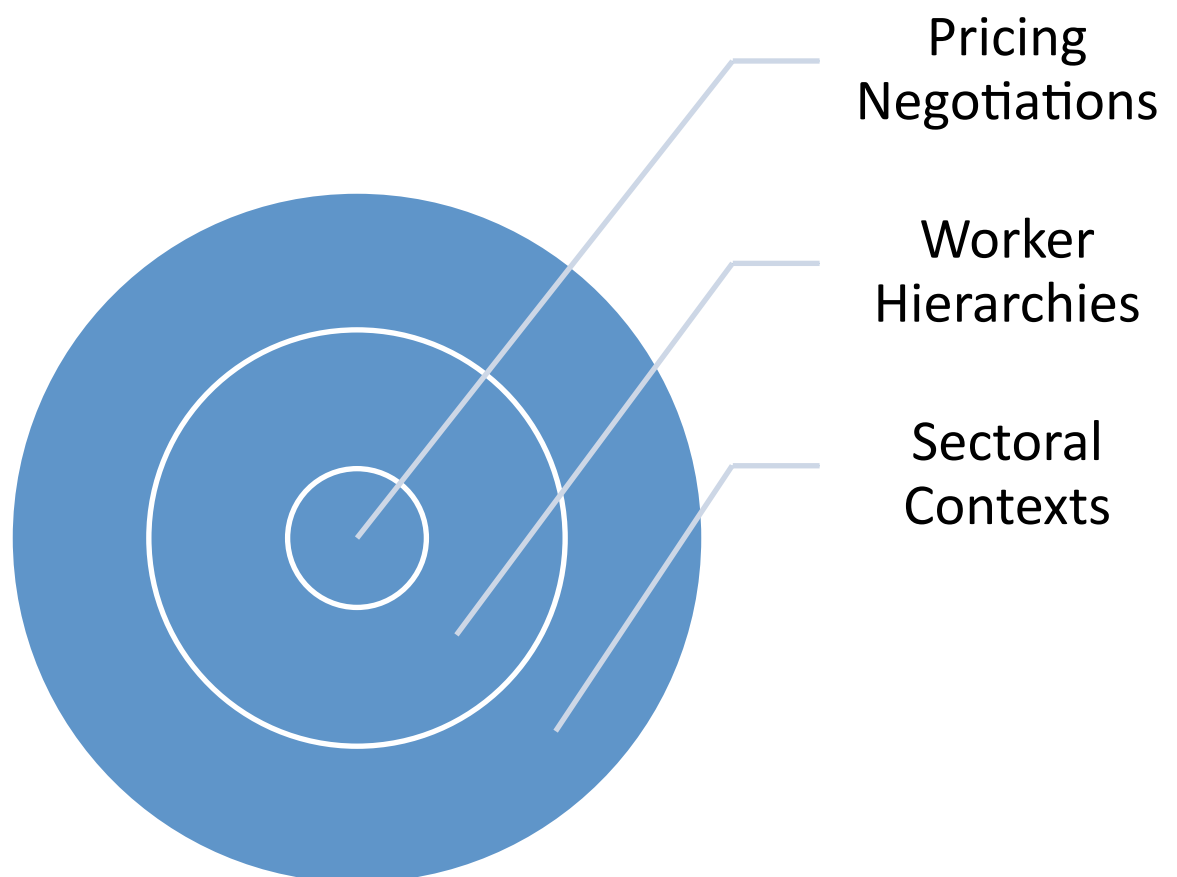
### Defining and naming theme

The three main umbrella themes that emerged were labelled according to what they appeared to represent and how they were distinct from one another. Sub-themes were used to define the parameters of each theme – for instance, the theme identified above was subsumed into the global theme of the "Worker hierarchies" and in an organising sub-theme of "Informal obligations"

### Producing analysis into a report

The findings were presented per theme, illustrating how they were connected to each other and a selection of pertinent examples from the data were employed to illuminate the point. The three global themes were shown to expand outwards from looking at the minutiae of shop experience (pricing structures in the shop) to a wider meso context of worker hierarchical structures, and finally to the extrinsic macro context of how charity shops operate within the third sector through public and private sector ties.

The three global themes found in the research are laid out in Figure 3 below:



*Figure 3. Global Themes*

These global themes form the basis for the following three chapters, and address the research questions that were put forward in Chapter 1. Following extensive reading, familiarisation and reflection upon the data, emergent themes relating to pricing, haggling, value judgments and negotiation became apparent. It also highlighted a

theme around worker roles, volunteering, responsibilities, management, personal agency and extent of hierarchies. Both of these two areas were prominent themes in both sets of observation notes and the interviews with participants from each shop. The notion of sectoral context as a final theme was emergent upon discovery of the extent to which minute charity shop functions relied upon wider societal structures of business and state involvement. The themes form the basis for each of the three constituent results chapters (5,6 and 7), and aim to respond to the research questions listed above.

#### **4.5 Ethical Considerations**

Hammersley & Atkinson (2007, p.209) highlight the importance of truth and 'the production of knowledge' in social research, and how the pursuit of this through ethnomethodological means can sometimes result in ethical dilemmas which challenge not only the usefulness and validity of the data gathered, but sometimes also the safety, reputation and wellbeing of the participants and the researcher themselves. A developed sensitivity to the participants, organisations and knock-on effects of the research is something that must be sustained, as well as ensuring that they have a cogent awareness of their own participation and how this is going to be construed within the subsequent publication. Due to this, the research had to undergo University ethics approval, departmental research committee approval, and was mediated by questions of anonymity, informed consent, data analysis & storage, and the consequences for the future dissemination.

#### **4.5.1 Anonymity & informed consent**

The Economic and Social Research council lay out comprehensive guidelines for ethical conduct in social research, with an emphasis upon consent and willing disclosure, alongside an assurance that participants are fully aware and knowledgeable about the purpose and intent of the research (ESRC, 2010).

However, gathering informed consent for observational work is fraught with difficulties. Initially, the research objective was stated via email to the area manager of the MCR, and she responded that she was happy for the researcher to undertake research in the shop. Likewise, the manager of the IHR was informed verbally during an initial meeting with him during completion of an application form. Volunteers and other staff members were informed verbally of the researcher role, although customers and donors and occasional casual staff were not informed, since this would have required restating the researcher's academic position daily for 6 months. The ESRC guidelines state that "Informed consent may be impracticable or meaningless in some research, such as research on crowd behaviour" (2010, p.29) which is also applicable to public spaces such as shops where many individuals are 'acting publically' at any given time. Since the methodology was unobtrusive and indirect, members of the public were not required to give informed consent, although a form stating that research was taking place was placed on the wall behind the till for the duration of both of studies.

For those individuals who appeared frequently in the research (other charity shop workers and volunteers, for the most part), they were assured from the outset that they would be completely anonymised, and also, crucially, that their shop and the charity itself

would not be revealed throughout the course of the research. As fieldwork is an ongoing process through which the research aims developed and modified over time, it was near impossible to give a specific outline of the objectives of the research and its possible usage from the outset, and continuous and long-term interactions are not easily “reduced to an informed consent form” (Penslar in Silverman, 2010, p.168). As verbal/email consent was achieved at the beginning of the observation work under the assurance that the charity and all participants would be anonymised and confidentiality was explicitly stated, the researcher only pressed for individual reiteration of consent when participants demonstrated concern about appearing ‘in a book’ after saying something controversial or failing to follow the charity line. Due to the sensitivity of some data, certain instances will be described in generalised terms rather than referring to specific participants. This has been done to ensure that, in addition to anonymisation, no chance of identification can be made.

Informed consent forms were distributed to interview participants and they were required to read through information sheets in addition to these before signing. The informed consent form and information sheets were formulated to be free from ‘jargon’ and relatively simple for participants to understand. A copy was retained by the researcher and by the participant. The consent form contained an abbreviated summary of the research project aims and scope, which was described in more detail on the information sheet (See Appendix B).

#### **4.5.2 Data Storage**

The emphasis upon anonymising data from both the observations and the interviews during write up was necessary from

ethical, legal and commercial standpoints (UK Data Archive, 2011, p.26). Ethically, it is important to protect the identity of individuals by removing any direct identifiers (names, for example) and indirect identifiers (such as place of work, specific locations, etc). By not explicating the specific location of the research in terms of city, and not being able to name the charities involved, a little of the contextual depth from the research is compromised. But by stating the type of charity and using 'larger, non-disclosing geographical areas' (*ibid.*), I was able to locate the shops and their participants meaningfully without risking disclosure for those involved.

Therefore, once the data was collected and transcribed, I gave all individuals pseudonyms, and removed the names of both of the charities featured. I also removed the name of the city in question, and the names of local boroughs, as these would have jeopardised the anonymity of the shop locations. Contrary to a suggestion by the UK Data Archive (UK Data Archive, 2011, p.20) I did not retain unedited versions of the data, instead opting to keep a chart of replacements made, and stored these separately from the research data files. The terms IHR and MCR are used throughout to identify the two charities, based upon Parson's typology as described in section 2.4.

Data security was necessary to ensure that the raw data and replacement log were not accessible to anybody other than the researcher. A password-protected file was used for the replaced data, and files were back up in two locations, on two different password-protected hard disks, as well as copied onto online file storage as a backup.



### **4.5.3 Consequences for future dissemination**

Ethics are of key importance to the “consequences, dissemination and publishing of our research” (Coffey, 1999, p.74) in some instances many years after the original study has been conducted. As of 2010, ESRC-funded research data must be offered to the Economic Social Data Service for depositing in the UK Data Archive for future distribution for research or education purposes (UK Data Archive, 2011, pp.3-4). As a result, a clause in all informed consent forms must state that the data may be re-used in future research. As my research was undertaken in 2010 before this change took place, retrospective consent has been obtained. The consent forms given to participants can be found in Appendix B.

In addition to this, the research conducted must not affect opportunities for future research into charities or charity shops. The responsibility here is not only to those studied but for other researchers who may be interested in this field (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.218). These include other research bodies and associations, in particular those who have been set up to support, advise and advocate charity retail (for example the Charity Retail Association). Although not considered a ‘high risk’ area for social research, the charity sector itself relies heavily upon a set of values that may be scrutinised closely by the analysis. These include accountability, democracy and public interest (Goodall, 2000b, p.106). It is pertinent for the researcher to keep this in mind for the sake of further investigation into the potentially fraught commercialising process of charity shops.

## **4.6 Case Study Descriptions: The Shops**

This section aims to summarise the two case study locations chosen, in particular focusing upon the local demographic, the local area, the worker cohort and the shop floor layout, as these are relevant to the types of goods sold, their categorisation, and to the types of people working at the shop. Particular care has been taken to ensure that the charities, the shops and their workers are not identifiable from this information.

### **4.6.1 Geographic & Demographic Information**

The location of the two shops was of much importance, as this would impact upon the type of customer encountered, the volunteer cohort, the managerial structure, as well as the quality or volume of stock. The shops were, as the crow flies, located under five miles apart, within a large city in the North of England. Their respective locations are interesting in themselves: The Multiple Charity Retailer (MCR), the larger of the two, was situated in a busy thoroughfare adjacent to a large railway station, where the area footfall is phenomenally high (one manager estimates it as being near 20,000 people per day), while the Independent Hospice Retailer (IHR) is located on a leafy suburban street, in a low income area, in a stretch of shops which includes a small supermarket, a betting shop, a pound shop and several cafes and take aways. The MCR was often frequented by people browsing on their way to and from the train station, which meant their customer demographic frequently included shoppers who came from other places in the UK, or occasionally internationally. By contrast, the IHR rarely encountered shoppers from further afield than the immediate

local area. The researcher, being from a different area of the city, was considered to have come a long way, despite being a twenty minute drive from where she lived.

Location is particularly key to the diversity and availability of staff appointments, as well as loosely related to the demographic. This is important for contextualising the discussion in Chapter 6 on worker hierarchies and obligations. Despite the relatively small distance between the shops, the impacts of the immediate local surroundings should not be underestimated. The MCR is located at the heart of a large city and can be considered to hold a very prominent location compared to the traditional charity shop which was perceived as high street 'filler', occupying empty spaces where traders have been forced to move out due to costly rates (Parsons, 2002, p.4). However, along with the benefit of high footfall comes the side effect of being city-centre based, which means that fewer people live locally; the shop is near a busy city centre, and nearby buildings are mainly offices, shops, and hotels. Those that do reside nearby are part of an urban renewal site, comprising of students and young professionals. Therefore, the sense of a 'local' community in the shop is lacking, and this is compounded by the stream of non-locals who frequent the shop on their way to or from the transport links next door.

Comparatively, the IHR location is very community-centric, located down the road from two local schools and situated alongside a store where many local people do their shopping. The peripheral location of the IHR means that very few of the shop workers come from anywhere other than the local area – those that do have previously lived nearby but have moved a little further afield, as is the case with long-term volunteers Steve and Rose, and the manager Derreck. A sense of community attachment or a feeling of relative 'belonging' or familiarity (Savage et al., 2005) is reinforced by the regular discussion about local community events and occasions:

*“A woman comes in as Derreck is out the front. She talks to him about a recent funeral for somebody they both know, and how the parade went down the road outside. The chat is very informal.”*

*“Another younger woman comes in with a small girl. She talks animatedly to Derreck about her brother’s wedding that she recently attended.”*

*– IHR Fieldnotes*

The local knowledge and involvement of the paid manager is echoed by the work of many of the volunteers, who are familiar with the local customers and who, in some cases, pride the shop on its community-centric atmosphere:

*“Sister Maria continues to chat to me at lunch “The thing about this shop is, I like to think it’s providing a service. To the community. It helps people, they feel comfortable coming in here, they find it a friendly place. I think that’s really important.””*

*– IHR Fieldnotes*

In the above excerpts, the sense of community familiarity that is described as being threatened by modern life (Savage et al. 2005) is clearly evident: there is a shared local knowledge of people and events, and a sociability among patrons and staff that eschews the relative business-like formality of the MCR.

Although the informal social chatter that takes place is a common element of small suburban shopping locales, the long term shop participants at the IHR do differentiate themselves from their customer base, and distance their own lives from the deprivation seen in the local area:

*"This is a poor area. It's council housing, social housing, a lot of it, whatever you want to call it. Very much is.*

*– Interview with Steve, IHR*

*" [Derreck] "This area, I don't mean it rudely but it is a poor area. A lot of people are on the social. They haven't got a lot of money..." "*

*- IHR Fieldnotes*

Both the sense of 'belonging' in the community, and the relative economic deprivation that were present in the IHR went on to inform much of the data that can be seen in Chapters 6 and 7 on the 'quiet' economy. The assumption taken from Elizabeth Parson's typological study is that independent retailers have "a responsibility to their local community to provide low cost goods" which "usurps their profit-making motive" (Parsons, 2004, p.37). This forms one of several hypotheses that require testing, especially as the charity is also technically a Hospice Retailer, making it the most profitable of the three typologies (*ibid.*).

#### **4.6.2 Volunteers & Workers**

Below is a brief description of the volunteers, paid workers and New Deal Partnership workers encountered in each of the shops. Care has been taken to disguise personal descriptions for the sake of individual and charity anonymity.

##### Multiple Charity Retailer

##### Maria – Manageress

Maria is a lady in her mid 30s, who has worked for the charity for nine and a half years. She started off as a paid till worker in a shop on the outskirts of the city, and graduated up to manager there, working for seven years at the shop in total. She has managed the MCR for only one year, and is about to go on maternity leave by the end of the research project. She is married and lives a twenty minute bus ride away. She is talkative, and quite driven and diligent in her approach to her work.

#### Emily – Assistant Manager

Emily is hired one and a half months into the observation to assist Maria and cover her role as manager while Maria is on a month's annual leave. She is 19, and arrived from a role as a 'merchandise' with a ladies underwear shop. She is sacked from her role with the MCR for a shop floor indiscretion after two and a half months. She is from a small town outside of the city, a forty minute bus ride away. She is an outspoken and confident person, but easily distracted in the shop environment.

#### Helen – Assistant Manager

Helen is an assistant manager from another nearby shop owned by the MCR's charity who is taken on (initially temporarily) to replace Emily. Eventually she becomes a permanent assistant manager at the MCR. She is 20, from the city, and her role with the charity is her first job since leaving school. She is quiet and conscientious about her work.

#### Alex – Temporary Assistant Manager

Alex is another assistant manager from the same shop as Helen who is recruited as a temporary full-time manager to replace Maria while she is on holiday. He is only working at the shop for a month and a half.

#### Arran, Amelia and Dave - New Deal Partnership Workers

Arran is in his mid 30s and has been recruited to work at the MCR by the Job Centre. He speaks limited English, but enough to get by in the shop environment. The three of them work set hours per week and are occasionally called in at short notice. They hold a responsible role within the shop, being trusted with the keys and to do the banking. Dave is contracted to work at a different store in the city, but comes to help out when the MCR is understaffed.

#### Pam and Laura – Gift in Kind Office Workers

Both Pam and Laura work upstairs in the Gift in Kind office, maintaining spreadsheets, contacting local corporate donors and occasionally making trips themselves to pick up donations. They play a big role in the social life of the shop as they are in every day, but they very rarely spend time on the shop floor. Pam is in her 50s, Laura is early 20s. Both live in the city suburbs

#### Mike – Gift in Kind Manager

Mike is also in the office upstairs, and is only occasionally found on the shop floor when he is discussing GIK promotions etc. with Maria. He has come from a background as an account manager for a wholesaler, selling music paraphernalia to a large entertainment chain. He is in his late 30s and lives in the city with his young family.

#### Alan - Volunteer

Alan is 67 and originally from Scotland. He is an ex Army serviceman and lives alone in a suburb of the city. He suffers with ill health and therefore only works one shift a week.

### Independent Hospice Retailer

#### Derreck – Manager

Derreck is in his late 60s, and lives 5 minutes drive from the charity shop. He was running his own business as a milkman for 32 years before he became shop manager. He has worked at the IHR for 9 and a half years, and is intending to retire the following July after the study when his wife retires from her finance role with the charity. He

#### Juliet – Volunteer and Temporary Relief Manager

Juliet is originally from Ireland. She is in her late 40s and takes on the responsibility of managing the shop (unpaid) whenever Derreck is away. Along with all the other volunteers, she lives within walking distance of the charity shop.

#### Agatha – Volunteer

Agatha is retired and in her mid 60s. She volunteers at the IHR because her granddaughter was diagnosed with a brain tumour and it was thought for a while that she would have to go into the hospice. The experience affected her and she began volunteering for the hospice soon after because, she says, *“some others aren’t as lucky.”* She works exclusively on the shop till.

#### Rose - Volunteer

Rose is in her late 70s and only ever works in the back of the shop. Juliet states that she “is good but she doesn’t do sorting. She’s an ironer.” She suffers with ill-health but is extremely stoic and insists on staying to help even when she is feeling unwell. Halfway through the observation she has a fall and is not in the IHR for a while afterwards.



Steve – Volunteer

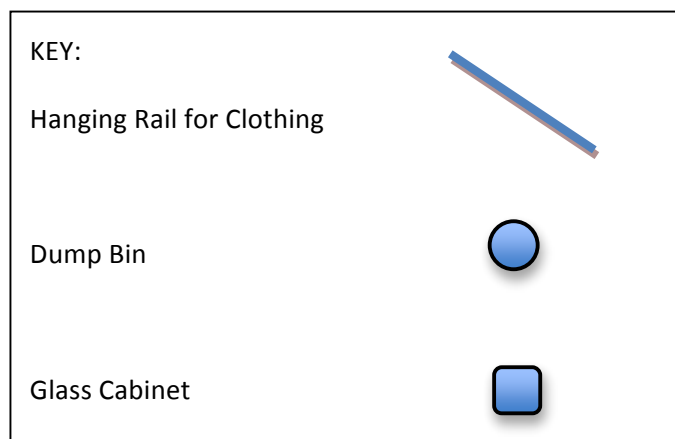
Steve is 68. He initially volunteered at the Hospice itself, helping out in the kitchens, and graduated on to being a member of the volunteer care team, the fundraising team and eventually became a delivery driver transporting donations before volunteering at the shop. In all he has volunteered with the IHR for fifteen years. He lives in what he describes as “leafy suburbs”, a six minute drive from the shop.

Tamsin, Elaine, Sister Maria, Sarah, Hilda, Diane – Volunteers

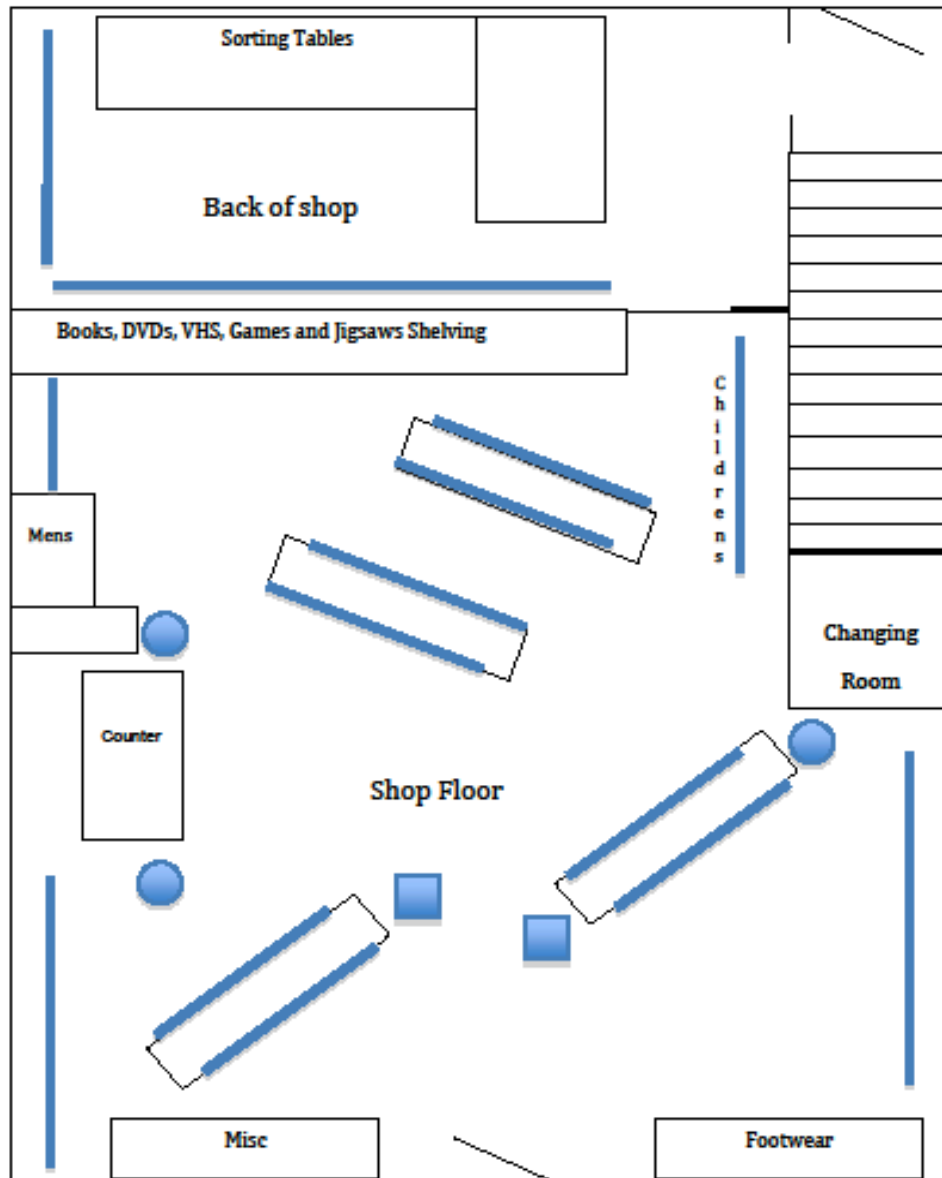
All local volunteers who are 40+, with the exception of Sarah who is 31. They live within walking distance of the shop. Sister Maria is a member of the convent that initially set up and ran the hospice.

**4.6.3 Shop Layouts**

The two shop layouts can be seen below. These are helpful for understanding how goods were spatially distributed in the charity shop, and where different workers would be often put to work. Also key are the differences between the shops, in terms of the amount of display rails for clothing, and the differing means of display available to them.



Multiple Charity Retailer



*Figure 4. Multiple Charity Retailer Shop Floor Layout*

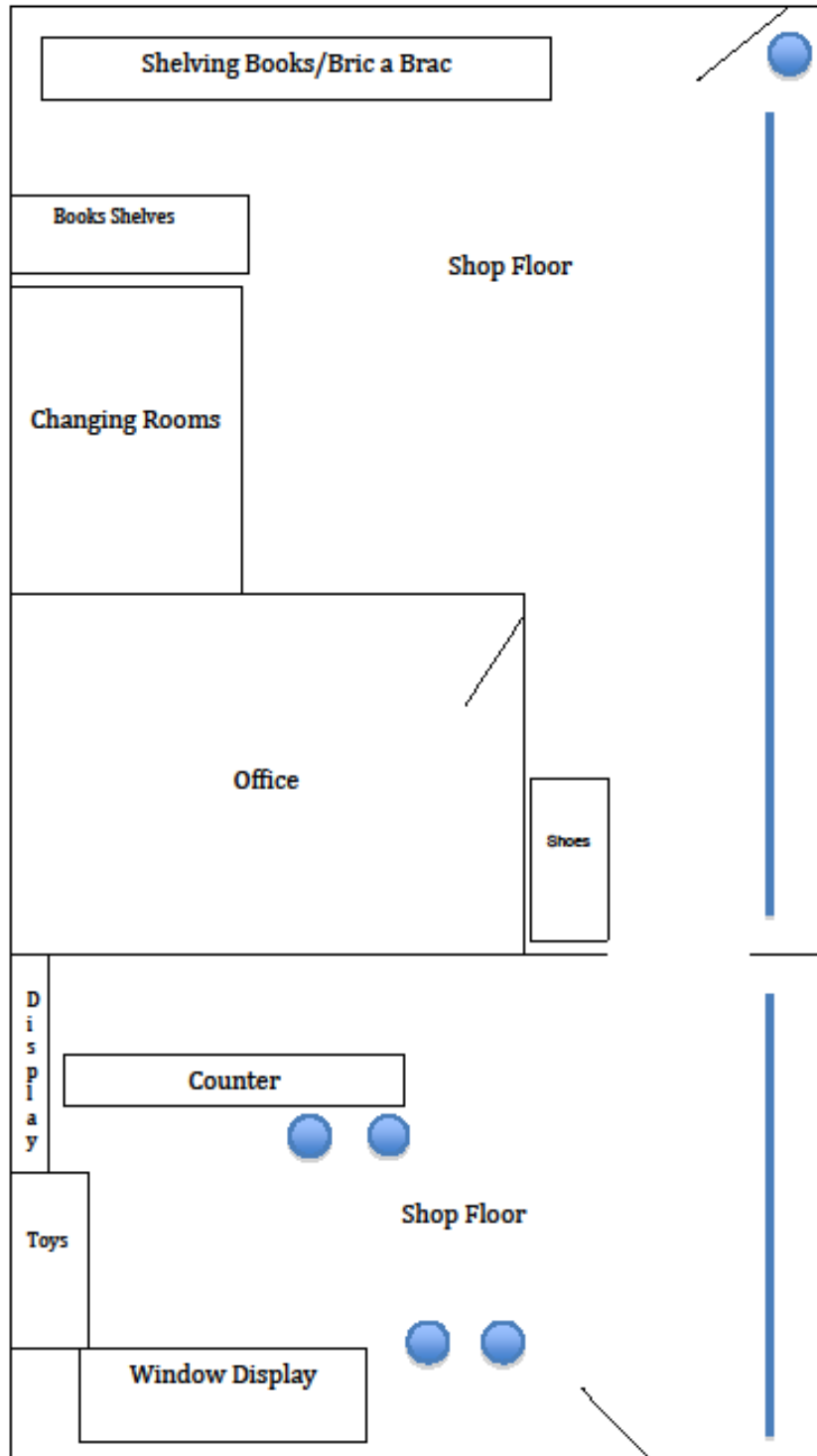
The MCR is smaller than the IHR in terms of square footage. It has an organised back room for sorting, steaming and tagging, which has two tiers of 'hanging rails' (for clothing) and counters free of clutter to work on. To the right of the back room is the entrance to the stairs, which head up to the Gift in Kind Office, the recreation room, the kitchen, toilet and some additional storage rooms. The back door is opposite these stairs, where deliveries arrive from the sorting depot.

Clothing makes up the largest proportion of the goods for sale. A dedicated men's section is in the top left hand corner of the shop floor, including clothing, accessories and 'mens interest' items such as sports equipment and aftershave. In the top right are railings full of childrens clothing. Aside from this, all railings in the store stock exclusively female clothing.

In the window are two sets of square 'box' shelving in which individual items are displayed. These are changed regularly, and can contain handbags, purses, scarves, shoes or anything else small that will create an attractive display.

There are two glass cabinets in the shop for more expensive items, these are locked with a key kept behind the counter. There are also several 'dump bins' that tend to be full of Gift in Kind items (usually a collection of identical items donated en masse by a company).

Independent Hospice Retailer



*Figure 5. Independent Hospice Retailer Shop Floor Layout*

The IHR shop floor is split into two rooms, making effective surveillance in the back of the shop difficult. The front of the shop is a slightly smaller room than the back, which also houses the changing room. Between these two rooms is an office which is rarely used due to having a leaky ceiling, and only ever accessed by Derreck, the manager.

The railings at the front of the shop are two-tiered – the clothes closest to the entrance are childrenswear, along from that is womenswear, through the archway to where shoes are is underwear and nightwear, then dresses and coats. Lastly, towards the back of the clothes rails, are menswear. Unlike the MCR, the shop space is dominated by toys rather than women's clothing. The front of the shop floor has a bookcase full of toys, several small racks of cuddly toys and often large items such as kids bikes or playmats will be on the floor behind the window display. There are several dump bins situated around the shop – the ones in the front part of the shop by the window display contain toys and childrens accessories. Those nearer to the till area contain other accessories for adults such as scarves, hats and belts. A hatstand is next to the counter, which holds mens ties and ladies necklaces.

Bric-a-brac is displayed throughout the shop on shelving, with no consistent organisation. Larger items (such as suitcases, mirrors, or small furniture items) are stowed beneath the clothing rails on the floor, often disguising them from the shopper unless they know where to look. Extremely large items (such as prams, pushchairs or tents) will sometimes be left in the centre of the floor in the back of the shop. At the very back (top left of the diagram) books are displayed, with softbacks (20p each) on the smaller bookshelf and hardbacks (50p) or childrens books (10p) on the larger back shelf.

Through the door shown in the top right of the diagram is the stockroom/sorting room, which is a large open space with shelves

around the outside, all of which are full to bursting with a random assortment of items. There is very little coherent organisation in the stockroom – the only things that ever change are the contents of the sorting bins (which are labelled according to what they contain: women’s trousers, men’s shorts, children’s shoes and so on) and a rail which normally has a selection of items that have just been ironed. In a small extension next to the stockroom is a tiny kitchen, washroom and toilet.

#### **4.7 Summary**

In summary, the sections of this chapter have given a detailed account of the means of inquiry adopted and utilised in this study, starting with their grounding in methodological interpretivism. To add context, an excerpt from the researcher’s point of view was given as to why charity shops were of particular interest to her. The research strategy was dissected and the reasoning behind the choice of method was explained and examples as to why others were inappropriate elucidated. Issues surrounding access and process development were explored alongside the practicalities of data collection in both the observation fieldwork and the interviews. Thematic analysis using the computer package Atlas.TI was also described and the process of thematic development was charted using an analysis structure provided by Braun & Clarke (2006). Ethical considerations and potential consequences were highlighted. Section 4.6 gave a brief but detailed description of each of the case studies, to offer some illustrative context to the following analysis. The rich character of the two shops has been stressed intentionally, as this is fundamental to the unorthodox nature of the sector, and why the charity shop is of interest sociologically.

The three umbrella themes evidenced within the final data analysis will be addressed in the following chapters: Pricing negotiations (Chapter 5); worker hierarchies (Chapter 6); and the intersectoral links with public and private organisations (Chapter 7). The argument as to why these are pertinent to changes in contemporary charity shops will be built upon through these chapters using the data gathered, and then finalised in relation to additional literature in the discussion in Chapter 8.

## CHAPTER 5

### Pricing Decisions and Haggling Behaviours:

#### The 'Quiet Value Economy'

This chapter is concerned with how the difficulties inherent in pricing goods in the charity shop have been further affected by the increasingly commercialised measures they employ. Tensions brew when the public perception of a traditional charity shop (somewhere that sells second hand goods at low and often flexible prices) clashes with a set pricing strategy that aims to categorize and systematize the pricing of items. These tensions are then experienced by all participants in the charity shop, from volunteers and paid staff to customers; they then require a process of price negotiation between participants in order to resolve them. Since price is the only marketing variable that generates income (Monroe, 1979) and charities are operating with an increasing emphasis upon economic value (Morris, 2009), the funds earned for the cause, and thus to the continued existence of the charity shop, are both dependent upon the outcome of these pricing negotiations. This chapter seeks to distinguish charity shops as an indicative case study of how charity professionalisation is being played out at a base level, as an anomalous shopping space within the concept of a 'marginalised' (Gregson et al., 2002, p.1663) or 'alternative' shopping space (Crewe et al., 2003) through the exploration of examples of pricing negotiations that came about during the participant observation in the Multiple Charity Retailer and the Independent Hospice Retailer.

The aim of the chapter is to highlight how the wider confusion amongst paid workers, volunteers and customers in the charity shop about how a charity shop operates and conflicting ideologies around



this result in unique interactions, exemplified by pricing decisions and haggling behaviour in the shop space. The chapter will also infer the wider implications these have for the implied professionalisation<sup>5</sup> of the contemporary charity shop, and the adapting nature of charity in general in a cutthroat economic climate. In section 5.1 below, the term *quiet value economy* will also be clearly defined as an essential characteristic of charity shop operations.

Traditionally, charity shop pricing was akin to the pricing methods used in other second-hand spaces in that it was relatively devoid of rationality (Gregson & Crewe, 1997a, p.246). It would have mirrored the ad-hoc variability of pricing that typically takes place at car boot sales or second-hand markets. Pricing stickers would be hand written and would round the prices up to the nearest pound, rather than marking goods at £1.99 or £2.99. This style of 'just-below' pricing has been shown by consumer research to be extremely prominent in increasing sales in first hand shopping experiences (Schindler & Kibarian, 1996) but would have had implications when adding up totals for sale, and required a large number of spare pennies and change on hand.

In the traditional incarnation of the charity shop described by Gregson, Brooks, & Crewe (2000) and Chattoe (2006), prices were set at store level by a manager or volunteer, who exercised a large degree of jurisdiction over what an item is worth using their knowledge and past experience (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, pp. 108, 113). It could also be a collective, collaborative appraisal of the item from several workers. Any systematic rules used for pricing would be employed on an improvisatory basis and were subject to change dependent upon

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<sup>5</sup> The terms 'professionalisation', and 'commercialisation', in this thesis refer to the way that charity shops are increasingly operating like private sector businesses, under the restrictions of bureaucracy and rationalisation in order to encourage efficiency, accountability and ultimately, profitability.

negotiations between customer and worker. In essence, all charity shop participants operated under the assumption that pricing was unfixed, unlike a standard first-hand shop, and that the goods would be sold for considerably less than is expected in these stores (Chattoe 2006: 154).

Contemporary charity shops have been seen to challenge this view (Horne & Maddrell, 2002). Situated in an economic market that is depressed and in crisis, they along with other businesses are attempting to adapt. The development of charity shops from the 1980s onwards has been exponential, with increasingly bureaucratic and administrative regulations being imposed on how they operate. In particular, a structured approach to the pricing of goods has been introduced to help with stock regulation, monitoring of profits and to ease the burden of pricing for staff. A regimented (yet still flexible) set of prices will be allocated to item categories, for example, 'ladies trousers', 'bric-a-brac' or 'childrenswear'. These set pricing boundaries then restrict how much or how little can be charged for an item within the category. Horne & Maddrell describe this process as 'price-lining' (2002, p. 108). In the last ten or so years, this has been standard practice in most British charity shops, with some employing more flexible price structures than others (*ibid.*).

The two charity shops in this study were no exception. They both used set price ranges for goods that permitted a degree of flexibility to allow for the second hand nature of the item. In effect, they were used as 'guidance' rather than a strict pricing measure. The Multiple Charity Retailer (MCR) for instance, would habitually price dresses at £6.99 or above. If the quality was poor, the price may occasionally drop to £5.99 or even £4.99 (although very poor quality, stained or ripped clothing would often be recycled instead). Often designer or branded dresses, those that were new with tags, or those made from a high quality material (such as silk or brocade) would be

priced far in excess of the £6.99 price mark. The pricing limitations, therefore, did not apply to items that were *upwards* of the Average Unit Price (or AUP)<sup>6</sup> for each type of item. Conversely, in the Independent Hospice Retailer (IHR), the AUP could not be exceeded because their customer demographic simply wouldn't buy it if it was over a certain price. Therefore, the restrictions did not apply *downwards* of the AUP. This is illustrated by the following incident involving back-room volunteer Rose, described in the IHR observation fieldnotes:

*"Rose is ironing some shirts. She finishes one and holds it up for me to see  
"Look. Yves Saint Laurent. And it's in perfect condition."*

*I tell her "That would be worth a fortune. How much you selling it for?"  
She goes over to a price list that's stuck to the wall and says "£2.50 is the  
standard price for men's shirts. So it would be that." I ask if they take into  
account brands or condition. "No" says Rose. "Well, if it's a bit tatty it  
would be cheaper than £2.50. But it won't be more just because it's  
branded."*

*- IHR Fieldnotes*

The pricing list in the IHR is a simple list of clothing items and their AUPs, written in biro and tacked to a back room wall. It was not shown to the researcher when they began work as a volunteer; it doesn't include bric-a-brac or other items as it is only limited to clothing; and it is buried amidst other wall decorations and notices. It could therefore be argued that this does not represent a professionalised pricing structure, since its implementation was limited only to staff who already worked there a significant amount of time and who would be presumed to possess a degree of average price

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<sup>6</sup> AUP refers to the average price per type of item sold, which can be used to "calculate meaningful average selling prices within a product line that includes items of different sizes." ; . This term was often used by the GIK manager at the MCR, but rarely used by volunteers and shop floor workers.

knowledge. However, the excerpt above indicates that at least one charity shop volunteer is aware that more money could be gleaned from the goods they are receiving; yet the pricing structure (a bureaucratic construction) restricts this, preventing the optimum value being achieved.

Conversely, in the MCR the price lining actively encourages the manager to up the AUP, as is stated below in an interview with the charity's Gift in Kind Account Manager, Mike. (Gifts in Kind are goods donated en masse from first-sector companies. The issues surrounding them will be discussed further in Chapter 7):

*"Our job is to... we talk about AUP, Average Unit Price, a lot, and we're always trying to increase that. [Our shop] has got an AUP of about £4.10 on GIK stuff, which is above the national average."*

*- Interview with Mike, MCR*

The allocation of AUPs doesn't only apply to Gift in Kind items, but also to every item in store: a calculated approximate value that the shop workers should aim towards securing. As a volunteer, it was sometimes difficult to gauge what this was, other than keeping an eye on the prices of things that went through the till. Pricing in both charity shops was done predominantly by managers and paid staff or when they are not present, an 'informed' or senior volunteer. Although the researcher (as a volunteer) was permitted on occasion to label up and price goods, this was generally done under the watchful eye of paid staff. There was no formal training on pricing procedures for volunteers in either shop. In itself, this created tensions that impeded the reliability of the 'simplified mechanism' of price structuring (Powell, 2012, p. 35) and added to the difficulties thrown up by

differing pricing 'knowledges'. This term, evidenced in the behaviour of shop workers in both shops, requires brief clarification

### 5.1 Pricing Knowledges

Price 'knowledges', as the term is used in this chapter, refers to the understanding of how value is decided and allocated in a particular shop, dependent on the insider knowledge of value the price-allocator has build up. Sociological theories of value allocation are made more complex by the unique characteristics of charity shop; supply and demand being largely unpredictable in quantity, quality and regularity. These knowledges are integral in the charity shop for what Chattoe (2006, p. 155) describes as 'non-substitute' (or one-off) items: first editions of books, rare records or designer clothing, for example. It is crucial that these are recognised and priced accordingly, for the shops to fulfil their fundraising potential. Harnessing potential value in any item is dependent on the price-allocator's awareness of its worth – therefore the actors who take on this role in the shop space play a very integral role.

Managers allocated their prices dependent upon many factors. A lot of their experience of this comes over time, through a learned process of seeing what sells for what price. In the case of Gift in Kind items (goods donated by private companies en masse), a separate team had required targets to meet, which meant that prices were strategically raised to ensure these were achieved. Sometimes, newer items have the price tags on which seems to make the process easier:

*"Some of the bags were originally £49.99, Maria has priced them at £24.98. The general rule she works by is that the charity shop sells items at half their original retail price."*

- MCR Fieldnotes

This precedent of halving the RRP only applied to the MCR where, as previously mentioned, a top limit on pricing was not observed to exist. This was not observed in the IHR, where the pricing structure was more restrictive and higher prices than the price lines were generally not charged.

In instances where the original price tags are on an item, pricing knowledge is concrete. In instances where the price is a little less apparent, managerial pricing is intuitively based on assumptions about known brand pricing, popularity or the general condition of an item. Increasingly in the MCR, Internet search engines are used to gauge the approximate value of an item, and as a justification by shop workers for the higher prices:

*“Maria asks me to look on Google when I’m at home to see if we’ve overpriced [the item]”*

*“Maria tells me Mike [the Gift in Kind Manager] is looking up the RRP for it”.<sup>7</sup>*

- MCR Fieldnotes

The contemporary charity shop, therefore, utilizes many tools, including technologies, in deciding pricing allocation. Maria’s tendency towards consultation when pricing items (by asking for a second opinion, looking up the prices for similar items online, researching brands on smart phones and so on) indicates that the pricing process is

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<sup>7</sup>In one instance at the MCR, a brand new Armani watch is put into the cabinet alongside a print out of the watch’s specification and current selling price (£250) on a jeweller’s website. This is then used to back up and reassert the ‘value assumptions’ that are embodied in the item’s price (in this case, it was being sold at the MCR for £199.98 – a saving of £50)

flexible, and often collaborative, involving shop workers, volunteers, the charity's set pricing structure, and wider value indicators (RRPs). In the case of the charity shop, the customer also has an input. This is significant because they are perceived commonly in charity shop literature as the lucky recipients of the spoils generated by poor value knowledge – they capitalise on the bargains for which charity shops are renowned, and with which the charity shop experience is intrinsically linked (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 101). However, the role they play in pricing knowledges and allocation is a key component of uniqueness of the charity shop, as this chapter will go on to describe, and speaks to the rhetoric of community involvement and reciprocity so prevalent in charity theory.

The sources which form a composite approximation of value and subsequent price decisions are summarised in the diagram below:



*Figure 6. Pricing Decision Influences*

The effects of these decisions were regular conflicting evaluations. Value is unpredictable and fluid, similar to other second-hand markets like the car boot sale (Gregson & Crewe, 1997a, p. 249). This is an example of 'imperfect market formation' (Thomson, 1979, p. 26) that is influenced by the acceptance of individual, often eccentric, evaluations from those in power.

Pricing discrepancies stemming from disputes over price knowledges were common in both charity shops. The fragmented logic behind what the charity shop was striving towards (profits, and/or helping the community) was acted out in the pricing negotiations and disputes that were observed with a certain degree of frequency on the shop floor. A lack of coherent pricing guidelines for non-paid staff meant that sometimes volunteers would adopt a casual, ad-hoc attitude to price restrictions whenever it was required of them to set prices – for instance, if the manageress was busy, absent or delegated the responsibility. The general feeling of uncertainty that existed towards pricing was exacerbated by the flouting of preliminary pricing rules, for example, the claim that shop workers 'do not haggle' – when in actual fact, this was a familiar occurrence. Gregson and Crewe (Gregson & Crewe, 1997a, pp. 248-250) highlight the crucial 'performance' of pricing knowledge in carboot sale transactions, where the attempts to 'outmanoeuvre' less-knowledgeable workers can involve active manipulation, either through disguising knowledge that the RRP is higher, or claiming to have bought it cheaper elsewhere. Equally, the researcher experienced shop staff maintaining claims of authenticity and justifying the set prices in spite of not knowing or having evidence to support them. The act of 'performing' price knowledge therefore played an integral role in the professionalising process, whilst still giving an opportunity for subversion and resulting in 'highly variable' pricing mechanisms (Gregson & Crewe, 1997a, p. 248).



It is these diversions from pricelines and bureaucratic rules that highlight the contentious nature of contemporary charity shop 'professionalisation', and speak of the wider implications these changes hold for the less visible benefactors of charity: the poorer customers, the local community, the tireless volunteer cohort and the cause it is aiming to help.

The way these pricing knowledges are performed and negotiations carried out: often subtly, sometimes covertly; suggests that charity shops are increasingly developing a *quiet value economy* alongside the accountable and visible charity fundraising that top-down professionalised systems are working to implement.

The *quiet value economy* is the first of three 'quiet', implicit operations that make up the charity shop *quiet economy* that will be detailed here and in the following two chapters. The term is in part inspired by Gregson & Crewe's use of the term 'alternative economies' (2003, p. 106) to describe what goes on in anti-capitalist, resistance shopping spaces (see Healy [2008] for a critique of the term: also Goodman & Bryant [2013]). It also was selected because of Toffler's (1981) discussion of an 'invisible' economy of prosumption, as described in Section 3.1.6.

In the context of this chapter, the term represents specifically how bureaucratisation of charity shops through structured pricing is tempered by the irregularities and 'messiness' inherent in the charity shop. This can be due to the unpredictability of stock, the autonomy and authority of staff, and the perceptions held by customers. The transactions that take place in-store frequently subvert the set pricelines, through subtle pricing negotiations that *operate covertly* and are unique to second-hand shopping locales. Weber's concept of the 'irrationality of rationality', in relation to the failings of bureaucracy is demonstrated by the unpredictability and fallibility of imposing pricing

structures with non-contracted employees such as volunteers. An economy of quietly negotiated pricing between customers and workers develops alongside the explicit, structured pricelines of the parent charity, through haggling, arbitration of wear and tear and various other subtle techniques. It is this quiet value economy that will be demonstrated through the examples of pricing negotiations that follow.

This chapter will conceptualise the different transactional exchanges into the categories shown in Figure 7, which features a selection of distinct discourses that were played out amongst charity shop participants when issues of pricing came to the fore.

	<b>WORKER- INITIATED</b>	<b>CUSTOMER- INITIATED</b>
	‘REGULAR’ FAVOURS	SEEKING REPRIEVE
<b>SOCIALLY-ORIENTATED</b>	&	<i>(“I ONLY HAVE £10 ON ME”)</i>
	VOLUNTEER DISCOUNTS	
	UPSELLING	HAGGLING UP
<b>PROFIT-ORIENTATED</b>	<i>(“YOU CAN HAVE THE LOT FOR £20”)</i>	<i>(“IT’S WORTH AT LEAST £5!”)</i>

*Figure 7. Value Negotiation and Wear & Tear Arbitration*

Figure 7 highlights the different categories of pricing negotiations that take place at the point of contact between the buyer of a product, and the person selling it within the charity shop space. The ‘seller’, can be a paid employee, or a long-standing/knowledgeable

volunteer – the only requirement is that they are defending a certain level of pricing knowledge, which is demonstrated by the good's price tag.

There are two predominant outcomes of a CUSTOMER INITIATED pricing dispute, and again two outcomes from a WORKER INITIATED pricing dispute. Both outcomes are dependent upon whether the individual is oriented towards earning as much for the charity as possible (PROFIT ORIENTATED) or towards doing and receiving favours in a charitable manner (SOCIALLY ORIENTATED). These orientations depend more upon the outcome of the exchange rather than the intentions, inclinations or motivations of the individuals involved. These four contingencies form the process of negotiations of value within which both parties (customer and worker) become embroiled in the price-allocation process. The acquiescence to superior pricing knowledge by either party plays a significant role in tempering the increasing commercialisation of processes that is separating the contemporary charity shop from its predecessors. And crucially, it takes place *quietly*; that is, non-overtly within the shop space. These negotiations may be acknowledged by the parent charity but not endorsed or formalised. Whilst superficially, the imposed structures of pricing and worker responsibilities in contemporary charity shops imitate operations in the private sector, the quiet value economy (in particular, as will be discussed, the act of 'haggling up') is unique to the contemporary charity shop. It indicates a disjuncture from the price negotiations that go on in pure-profit orientated markets and from the concept of bartering in general. This is because the addition of charity (a 'social orientation') into the equation results in a challenge to pricing that can at times *augment* the item cost, rather than discounting it. It is through this process that an internal 'quiet value economy' develops that is independent from the rational, standardised external economy the parent charity itself is a part of.

## **5.2 Worker Initiated Price Negotiation**

### **5.2.1 Favours for Regulars and Volunteer Discounts**

Categorising an act as a 'favour', especially alongside connotations of 'kindness' or 'selflessness', can hugely problematic when attempting to build up a picture of a shop environment. 'Favours' are essentially a foundation to informal exchange: they offer a form of a concession, but are often reciprocated in a way that works out to some degree beneficial to both parties – they are reminiscent of Mauss' (1970) concept of gift exchange in that they are dependent upon a reciprocal relationship. There has been much work on the concept of the 'favour' in relation to the point at which a paid favour becomes a form of employment (Williams & Round, 2008) (Thomas, 1992) and how to clarify what is distinct about a 'favour' compared to a 'perk of the job'. Favours differ from upselling (the other category of worker-initiated value negotiation) in the sense that they are not explicitly profit-motivated, and by definition they infer that one party 'helps out' another in some sense. For this reason they are observed to be (and labelled as) 'SOCIALLY ORIENTATED'.

Favours in the context of the charity shop are dependent upon a hierarchical structure that permits an almost maternal role for managers as 'carer' or even 'nurturer' of their junior staff (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007, p. 557), or the shop itself operating as an outreach to benefit their local community. However, to state that the two observed examples found through this research - favours for regulars and volunteer discounts are wholly the result of benevolence and kindness would be naïve and reductive. There are many other imperatives operating, including compensation for unpaid work. In

some instances, a volunteer will have worked in the shop for so long that they are able to make ad-hoc pricing decisions based on their own personal knowledge of customer circumstances. The excerpt below from IHR volunteer Steve illustrates this:

*“There are a certain type of woman who tend to ask, you know: “It’s £3.” “[will you take] £2?” \*laughs\* “Noooo. It’s £3!” But occasionally there are the regular customers who come in, and you know they are tight [short of money] and they’ve got three or four kids and... circumstances. So I go “Oh, alright, make it... so and so.” Without making a big fuss about it.”*

*- Interview with Steve, IHR*

Steve has the jurisdiction<sup>8</sup> to offer money off when he has knowledge of an individual’s circumstances; if he knows things are ‘tight’ he will take that into account. By letting them off a couple of pounds, Steve is considering the residual benefit that the customer will receive, as opposed to the monetary benefit for the charity. Kindness, and the enjoyment of the participating in the philanthropic experience are not the only things at play here, as Steve is taking an active role within his community that is dependent upon his local knowledge. By volunteering for the nearby children’s hospice shop, and acknowledging the struggles of local people, the social impact is doubled and can be perceived as reciprocal: they receive the discount, and Steve receives the altruistic pleasure. Steve enjoys the empathetic ‘warm glow’ (Andreoni, 1990) of aiding his community and improving the well-being of those in it; the community enjoy good value products, and the charity enjoys the profits, which again contribute indirectly to the wellbeing in the local community. Thus the cyclical process is reinforced and the relations between the participants and the charity become symbiotic. It can be argued that these form of pricing

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<sup>8</sup> The reasons why Steve, as a long term volunteer, has more jurisdiction than other, newer volunteers will be explored in Chapter 6.

negotiations prevent professionalisation from overtaking charity processes, rendering the shops as significantly estranged from the commercial principles of first-hand shops.

This is, however, dependent upon context, as the use of the two case studies came to demonstrate. Charity shop symbiosis operates relatively efficiently in a community-centric charity shop such as the IHR. There, the shop is situated in the heart of the locality, on a popular local high street, in a low-income area that is proximate to the hospice it supports. There is a school nearby, and many customers, volunteers and local shop workers know one another. School teachers pop in on their lunch break to chat and browse. The lady who runs the book-keepers next door regularly buys her daughters little gifts from the shop. The supermarket next door often trades change with the charity shop if either party needs to break a note. There is a shared sense of affinity, a knowledge of local affairs and a parochial mentality that transcends the fact that the shop is located in the suburb of a very large Northern city. As a result, community involvement underlies many of the complexities that are exhibited when attempts are made at running the shop in any kind of professionalised sense. Cohesion seems to hamper attempts to standardise pricing – simply because the volunteers prefer to help people out. Steve describes his allocation of discounts as *'circumstantial'* and *'not something I'm doing every day for everybody'*. Thus his decision making process for discounting is contextually dependent, but the issue of profits for the parent charity OR the competitive status of his shop is not always his primary agenda.

Whilst the basis of this form of price negotiation is informal, familial and linked to altruistic tendencies, it also has another characteristic that sets it apart from the other forms of price negotiation described here. It is frequently a subtle and discreet act. It is not openly asked for, instead it is initiated by the worker and given with a degree of silent understanding, something is acknowledged by

workers in the shop as being somehow a little bit underhand and 'against the rules':

*"Some customers come in, a lady with two slightly older ladies. They appear to have learning difficulties, talk very loudly and have to be given 'permission' to buy things from the other lady with them [...] one brings over a handbag. She says "how much?" and I tell her the price, £2.50. She gives me 20p from her purse and looks at me. I tell her "Sorry, that isn't enough." She opens the purse and I help her by digging out her change. It only comes to £2.30. Feeling a bit naughty, I tell her "That's fine." and she takes the bag away. Later, I 'donate' 20p to the till myself."*

*- IHR Fieldnotes*

The above example, whilst illustrating the discrepancies caused by pricing flexibility and awareness of customer circumstances in the charity shop, also encapsulates the burden upon the volunteer as the representative and custodian of bureaucratic pricing structures. The researcher felt compelled to help out the customer, but to do so 'on the quiet', and at her own (albeit minimal) cost. The act took place external to the authorised pricing structure, which the researcher then felt obliged to adhere to by contributing the additional money herself. The awkward juxtaposition between profit-centric structures and acts of sympathetic kindness is therefore bridged by the act of sticking to the 'rules', justifying and modifying them contextually and in a relatively covert manner. This 'quiet value economy' is arbitrated by volunteers and customers who operate co-dependently, ensuring a balance of profitability and philanthropy.

This also applies to exchanges between volunteers and discounts for those who work in the shop. Volunteers at the IHR have more unspoken price jurisdiction than at the MCR for several reasons. There is a single manager and no seniority above him to answer to; also it is symptomatic of being an independent hospice shop with no

need to standardise prices across different locations; and equally, to some degree the workers are almost all volunteers – therefore they are not as formally obligated or restricted as they are in the MCR by the boundaries of their role. They are therefore able to operate a ‘quiet value economy’ due to having a more legitimate authoritative voice in the workplace (Fox, 1971, p. 35). As Steve states, in relation to offering discretionary discounts:

*“[...] I’ve been here so long, and he [Derreck, the manager] gets enough out of me, so he’s probably not going to challenge me on that!”*

The opportunity and permission to offer socially-orientated discounts does depend greatly upon the perceived role of the volunteer within the shop hierarchy<sup>9</sup>. But volunteer to volunteer/worker to volunteer discounting behaviour also paints a picture of how offering ‘favours’ and having a social orientation in the charity shop is countered by profit-orientated motivations.

The researcher is herself an avid charity shopper who often has an eye out for a bargain. However, the idea of haggling in a charity shop is one that she is strongly against and therefore generally avoided. The reasons for this response in itself are not straightforward and speak to debates about the patriarchal discourses inherent in our notion of charity<sup>10</sup>, but when adopting a role as a volunteer-as-participant-observer the territory of discounting becomes even more treacherous.

The fieldnotes gathered from both shops show more than one instance of the researcher’s reflexive discomfort at receiving a ‘volunteer discount’ from other shop workers. The difficulty was more keenly felt by the researcher in the IHR than the MCR, where the concern was that the researcher was taking money from the charity

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<sup>9</sup> Paid and unpaid worker hierarchies within the shop will be discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 3



and that the prices were low enough already. Yet also there was a methodological sticking point around the issue of the researcher not being a volunteer for the same reason as the other volunteers. As with the contentions discussed in chapter 4 about 'going native' (Burgess, 1984) , there was a sense that volunteers received 'discounts' or favours from the shop as a more tangible reward (or 'reciprocal gift') for their otherwise unpaid work and devotion to the cause, therefore a researcher does not fit comfortably within this category.

Volunteer discounts differ to some degree from the socially-orientated favours offered to regular customers. At the MCR, the till included a 'staff discount' button, which was not supposed to be used for volunteers according to manageress Maria - although the assistant managers Helen and Emily and New Deal Partnership workers would frequently put volunteer purchases through as staff discounts. The staff discount was set at 10% across all stores in the chain. The fact that this is provided and systematically recorded through the tills is another indicator of how the charity has mimicked commercial outlets and their standard staff discount as an incentive to workers – yet volunteers were not counted as staff in this circumstance. In itself, this professionalised procedure indicates a subtle hierarchical demarcation, which will be explored further in Chapter 6.

Nevertheless, often Maria would speculatively offer discounts when the researcher was considering buying items, to try and encourage a sale. In the following extract, the researcher is debating whether or not to buy a coat:

*"When I try the coat on, Maria says "Actually it suits you on. It looks better." She offers me a discount if I buy it, [saying] "If that will help you to decide." I get the impression she isn't bothered either way. Eventually I buy the coat for £4.99 (a discount from £7.99)."*

*- MCR Fieldnotes*

As an extension of this, Maria also offers volunteer discounts based around *pricing knowledge acquiescence*. Put simply, Maria enters into a dialogue with the volunteer as to how much they think the item is worth, and then discounts it to tempt them into buying it. Although still worker-initiated, the orientation of this is both socially AND profit driven, since the volunteers value to the shop is being acknowledged, and the manageress is still 'closing a deal'. Perhaps most integrally of all, this discount is at the manager's discretion, and is *substantially more* than the 10% staff discount. Thus, it operates within another facet of the charity shop's quiet value economy. The volunteer's value is also acknowledged by the paid staff member acquiescing to their pricing knowledge authority. In the example below, Maria uses hard-sell tactics to shift some GIK items donated by fashion shop Urban Outfitters. At one point, the researcher mentions that she likes one of the bags, but that at £29.98, it is too expensive for an item that is 'vintage' and therefore not new:

*"She looks at me and says, "How much you wanna pay for it?" I shake my head and say, "No no, it's ok." But she pushes "No really, how much can you pay for it? You tell me a price." I protest and say that I buy too many handbags as it is! She then says, "You think I should discount it?" I check the bag over and say yes – it has the appearance of being used, it has crumbs and bits in the bottoms and blusher marks in the zip pocket. She reduces the price from £29.98 to £14.98. I [...] say, "It's definitely not new, it's been used." Maria says "Yeah but it had a tag on it, it was originally £50." I don't elaborate, but I'm aware the bag is from a vintage selection, therefore the presence of a tag doesn't signify newness."*

- MCR Fieldnotes

This style of worker-initiated price negotiation differs from the volunteer discounts also offered in an ad hoc manner at the IHR, because the managing staff at the MCR were required by the parent

charity to cycle through items quickly, ensuring rapid stock turnover. Therefore, the commercialised drive for profit was consistently tempering their pricing decisions even when social or altruistic leanings were present. At the IHR, some discounts appeared to be 'purer': that is, less tainted by the desire for profit:

*"I am digging through the jewellery under the counter [in the "Any Three Items For A Pound" basket] when I spot a silver bangle amidst the tat. I tell Juliet I am going to buy it, but I don't want to get "three items for a pound". She says "Oh well just give whatever then." I say "About 33p?" And she says "Oh **don't worry** about it." When I bring out the money, which I have in pennies, she says "Oh gosh, I'll just ring it in as 20p. **Don't worry** about the rest." So I give the pennies to her to put in the collection box. The bracelet, being 925 silver, is worth far more than 30p!"*

*- IHR Fieldnotes, emphasis added*

Volunteer Juliet's relative lack of concern over my paying anything for the item indicates a lack of authoritative pricing knowledge, but also a dismissal of responsibility for pricing knowledge. Her repetition of the assurance '**don't worry**' about paying emphasises how she absolves herself from the entire situation, deeming the profit minimal or irrelevant. This same attitude was indicated in the MCR when paid staff and JCW would use the 'staff discount' till button to give 10% discount on sales to volunteers.

To summarise, 'regular' favours, volunteer discounts and pricing acquiescence are negotiations that are generally initiated by a staff member, often in an effort to transgress the difficulties of teaming capitalism and profit with philanthropic action. This act is frequently subtle, covert or operates under the radar. Professionalised structures for pricing are flouted in the name of empathy, community membership or worker cohesion. For volunteers, discounts are also the result of a concession to pricing knowledge authority, or a disavowal of

their own pricing knowledge by paid workers. A 'quiet value economy' develops, executed externally to the bureaucratic, professionalised systems implemented elsewhere in the contemporary charity shop.

Conversely, there is a profit-orientated negotiation process that is initiated by the shop worker shows little to no concern for the social implications of the exchange. This is indicated by the 'upsell': the enhancement of funds raised through targeted sales techniques.

### **5.2.2 Upselling**

Upselling is a term that originated from the world of sales and marketing. It refers to offering add-ons or bundles (or in the case of 'cross-selling', additional or complimentary products) to an item a customer already wishes to purchase, in essence bolstering income exponentially with very little effort. It is most common in the service industry (Weisman, 2012), although charity shops are using established market techniques such as these to increase the money that can be made from each individual sale. This conscious effort towards gaining extra revenue indicates how a charity shop can feel obliged to compete in a more ruthless economic marketplace, and adopt the techniques of business in order to survive. A prominent example of this is Gift Aid, which will be discussed in Chapter 7, which allows donors the option to participate in the process of increasing the value of the items they donate. Yet there are many ways in which charity shop workers adopt this technique, both in the slick professional environment of the MCR, and the less organised yet still progressive IHR.

The concept of upselling in the charity shop is not concrete, and doesn't entirely replicate the notion of the upsell in first hand sales

techniques. In the context of this study, it is simply used to refer to the encouragement of further purchasing from the customer. This includes offering a discount if a certain amount of money is spent (eg. £5 off if spending over £20), offering a bundle of items for a set price that equates to less than it would if each item were purchased singularly (eg. a hat, gloves and a scarf for £8) or offering an item for cheaper if several are bought at once (eg. buying 3 shirts reduces them to £2 as opposed to £4 each). Whilst this echoes the inclusion of sales, reduction rails and other market strategies that have slowly encroached upon charity shop operations, charity shop upselling frequently takes place informally and at the discretion of the management; on rare occasions it is at the discretion of another charity shop worker. Formalised upselling was rare in the MCR, and even rarer in the IHR. Rather, its spontaneous nature unsettles the ordered and systematic pricing system, subverting the rationalised pricing structure in order to make a quick and profitable one-off sale. When this is initiated by a member of staff to 'close a deal', efforts to systemise and rationalise pricing are threatened. In particular, in the future actions of volunteers, who are not trained in pricing restrictions and therefore often operate on a 'do-as-I-see' basis. By destabilising the professionalised structures of the charity shop, the act of upselling is indicative of how charity shop actors still exercise a degree of control and authority in the shop space in relation to pricing.

The standard line taken by both charity shops was that discounts were not given. The researcher was informed of this as a 'rule' upon commencing the volunteer role; yet throughout the observation this rule was repeatedly flouted by both shop managers. This could be described as the complicated 'tactics of consumption' (Du Gay, 1996) which necessitate a degree of dependence upon the 'official norms' of pricing, whilst allowing them to be subverted at the worker's discretion. To employ the upsell, alongside 'favours' given to regulars

or discounts for volunteers, was to condone a deliberate disregard of bureaucratic pricing rules. What is of crucial importance here is that this was *initiated by the staff member* rather than a haggling customer. The motivation is predominantly profit, or to heighten the profile of the individual shop within the chain of shops owned by the parent charity. Take the following example from the MCR:

*A woman who has come over from Ireland buys the Miss Sixty wedges (£12.99), an Accessorize handbag and a bedding set worth £49.99 after lots of umming and arring. She is only concerned about paying more on her luggage allowance on her flight back. Maria knocks 5 pounds off the price of the bedding set to convince her. [...] Later, Maria says, "It was good that that lady bought that duvet set eh? She comes in here now and again, I think **she must be loaded.**"*

*- MCR Fieldnotes, emphasis added*

The outcome of this exchange was profitable for the charity, and for the individual manager and her specific shop. By offering five pounds off the bedding set she secured a windfall for the charity of over £60. Her post-sale remark: *"she must be loaded"*, suggests that Maria did not offer the discount out of kindness or sympathy: instead it was strategic encouragement of further custom. Despite Maria acknowledging the customer as being somebody who frequents the shop regularly, her motivation to discount the bedding came from a desire to get rid of it, and close a sale, rather than to offer a discount out of kindness. Therefore this form of upselling differs from the 'Regular Favours' shown in Figure 1 because the gesture and motivations behind it were *profit-orientated* – although still to some degree dependent upon the shop workers tacit knowledge of the background of the individual.

This contrasts starkly with Maria's response when she is being pressed for a (smaller) discount by a customer in the following extract:

*"[a female customer] is buying some books and other bric-a-brac. She asks Maria if she can have one of the hardback books (all of which are £2.99) for £2. Maria tells her no, and when she reads out the total on the till (£13.96), the customer hands her only £13. Maria tells her she needs another 96p. The customer laughs and says "Aren't you going to let me off?" Maria says, staunchly and quite loudly **"That's not the way business works, my love."***

*Then the lady tries to tell Maria she'll come back later and pay the extra change. Maria stands her ground, and eventually the lady pays and leaves. Afterwards [...] Maria says "I can't believe some people. I'd already told her she couldn't have the discount. **How are we supposed to make money with people haggling like that?"**"*

*- IHR Fieldnotes, emphasis added*

Thus, the significance of the upsell not only depends upon how much money is to be made (although the temptation of a big sale does seem an encouragement in the former extract) but also upon whether the shop worker *initiates* the negotiation. Maria's repetitious refusal of the discount means that the customer is attempting to challenge her pricing authority, hence she stands her ground on principle. The meagre discount plus the tactics employed to try and obtain it infer that a customer is spendthrift and a seasoned haggler, thus unlikely to be a big spender in the shop if they return. As a result, in this instance she is not viewed as viable for upselling, and the manageress insists upon adhering to the original price. She also highlights the importance of sticking to formalised pricing rules to the customer in her comment *"That's not the way business works."* The 'business' principle takes precedence over the 'charity' component, as the charity shop adheres to a more professional mode of operation. Maria transposes the notion of business over charity seamlessly, surreptitiously rendering the shop

as oriented to 'pure fundraising' as opposed to providing a community service (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 29).

The refusal to haggle was a common feature in the MCR, but it also occurred in the IHR, particularly when customers challenged pricing authority:

*"I had a customer in the other day and I had a 50p box on here \*gestures to counter out front\* you know, full of items. Nothing wrong with them. [...] she says "If I buy six items, I can have these for 20p each" and I says "NO." She says "Those are 50p each, I can go to Primark and get 6 items for £3." I said "Well, go [to] Primark!""*

*- Interview with Derreck, IHR*

Profit-orientated upselling in this instance is again not viable. The promise of a minute monetary benefit to the charity does not supersede the pricing structure that is in place, nor the shop worker's authority. Again, this indicates that the rationalisation of pricing in the charity shop is consistently challenged by the actors within the sphere. Although the customer explicitly compares the shops prices to a first-hand retailer as a criticism of the level of value on offer, Derreck is not prepared to acquiesce because he did not endorse the lack of value himself by suggesting an upsell. The resulting defiance he exhibits (*"Well, go [to] Primark!"*) attests to the fact that the IHR manager is not thinking in terms of pure fundraising for the cause, nor in altruistic terms. Therefore the importance of the challenge to pricing authority is a perpetual undercurrent in these exchanges.

The upsell works most successfully when a manager is keen to get rid of stock. In the first excerpt above, Maria states that it is 'good' that they managed to sell the aforementioned duvet set, suggesting that its high price may have proved a deterrent and that they ideally needed to shift it. This situation occurred more frequently in the MCR where



stock turnover was a bureaucratically regulated and reasonably efficient system that circulated goods, dependent upon demand, throughout the shops the charity owned in the wider city area. During the observation, the researcher noted one very distinct period of time where the paid and volunteer staff were actively encouraged to 'get rid' of a certain lot of GIK stock (a selection of brand new bedding donated from a large chain store). It was clogging up and slowing down the circulation of stock in the area, and taking up too much GIK display space in store, as this fieldnote from the start of the shift indicates:

*"The GIK bedding has all been reduced, and Alex tells me quietly when I'm upstairs that all the bedding has to go today, otherwise it will be going 'out'."*

- MCR Fieldnotes

'Going out' refers to the transference of stock from one shop to another by delivery van, usually within a restricted locality, ensuring that all shops operated by the charity get enough stock to tide them over when donations are low. It also enables a degree of 'supply and demand', variety and even seasonality of goods (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, pp. 60-1). The system is organised so that the best quality stock goes to the most lucrative areas (based on sales), and vice versa. The MCR where the observation was undertaken was the most profitable for that charity in the country, and therefore had a very high turnover with stock rotation every two weeks. This rapid cycle required upselling in order to make the most money from the stock available in the short time before it has to 'go out' and be sold elsewhere (usually at a knocked-down price). Thus, the primary aim for workers becomes the act of earning money for *the shop*, as opposed to *the charity*, as a recipient of profit (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007, p. 559).

This stock circulation (particular in the case of high value, new GIK items) caused even more price flexibility as items on the shop floor

neared their two-week departure point. In the notes below, shop manager Maria is away on holiday and being covered by a temporary manager, Alex, from another store owned by the same charity. The shop had been having stock issues that had been compounded by Maria's absence, and Alex and assistant manager Emily were struggling to keep the place under control. Alex had discounted a bedding set from £12.98 to £9.98 for a customer who didn't want the valance sheet that was included in the set:

*"As I'm ringing it into the till, he [Alex] explains to me that they are all just going to go at the end of the day anyway, so the valance needn't be packaged back up to put back on the shelf. When she hears this, the customer says "Well if you're going to throw it out, I'll take it anyway." Alex agrees with this, so the lady gets the set for only £9.98 despite the original price being £3 more. [...] When I go upstairs to get my things to leave, Alex stops me, [...] and he says "Jesus Christ. She is obsessed with that bedding. Completely obsessed with it. She's always coming in and asking for pillowcases to match this or a sheet to match that. But to be honest with you: she can take it all if she wants. I'm not bothered about giving her a discount since after today it'll be gone anyway."*

*- MCR Fieldnotes*

Alex's decision to discount and subsequently 'upsell' the bedding (by including the valance for free) was strategic, despite the fact that he did not actually initiate the discount. His view was, any money earned would be revenue towards the budget of that particular shop in that particular week, which would be missed out on when the stock went out for circulation. The 'bigger picture' of charity-wide profit and cause-orientated fundraising therefore does not take precedence over the need for that shop to get the most out of its

allocated stock before it must be moved on to another store and achieving the monetary 'targets' calculated by the parent charity.

To outline the motive behind charity shop upselling, the bureaucratic processes necessary for strategic and rationalized pricing of goods are threatened by four factors:

1. The desire for shop workers to achieve a big sale or close a deal, even when this means some items are sold for less than their 'guide price';
2. The way shops that represent the same charity are encouraged to operate competitively, thus undercutting each other in terms of weekly budget;
3. The cyclical stock system that necessitates items be moved on if they are not immediately lucrative to the store; and
4. The influence of the participants involved who negate the value assumptions that are made with a questionable degree of authority.

This will be discussed further in Chapter 7, in relation to how charity is developing stronger and more intrinsic ties with the private sector. The combination of these four tensions is dealt with by the upselling technique, itself a product of the professionalised marketplace, as one of several methods used to try and temper the tensions within the charity shop.

### **5.3 Customer Initiated Price Negotiation**

Disjuncture between pricing knowledges are, as has been shown, quite common in the contemporary charity shop. Customers, volunteers and staff frequently disagree as to how much an item is

worth. Whilst the old adage *'one person's trash is another person's treasure'* manifests in relation to the most unlikely objects at times; generally charity shops must operate with a degree of rational value understanding through which they set their average unit prices and deal with outliers or unique cases. The reasons for managerial pricing decisions are multifarious and are intrinsically, perhaps even inseparably, linked to how much their customers will be willing to pay. As stated by the Gift in Kind manager at the MCR:

*"We realise that the customer is savvy enough to know that they're only going to buy it at the right price. So there's a certain limit to what we can do and what we can charge and we're always trying to maximise that and increase it and stretch it and make it as high as we can, but there is a kind of, cut off point."*

*- Interview with Mike, MCR*

Therefore, customer pricing knowledges are integral to the value judgements that take place in the charity shop. As the final section in this chapter will indicate, 'haggling up' is an instance where the customer supersedes the pricing knowledges in place with the organization, or allocated by the workers. Yet this is not the only time pricing knowledges are challenged, although, as with the other negotiations mentioned above, these are frequently done on the quiet, and indicate another facet of the quiet value economy of modern charity retail.

### **5.3.1 Seeking Reprieve**

One less successful observed pricing negotiation process is the kind which aims to haggle down prices by means of seeking monetary

reprieve. This is usually done by appealing to the kindness, sympathy or 'charitability' of the shop worker. This is a more complicated negotiation than merely haggling *down*. In seeking reprieve, the customer aims to be 'let off' a certain amount by the shop worker, either because of personal finance issues, or because they are in a 'charity shop' and therefore discounting goods or requesting money off is perceived as acceptable<sup>11</sup>. The latter reason is frequently alluded to during the process, and frequently it is coupled with indignation at the high prices in contemporary charity shops:

*"A man picks up a pair of mens shoes from the window display and says "is this price right?" Maria says "Yeah, £24.99." He says "You what? That's ridiculous. £24 for a pair of shoes! I thought this was a charity shop."*

*"A lady who has been browsing the shop for a while comes over to the till and begins quite a long diatribe about the prices in the shop. She says "I know it isn't down to you, but I just wanted to say I think some things in here, well, a lot of things actually, are really overpriced." [...] I point out that the manager has set prices for things that can't be undercharged, for instance, no dress is sold for under £4.99. She says "I know but it's madness. This is a charity shop, but it's not catering for the kind of people it should be. The prices are more than they would be for new things."*

- MCR Fieldnotes

These comments were extremely common in the MCR, and were more related to dissatisfaction with the MCR's lack of adherence to 'traditional' charity shop prices, than to seeking reprieve from high prices in general. The customers are complaining that the more professionalised and subsequently expensive charity shop is lacking

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<sup>11</sup> It's important to distinguish the reprieve of being let off paying the full price for individualistic reasons relating to the participants involved, rather than because of faults or detriment in the item being sold; this would come under the final category of 'Wear & Tear Arbitration' discussed later in the chapter.

the characteristics they feel a charity shop ought to have – particularly, flexible, low pricing that is more responsive to their customer spending power than to wider market conditions or competition. The entrenched belief in charity shops providing low-cost goods is reinforced by customers who challenge prices.

Seeking reprieve occurs when a customer attempts to appeal to the individual working in the shop to ‘let them off’ as an act of kindness or social obligation. Often, it seems to be related to the customer perception of a charity shop as somewhere for low-priced and discounted goods (Williams C. , 2002), and thus eager to make *some* money rather than not make a sale. The phrase ‘I only have £n on me’ or variations of this are used by customers to undermine the bureaucratic pricing structures of the charity shop by challenging the pricing authority. Rather than expressly asking for a discount, they appeal to the compassionate nature of the volunteer and highlight the inconvenience of adhering to pricing rules. The examples below show how commonly this takes places in the MCR:

*“[A customer] asks Maria for a discount at the till. Maria has already rung the items into the till and tells the woman that we don’t do discounts. The woman tries to pester her to give her a discount, and Maria stands her ground. The woman then says that she only has £11 on her, at which point Maria gives in and accepts it, although she says “You’re going to get me into trouble.””*

*- MCR Fieldnotes*

In this instance, the customer doesn’t directly state that she can’t afford the total for the items. Instead she rounds down the cost of the items to an amount she wants to pay, and Maria ‘lets her off’, albeit with the caveat that the parent organization would likely disapprove. Therefore, the customer-initiated negotiation challenges the authority of both Maria and the charity in their pricing structure, in a way that

would be inappropriate in a first sector retail space. By seeking reprieve from a portion of the set price, the customer is challenging the set prices to suit their own perception of how a charity shop works, and undermining the structural elements that have been put in place to ensure efficiency and standardisation of prices. This initially evokes the negative response from the manager, who treats the challenge to pricing authority as something unwelcome and out-of-place in the contemporary charity shop. But by the end of the exchange, Maria permits the customer-initiated discount under duress, though highlights how transgressive the act is with her comment about ending up 'in trouble'. The act operates again through the quiet value economy, away from the parent charity's gaze.

By appealing to the manager's guilt, and by seeking reprieve from the cost, the customer's role in the price negotiation becomes extremely powerful:

*M: If somebody poor comes and says "Oh, could you let me have that for 2 quid or 3 quid?" We're not allowed to do that are we?*

*T: So from your personal perspective then, how do you feel when you have to do that?*

*M: Guilty! Guilty. \*laughs\* [...] I could get in trouble for that as well, and also, if you've done it once, the person who you're doing the favour for expects you to do it again. So basically I don't want to encourage them to come in and do it again. And not just with me, they will be going to other charity shops and hassling their staff to try and get the same thing, saying "Oh I did it once, why can't they do it for her?"*

*- Interview with Maria, MCR*

Maria highlights the importance of setting a precedent for how modern charity shops deal with hagglers. This is indicative of how professionalisation aims to streamline not only the actions and

structures that occur within their shop, but also aim to change *wider* perceptions of how charity shops operate in general. The 'guilt' Maria experiences is two-fold – she feels guilty for not being able to help customers out, and also because of her allegiance to the parent charity, her job, and the image of the sector. Mentioning the other actors within this space: her co-workers and staff in other charity shops, universalises the issue.

But as well as being seen by some customers as normative in the charity shop environment, seeking reprieve from paying set prices in charity shops risks certain social repercussions, as described by a regular customer in the IHR following her observing somebody attempting to haggle:

*"I think it's terrible when people haggle. You wouldn't haggle with someone if you were giving them a donation. Or if you were sponsoring them for a sponsored run! You wouldn't say... "Minimum donation £5.... Hmm, with you take £2.50?" It's for charity, for God's sake!"*

*- IHR Fieldnotes*

The accepted role of 'charity' in the context of the shop therefore overrules the perceived informality of pricing, and this customer demonstrates a degree of respect for its unquestionable worthiness as a charitable cause. One of the integral difficulties in customer-initiated pricing negotiations is this indirect challenge to the value and validity of the cause, alongside the more personal challenge to the price authority of the workers involved.

Seeking reprieve is one of the more fragmented and contentious pricing negotiations observed in the shop. The appeal to the altruistic nature of the shop worker not only serves to challenge the authority of the staff, but also to challenge wider ideologies surrounding the value of 'charity'. By doing so, they prompt further questions about the



difficulties faced by charity shops at sustaining their existence in an economic environment that is constantly challenged on relatively small issues such as this.

### **5.3.2 Haggling Up**

Because of the general pricing mutability in charity shops, there are occasional instances of 'haggling up': a process in which the customer acknowledges that the value of an item is more than what is being asked for it, and tells the shop workers as much. Sometimes, they were observed insisting on paying more, or making an additional donation. This value negotiation not only tells us about the role the parent charity element plays in charity shopping participation, how this differs from shopping in privately owned shopping spaces, and how valuation and worth is negotiated collaboratively in the charity shop space. Previous charity shop literature has neglected the issue entirely. Haggling up remains a wholly anomalous pricing negotiation, unique within the field of alternative retail, subtly executed and inextricably linked to the concept of 'charity'.

To haggle a price 'up' is uncommon under general circumstances. One does not go into Argos and insist on paying £20 for an £18 kettle. However, the presence of the charitable cause in the equation means that customers are investing not only in the purchase itself, but in the benefit of those receiving the charity. If a customer knows the value of an item, either through its price tag in the shop, or their own value knowledge, the phenomenon of insisting on paying *at least* this is seemingly unique to the charity shop space. It requires the customer to confide their superior price knowledge, and does not challenge the pricing authority of the charity shop worker in the way

other customer-initiated price negotiations do. It also indicates an affinity between the customer and the cause, to the extent that they believe they themselves should contribute more to the exchange.

The researcher found herself on the receiving end of such comments, indicating a great deal about the mixed feelings customers have towards pricing knowledge in the charity shop:

*“A lady brings a hat from the stand over to the till, and we discuss whether or not we believe it is real fur. Authenticity of items is often questioned in both charity shops. She goes to pay for it, and I tell her it’s £1 (as all items on the stand are £1). The lady says, “No, it says £3.” And shows me a tag [which has been detached] which indeed does say £3. She insists I take the full price and says, “It is real fur after all, I think you should take £3!””*

*- IHR Fieldnotes*

Initially, the researcher and the customer collaboratively work on clearing up whether the item is authentic. Once it is deemed to be bona fide, the customer then insists that its ‘true value’ (according to their price knowledge agreement) is paid, in spite of the researcher’s value knowledge initially being fallible. Interestingly, the value of the hat is gauged only in relation to the prices of other hats in the IHR, all of which are priced at £1 pound. Therefore tripling its price indicates its authenticity, but is not necessarily representative of its value in market terms or in the eyes of the customer. In short, the price allocation is contextually-specific to the charity shop.

Haggling up also coincides often with additional donations – where customers simply add extra money to that which they are handing over:

*“One gentleman buys a shirt, and afterwards just hands me £1. As I stand looking at it, Dereck says to me “It’s a donation for the box. He always does it.””*

*- IHR Fieldnotes*

*“A gentleman comes in and buys a blue teeshirt. When paying for it, he pays with a tenner and gets £6.01 change. He gives me the fiver [...] and he explains “I’ve got a bit of a gambling problem. So whenever I have a win, I just give it here. Rather than gamble it away again you know!””*

*- MCR Fieldnotes*

In these instances, the additional donation is tagged onto the act of consumption, and although this is customer-initiated, this kind of unsolicited donation is a crossover point for charity shops and first hand stores. Commercial retailers will regularly have donation tins or fundraising boxes at their tills to collect shoppers’ loose change. The introduction of ‘just-below’ pricing (99p, £1.99) in charity shops (it is used in the MCR, although not in the IHR) shows a desire for the third sector to employ this measure, although it is significant that in the charity shop the donation is often combined with the purchase in a way that shows a blurring of boundaries between the act of consumption and the act of donation. The conflation of these two different yet interdependent acts within the charity shop domain is further explored in Chapter 7.

The concept of haggling up represents a failure in shop pricing procedure, particularly in the IHR where, as previously mentioned, there is an upper limit to the AUP within the set pricing structures that restricts the scope for haggling up. Additional cash donations (normally a couple of pounds) were more common in this instance. However, haggling up shows the involvement of customer pricing knowledge and perceptions of value having positive repercussions for the charity. It

also highlights how the theme of 'charity as fundraiser' is potent to the customer, in contrast to the previous theme of 'charity as cut-price, community service' indicated by some of the customers who were 'Seeking Reprieve'.

Already it has been evidenced that pricing decisions in both shops was inconsistent and responsive to input, in spite of the set pricing structures. It was clearly observable in the research how often other actors in the shop space temper and moderate managerial authority over pricing. Ultimately: an agreement must be reached between customer and the worker who is setting the prices, in order for any transaction to take place. As has been noted earlier in this thesis and in work by Gregson, Brooks & Crewe (2000) and Gregson and Crewe (2003) charity shop stock lends itself to value disputes due to the second-hand nature of the stock sold. These goods may have flaws, be soiled, damaged, missing parts; they are as irregular in physical nature as they are in supply. Therefore, the final negotiation discussed here is that of arbitrating the wear and tear of used goods, through the collaboration of workers and customers.

#### **5.4 Wear & Tear Arbitration**

The different negotiations depicted in Figure 7 represent the arbitration of value between the worker and the customer. This process endeavours to establish a tentative equilibrium of the oppositional ideologies represented within the nexus of altruistic and profit motives.

The successful resolution of a negotiation through agreement, and a collaboration of social and profit-orientations, is described as *wear and tear arbitration*. This umbrella term defines the type of

negotiation that unites certain troublesome characteristics of the charity shop (and second-hand shopping in general) that have been touched upon by previous authors:

- The pre-used and factory-second nature of the stock, and an understanding that this may mean faults, wear or missing parts (Crewe et al., 2003; Gregson & Crewe, 2003; Gregson et al., 2000; Horne & Broadbridge, 1995)
- The (presumed) flexibility of the prices (Appadurai, 1986; Thomson, 1979)
- The often contradictory pricing knowledges of customers and workers, including assumptions about brands and their value (Gregson & Crewe, 1997b)

A negotiation can be initiated by either the worker or the customer, but the process represents a co-ordination of differing price knowledges, of professionalised retail tactics and of shrewd bargaining skills. Through this negotiation, goods are sold in a way that does not challenge pricing authority for either party, nor undermine the worker's social orientation or the customer's thriftiness.

The process revolves around acknowledgement and agreement of pricing failures, and still incorporates commercial strategies for dealing with them, without threatening the set pricing structure. When the contentious characteristics of charity shop goods are accepted and acknowledged by both the customer and the shop workers, then the price is arbitrated successfully. This research refers to this as 'wear & tear arbitration' rather than simply haggling; due to the fact that the majority of instances of successful value negotiation occurred due to a dual acknowledgement of fault or degradation in quality due to the secondhandness or 'factory second' nature of the item. They call into

question the rationalised pricing structures evidenced, in particular, in the MCR:

*“A lady calls me over to where she’s trying on shoes. She asks how much a pair are, and I look at the other pairs for examples of prices. I note that most other pairs are about 4.99-5.99 and so say “£4.99”. The man who is with her says “£4.99 for them? The heel is all messed up. They’re only worth about £3 at the most.” She takes the shoes off and shows me the damage. The soles on the shoes are okay, but the patent leather on the stiletto heel of both shoes is damaged. The woman says “Will she sell them for £3?” I tell her that Maria doesn’t generally give discounts, and noticing the brand is Marks and Spencer I tell her that the brand makes them worth a bit more. The man says “well will you ask her if she’ll do it for these?”*

*I phone Maria and tell her about the people asking and she says “Well we don’t discount the prices; they’re set for a reason.” I tell her about the problem with the heel and describe the shoe to her. She says “Okay, tell them if they want, they can have them for £3. I know which shoes you mean and they are a bit knackered.””*

*- MCR Fieldnotes*

In the above excerpt, Maria acknowledges that the standardised pricing for shoes of that kind should be £4.99 upwards, as the researcher had presumed from her own pricing structure knowledge. Yet once the poor condition is taken into account, she concedes pricing knowledge to the customer. In a sense, both parties arbitrate the value of the item between them. Offering a price reduction in light of a fault is frequently standard procedure in first-hand outlets, even when a customer identifies the fault first. Yet due to the ambivalent quality and condition of charity shop goods, this value negotiation is perceived as more customary.

Sometimes this occurs without the customer buying the item, but merely 'advising' the staff in store about a suspected pricing failure.

*"The Betty Barclay bag in store has still not yet sold, despite being there for 2 weeks priced at £99.99. One customer asks me to get it down, and speculates that it isn't real leather as "it doesn't smell like it." Maria asks me to look on Google when I'm at home to see if we've overpriced it."*

- MCR Fieldnotes

As the above excerpt indicates, the charity shop is unique in retaining the flexibility of its pricing boundaries, in spite of the claims from previous authors that charity shops are now required to commercialise (Gregson et al., 2002) or trade up (Horne & Maddrell, 2002) in order to remain competitive in the contemporary marketplace. The process of commercialisation is ostensibly challenged by the nuances of value arbitration such as this, which are granted at the discretion of the individual manager.

Sometimes discount requests between the staff member and the customer aren't always successful, yet the member of staff and the customer reach an agreement about the price of the item. The initial attempt at haggling is tentative, as if asking a favour; when declined it is dismissed as unimportant fault, or even a valuation error on their own behalf:

*"A lady brings a Dorothy Perkins GIK top to the counter and says "I wanted to buy this, but it has a rip in it." She shows me the tear, which is quite large, down the left hand side seam. She asks, "I don't suppose they could do anything about this could they?" I have a look at the top but I am hesitant to ask if it'll be cheaper since they generally price items*

*according to their faults. I tell the woman this and she agrees to buy it full price anyway. I notice she doesn't explicitly ask for a discount, as if she thinks that's too cheeky? Also when she agrees to pay full price for it, she makes excuses like "Oh i could easily sew it up anyway." And the girl with her says, "yeah you won't even notice it. It's only the seam"."*

*"[A customer brings over an item and] says "Hi. I know it's only £5 anyway but I was wondering, would they knock anything off the price...it's missing a row of sequins just here." She shows me a line along the top of the shoulder of a jumper she's holding. I take it off her and examine it, then explain that both shoulders are the same and that we don't generally discount items for faults anyway. She says, "Oh, I must have been wearing it lopsidedly then, it looked different on one shoulder."*

*- MCR Fieldnotes*

The concession to the superior pricing and item knowledge of the shop worker shows that value arbitration therefore is not merely haggling for a bargain – it is a joint attempt to ascertain worth in the uncertain territory of charity shop goods.

A large number of MCR items have faults due to their emphasis on Gift in Kind stock (which are usually shop seconds or returns). Maria will be aware of these before the items are put out and will insist they are priced 'As Seen'. At the IHR, faulty or damaged items are rarely put out, because manager Derreck is conscious of the small amount of space he has to display the goods, thus selecting only the items in the best condition from the many donations they receive. Price negotiation rarely takes place unless initiated by Derreck himself, partly because he does not bow to alternative judgments on prices. The following instance took place in the back sorting room at the IHR:



*I hold up a top and say, "This has a stain on it. What do you think?" [Hilda, a volunteer] says, "Well, I wouldn't get rid of it. I'm not like Derreck. I think there are people out there that would want it, if only for 50p. Sometimes you want something cheap to do housework in, or DIY. It doesn't matter if it has a little stain."*

*"We wanted for ages to have a discount rail – you know, every one 50p. Just to get rid of it. There's no point it sitting on the rails for 10 weeks at £3 when no one wants it. But Derreck doesn't like it. No idea why. Maybe he doesn't want to maintain it." [Juliet, a volunteer]*

*- IHR Fieldnotes*

During the entire observation, the researcher does not observe a single attempt at haggling or value negotiation with Derreck – perhaps due to him being well known amongst the local patrons. His authority goes mostly unchallenged, except occasionally by long standing volunteers like Steve, who was mentioned earlier in this chapter as having the jurisdiction to offer discounts because he has worked at the IHR longer than Derreck himself.

Value arbitration over things like object faults or missing parts aspires to the 'customer is always right' ideology that is favoured by first-hand commercial organisations. Although the process seems unstructured at first glance, in fact the procedure that volunteers, paid workers and customers follow is acknowledged in most sales environments as being conventional. Take the negotiation process documented below, regarding a customer who is interested in buying a GIK top made by Bench:

*"[...] She notices a stain on the sleeve (the stain looks faded, therefore not the kind that is likely to wash out.) On a white jacket it is quite*

*noticeable. She asks me if we can do it 'any cheaper' due to the stain. I tell her I'll ask Maria, and phone upstairs."*

*- MCR Fieldnotes*

This exchange between the researcher/volunteer and the customer would not be out of place in a first-hand shop – nor would the requirement for a 'superior' to confirm that the price can be negotiated. However:

*"Maria tells me "I know it's stained, but it's the brand. It's Bench, so it's still £9.99 even with the stain.""*

*- MCR Fieldnotes*

In charity shops, there is an unspoken understanding that goods may well be soiled, damaged, tired-looking, possibly even faulty. It is the reason charity shops are sometimes treated with trepidation by those accustomed to first hand goods (Williams C. , 2002), and it forms the solid foundations of the quiet value economy, differentiating it from the economies that operate elsewhere. Charity shop goods are of 'ambivalent' character (Gregson et al., 2000, p.106) therefore Maria acknowledges that the pricing of the item has already taken this into account, and thus ends the negotiation. Her pricing knowledge places Bench items at a higher APU than unbranded jackets, but the stain serves to inhibit the full price of the item. Because the understanding of this is not mutual (the customer had to ask whether the item could be sold cheaper), uncertainties about value judgments in the shop are clearly evident. However, the uncertainties are due to irreconcilable characteristics of charity shops that are essential to their nature: stock aberrations, pricing flexibility, second-handedness, the resale of known, popular brands and their traditional reputation for low prices. Wear and tear arbitration uses a common sales technique of small discounts for faults where appropriate, but this is always contextually

dependent and is not bureaucratically enforced by systematic procedures in the way a first-hand organisation may do so.

## **5.5 Summary**

As with all of the price negotiation processes described, the main tensions emerge in charity shop pricing because of differing price knowledges being played out in a relatively informal arena that differs in many ways from the public conception of what a charity shop entails. The competing demands of the parent charity (for profits) and the customer (for a bargain) can become more harmonious through these subtle arbitrations of value, but the fundamentally oppositional discourses of charity and capitalism that are evidenced by all of these exchanges show how the charity shop still remains a unique and anomalous shopping space, due at least in part to the sustained presence of quiet economic activity that occurs on the sidelines due to pricing knowledge disjunctures. The following chapter will serve to develop how one party in this exchange, the shop worker, is part of a similarly irreconcilable 'quiet hierarchy' on the shop floor, which has formed due to the anomalous and variable backgrounds and obligations of charity shop workers. Alongside the quiet value economy of the charity shop, this hierarchy again exposes the subtle nuances in authority and worker obligations that do not fit neatly into the depictions of a traditional, or professionalised, charity shop space.

## CHAPTER 6

### Working for Charity: The “Quiet Hierarchy”

The preceding chapter examined the negotiation of pricing strategies in the shop and how these are framed within an increasingly professionalised and centralised business framework, using the example of haggling to show how paid employees, volunteers and customers respond to arbitrations of value. The process of price structuring and negotiation in charity shops, along with many other decisions made on the shop floor, is dependent upon the amount of responsibility the worker has; yet it is controlled by the rules and regulations assigned by the parent charity. It is also dependent upon the customer’s personal perception of what charity shop prices should be. These conflicting pricing knowledges are a small part of the wider difficulties surrounding the diverse nature of charity shops; in particular, how the formalities of a rational, regulated and professionally-run shop can clash with the informality of charity retail.

Thus, this chapter will extend beyond the act of pricing to the varying obligations of those engaged in it, and examine how the heterogeneous mix of charity shop workers reconcile the formal and informal hierarchies that exist in the shop, in relation to responsibilities, co-operation, autonomy and personal agency. This chapter will also link the formation of a *quiet value economy* as described in Chapter 5 with the concept of a *quiet hierarchy* in the shop, operating independently from any formal hierarchy that is set in place by the professionalising structure of the parent charity, thus continuing the theme of covert, non-professional operations that underpin the bureaucratic developments of charity in general.

The diverse social background of charity shop workers does not, at first glance, bear much resemblance to the precise and highly coordinated efficiency of bureaucratic hierarchies that are more commonly observed in the first sector. Charity shops can be seen to operate more in line with 'network transactions' that are based in interpersonal relationships and less strongly shaped by a central authority (Powell, 2012, p. 34). Yet thus far typologies of worker relations within the charity shop are under-represented in sociological and socio-economic literature, especially in light of the increasing diversity in charity shop worker demographics.

The archetypal image of the charity shop worker is a volunteer, despite the fact that in the last decade charity shops have increasingly incorporated a mix of paid and unpaid workers, Job Centre placement contractors and members of the public undertaking Community Service (Parsons, 2002; 2004; Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007). Thus, much of the present literature fails to accommodate the notion that charity shops are increasingly mimicking the private sector in the extent of their workforce diversification, whilst still in many ways remaining representative of more traditional notions of charity shops by relying upon unpaid work from volunteers.

These developments to the shops' employment structures impact upon the obligations associated with the roles each individual carries out, rendering past theoretical assumptions about shop volunteer motivations limiting in the same way that the present understanding of professionalisation as solely characteristic of full time, paid work, can be (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p. 156). This chapter will lay out how informal and formal hierarchies that currently exist in the two case study shops, and indicate how a quiet hierarchy of social obligations, sanctions, alienation and collaborative cohesion dominates on the shop floor, in spite of the extent of professionalisation in the sector.

Hierarchies form the defining characteristic of organisations (Sias, 2009). In general, they represent an internalisation of roles that may have previously been dependent upon external market forces – for example, supply and demand. Administration of tasks is regimented in a (typically) vertical structure of managerial supervision and subordinate staff. Charity shops, on the surface, seem to follow this model, albeit with a horizontal formation of auxiliary staff who take on roles as delivery drivers, cleaners, accountants, recycling coordinators and so on. A traditional vertical hierarchy is often favoured in business because of the clarity it offers (Powell, 2012, p. 34) in terms of worker roles or obligations; it permits a rationalisation of employee structures.

Charity shop hierarchies are already indistinct and unscripted, with both paid and unpaid workers undertaking similar tasks but not receiving the same reimbursement or degree of authority. Interactions and roles maintain a degree of ambiguity, they are difficult to systematically classify because many entail ‘situated and subjective’ behaviours or ‘soft’ responsibilities such as caring or mundane, invisible tasks (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 30). Equally, the enhanced flexibility of modern work behaviour due to technological advancement (Beck, 2000a; 2000b; Castells, 2001) has resulted in destandardised work patterns and job descriptions in all kinds of organisations. This fragmentation of tradition work behaviour is visible in the charity shop, too. Modern charity shop workers are not merely volunteers. They also employ a complex mix of paid employees, and workers from state institutions (conscripted from the CPS and the job centre) which strengthen charity ties to public services, whilst severing ties that promote organisational social capital.

To clarify how charity shops are anomalous in this respect, a typology of the diverse worker types has been constructed based upon observation notes and supplementary interviews. It is shown in Figure 8 below. The typology aims to illustrate another way through which the

professional development of charity is mediated through the peculiar ties it has to formal institutions and the state, and the invisible hierarchical nuances that enable these.

Informal	Formal	State
	Paid workers	
Volunteers	New Deal Partnership Workers	
	Community Service Workers	

Figure 8: Worker obligations

Charity shop workers in the two case studies can be categorised using the table above. They operate either under *formal* or *informal obligations*. Informal obligation would fit with the idea of ‘soft’ responsibilities inferred by Bowker & Star (1999), and utilize in predominance organisational social capital (Leana & Van Buren III, 2012, p.44). Volunteers are the best example of workers who are employed under informal obligation; as their presence in the charity shop space is not formally required of them. Their motivations can be categorised as conscientious and loyalty-driven; or they may be

‘instrumental volunteers’ (Edgell, 2006, p. 175) who are offering their time in the hope of gaining skills or experience<sup>12</sup>.

Paid employees, including managers, shop assistants and delivery drivers can be described as working under *formal obligation*; they have contracts with the parent charity, which distinguishes their roles and gives them a specific purpose within the organisation. Additionally, Job Centre workers (henceforth described as New Deal Partnership workers or NDPWs) work under formal obligation too, though their obligation is twofold – to a state service (the benefits agency that pays their support) and the charity they have been allocated to work for.

Community service workers (henceforth CSWs) are required to complete their work due to another set of dichotomous formal obligations: there is a *legal* (state) obligation that is sanctioned by a court order, but they too are contracted to that specific charity shop and must turn up and fulfil set hours there with work that is satisfactory to the charity. In relation to NDPWs and CSWs, the involvement of governmental agencies and ‘public’ issues (unemployment benefit and criminal proceedings) again indicates charity shops’ dependence upon the shadow state. This issue of intersectoral crossovers will be explored in detail in Chapter 7.

It is helpful to think of those who operate under any *formal* obligations as *transactionally* obligated: they either receive payment, formally (paid employees and NDPWs) or they are paying a societal debt through the work they do (CSWs). For volunteers, there is no formal transactional exchange or contract. However, they may be bound by a ‘psychological contract’ (Rousseau, 1995), an implicit

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<sup>12</sup> Although the author notes that this does not exclude some degree of formalisation of their role, for instance, the increase in contractual obligations for some charity volunteers.



agreements that is unstated and relies upon a sense of shared values and trust. This idea will be further explored below.

A series of different obligations must therefore be acted out in tandem on the charity shop floor. Difficulties emerge because of these relationships and their impacts upon the formal hierarchy in the shop, and challenge theories of enhanced professionalisation and bureaucracy of charities. They also threaten the role of the traditional charity shop in the hearts and minds of those who frequent or work in them, as is evidenced in some of the observation excerpts later in this chapter.

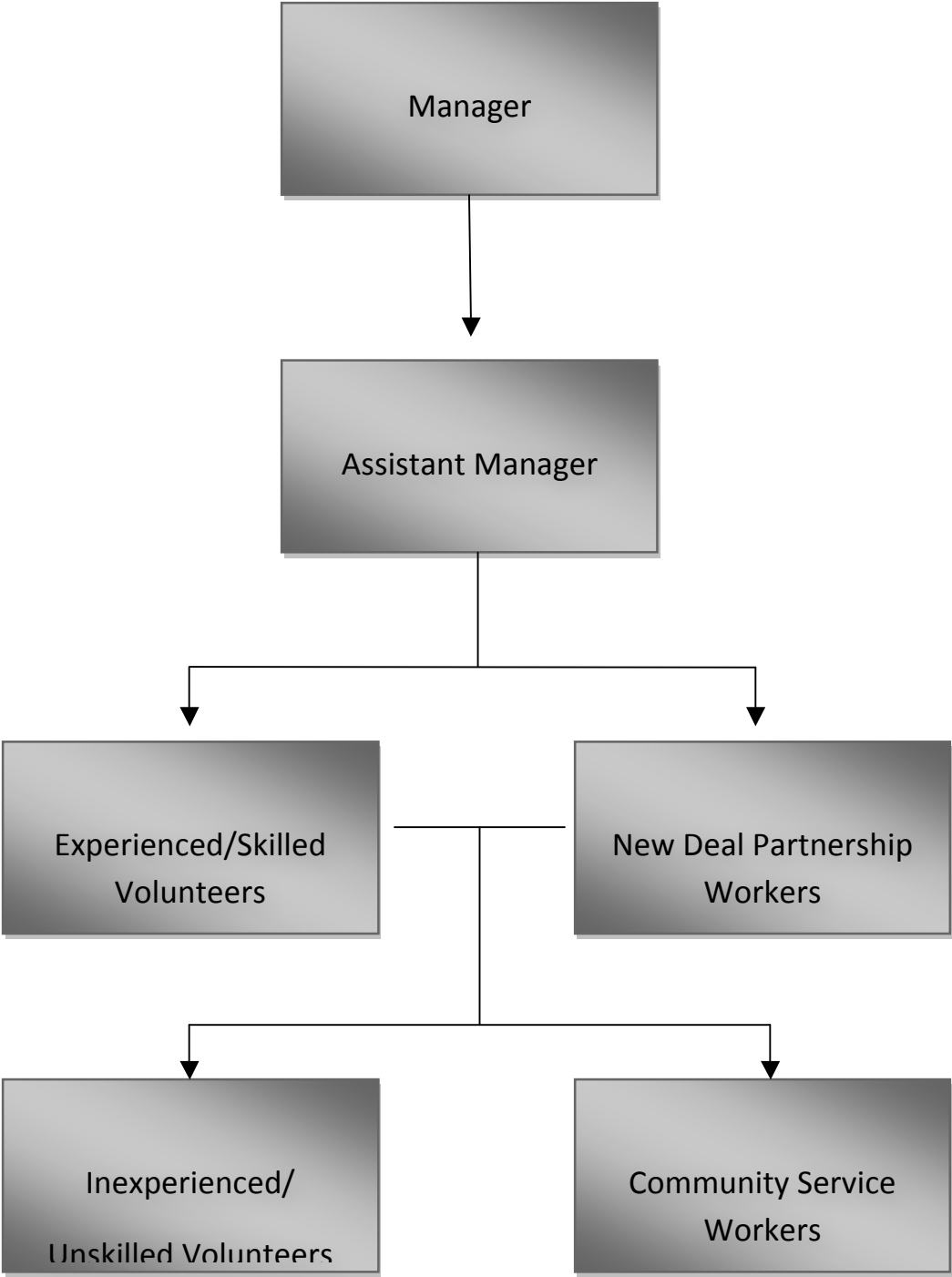
As a result, the juxtaposition of contrasting and often conflicting sets of obligations provokes tensions that are unique to the charity shop space and necessitate a more thorough and reflexive qualitative analysis.

The diversity of obligations amongst charity shop workers stem from the increasingly complex worker dynamics and characteristics that have redefined present day organisation hierarchies – in particular flexible and destandardised work (Atkinson, 1984; Beck, 2000; Castells 2001). Looking at these presents an interesting contrast to previous work on charity volunteer motivations (Broadbridge & Horne, 1994a; Maddrell, 2000; Horne & Maddrell, 2002), which made the psychosocial drives behind an individual's volunteering habits their focus. This study looks instead at the tensions inherent in a workplace where comparable practical working roles are undertaken with diverse conflicting or unspoken individual obligations. It will try to understand the way these affect 'associability' and 'trust' in the workplace: two of the crucial elements required to manage the aforementioned 'social capital' in organisations (Leana & Van Buren III, 2012, pp.45-46), that is, the cohesive social relations between workers which is considered by many authors to be a strong asset. It will also consider whether

social characteristics such as trust and shared beliefs can actually be held by an organisation at all (Rousseau, 1995).

This chapter will mark out the hierarchical changes that stem from increased bureaucratic processes and provide a more rigorous typological perspective than the 'volunteer-centric' interpretations of charity shop worker motivations. The aim of this chapter is to assess how an esoteric 'quiet hierarchy' is sometimes overlooked in sociological literature in favour of the formal hierarchies that have developed alongside commercialisation and rationalisation of charity shop operations. It will also contribute to the main premise of this thesis, which is to develop an understanding of how commercial and bureaucratic pressures, as well as governmental collaborations, are fundamentally integral to the way charity shops operate.

The Multiple Charity Retailer Hierarchy



*Figure 9. Multiple Charity Retailer Hierarchy*

Figure 9 depicts the hierarchical structure that can be found in the case study of the Multiple Charity Retailer at a point in time 3 months into the study. It has an unusual array of employee 'types'. There was a constantly evolving group of paid staff and volunteers, and several new paid roles were created during the six months of observation. This augmented development of new roles would seem to indicate the exponential growth and anticipated earning potential of the shop.

At the commencement of the study the only member of paid staff on the shop floor employed by the charity was the manager Maria, who resides at the top of the chain in terms of earnings as well as responsibilities and accountability to the charity. Below her are the assistant managers, of which there are 3 throughout the period of observation: Emily, Alex and Hayley. Emily is hired on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2010, one and a quarter months into the observation; prior to this there had not been an assistant manager at the shop.

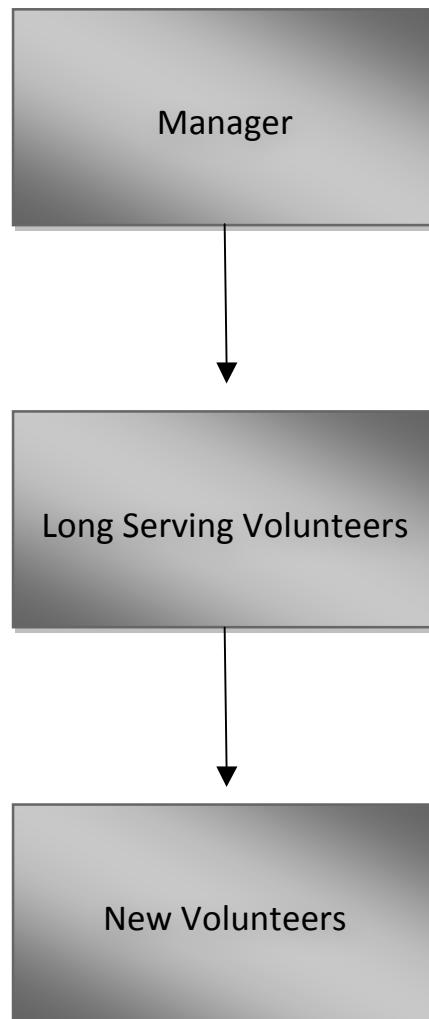
Below the array of assistant managers are the NDPWs – long-term unemployed individuals who are technically unpaid by the charity, but work set hours and receive their Job Seekers Allowance in return. This 'partnership' is treated as a means of encouraging the unemployed back into work and developing their skills – Maria regularly refers to them as 'trainees'. Arran and Amelia have a set number of part time shifts per week, during some of which they have free run of the shop. They have allotted break times for lunch, unlike volunteers. Responsibility-wise, they are permitted to open and close the shop, give refunds and deal with phone queries, as well as taking the charity shop profits to the bank midway through the working day, therefore increasing the level of trust placed upon a member of staff not technically contracted by the charity.

At the MCR the volunteers were perceived by the researcher to rank second from bottom in the hierarchical structure in terms of their authority – although they are separated up into skilled and unskilled volunteers due to the fact that Maria distributed responsibility unequally dependent upon the ability the volunteer exhibited. Nevertheless, frequently subordinate to all volunteers are the community service workers, a never-ending succession of people with convictions for petty crimes. They are given almost exclusively backroom, menial tasks like sorting, hanging clothes or steaming items to remove creases. CWS are the labour force behind the scenes in the shop, and whilst required to keep to the rules set for those in contractual employment with the charity (for example, to keep to a one hour lunch break), they do not have the flexibility, opportunity to learn skills or the limited reign to self-assign tasks that volunteers do. They retain a degree of anonymity in relation to other staff: Maria rarely introduces the volunteers to them and the understanding is implicit that the two work groups do not mix. This segregation seems to be due to the temporality of their position, and the emphasis upon their back-room presence (Goffman, 1959) particularly in contrast with the front-room (shop floor) presence of volunteers. CSWs are a largely invisible presence in the charity shop, forming a large part of the lower echelons of the quiet hierarchy. It is notable that due to their relative anonymity amongst the workforce volunteers and their temporary employment, none of the necessary accountability, trust or associability of working towards a collective goal develops between the segregated work groups, leading to a lack of trustworthy social capital (Leana & Van Buren III, 2012, p.47). This can cause difficulties in an organisation that relies to some degree upon goodwill; as “Associability without some level of trust [...] seems largely impossible in an organization where membership is voluntary.” (*ibid.*)

On top of these diverse aggregate workers was a fluctuating group of volunteers, with 13 'on the books' at the start of the observation. Only 1 volunteer from the start of the study still remained at the end, the others having left and been replaced. During the observation period, several other temporary New Deal workers worked briefly in the shop (these staff were regularly relocated to other stores by Head Office). In all, the only constant members of staff were the manager and upstairs office team, otherwise it was a constantly shifting group, in many ways reflecting the unpredictable nature of the traditional charity shop, and the type of goods they sold. Integrally, the hierarchical structure that exists at the MCR is underpinned by a certain amount of formal, bureaucratic procedure, including the presence of certain stakeholders which are not part of the parent charity (in this instance, governmental agencies dealing with CPS and benefits) – something that, arguably, is only possible through the augmented professionalisation of charity shop operations.

The Independent Hospice Retailer case study showed a remarkably different hierarchical set up, which was more in line with the established manager/volunteer structures found in previous charity shop studies (Goodall, 2000b) (Parsons E. , 2002; Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007).

The Independent Hospice Retailer Hierarchy



*Figure 10: Independent Hospice Retailer Hierarchy*

In the IHR, the hierarchy of workers did not show the level of formality exhibited in the MCR. The only individual on the premises in paid employment with the charity was the manager, Derreck. Throughout the period of observation no other paid staff were hired.

There was no presence of CSWs or NDPWs, and the majority of the volunteers who were helping out at the start of the study were still doing so by the time it ended, with a few additions, several of whom were regular customers who joined the workforce during the observation period.

Juliet, a volunteer, covers for Derreck when he is on holiday, and acts as an unpaid manager. Occasionally, Derreck's wife Lydia, who is employed by the charity within the finance office part time, turns up to help out in the shop. One of the volunteers is a sister from the local convent, the nuns there having initially set up the hospice and still having a degree of involvement in fundraising for the charity. The researcher was unique amongst the volunteer cohort in being not from around that area, not previously related to the hospice, and being relatively young by comparison to the other volunteers. This meant that the researcher remained mostly in the 'new volunteers' category in Figure 3 throughout the six-month observation.

The non-contractual hierarchical structure at the IHR that is shown in Figure 2 does not divide comfortably into worker groups as it does in the MCR. On the shop floor, Derreck as manager presides over the day-to-day running of the shop. His role consists of everything from serving customers, carrying bags of donation to the back room and sorting them, organising recycling and rubbish dumping, dealing with paperwork and accounting, managing volunteers, and deliveries or pick ups using the charity shop's own van. Beneath him are an array of volunteers, two of whom have worked at the shop since before Derreck started 9 years ago. Although unspoken, a quiet hierarchy exists between volunteers; something that, as a newcomer, the researcher became increasingly aware of as time progressed.



## 6.1 Hierarchy of Duration of Service

A clear divide was acted out between the responsibilities, authority and trust delegated to different volunteers, depending upon how long they had worked in the shop. It did not necessarily correspond with how much experience or knowledge the volunteer had; it was more about Derreck developing a confidence in your abilities – in particular in relation to pricing knowledges. This was echoed by the sentiments of another volunteer when discussing the value judgements made on goods:

*T: I think Derreck would overrule me in my thoughts of value here...*

*S: That would depend if you took on a job here on a more permanent basis. As a volunteer, he may consult you [...] so long as he didn't feel demeaned by it, or whatever.*

- *Interview with Steve, IHR*

This volunteer is one of two who worked at the shop prior to Derreck's arrival, and speaks quite frankly about the informal hierarchy that develops in relation to length of service. Derreck happily makes value judgements on goods based upon the opinions of long serving volunteers (and his own prudence) but the same does not apply for short-term staff members. In general, the researcher is excluded from pricing as a task, with the one exception being a time when Derreck is away on holiday, and fellow volunteer Tamsin gets me to price up some bric-a-brac:

*“Tamsin tells me to fill the bric-a-brac shelves with ‘gifts’. She brings out lots of boxed, new goodies – make up cases, body products, gift sets, and so on. I am left to price them all, as she says, “I don’t know how much they should go for really.” I feel slightly uneasy as I don’t think Derreck likes the idea of me pricing things. One thing I notice is I find myself down-pricing items, as opposed to at [the MCR] where I put the highest amount I feel I could feasibly ask. I almost feel bad about this.”*

*– IHR Fieldnotes*

This was one of several instances where the dichotomous experience of two different charity shops case studies overlapped. Although the researcher was privileged at times with the task of pricing in the MCR, their pricing scheme differed from that of the IHR, as has been noted in Chapter 5. As a result, although the researcher believed in her competence in correctly pricing second-hand goods, she felt a need to adapt her pricing knowledge to the circumstances, something that jeopardised the set pricing structures in both shops. The reflexivity of useful ‘insider knowledge’ of second-hand markets (something that, as seen in Chapter 5, is used as a valuable resource) almost worked counterproductively, since the determinants of value in each shop were so vastly different. This, along with the researcher’s age and short duration of service, may have skewed the perception of the IHR manager as to her lack of pricing knowledge. In short: duration of service at the MCR did not impact as significantly upon the perceived knowledge required to make value judgments. Conversely, in the IHR this knowledge was presumed to have developed alongside the trust that came with long-term volunteering in the shop. The difference between these hierarchies became more acute when the researcher was permitted to exercise her pricing knowledge. The indication of a strong divide between the two case studies that can be seen in the two different worker hierarchies is reinforced by the perceived importance

of the length of service – especially considering the temporality of many of the volunteers, CSWs and even the assistant manager at the MCR – many of whom did not remain for the entirety of the observation period.

The extent of the hierarchies displayed in the two shops actually extends beyond the shop floor, and in both cases there is input from the higher management of the charity as to the running of the shop, including area and regional managers (MCR specifically) and even the Chief Executive (IHR). The involvement of extended formal hierarchies play a predominant role in the increasing professionalisation of charity shops according to Parsons & Broadbridge (2007); yet the flexibility of the non-formal hierarchical structures that manifests organically amongst the workers in the shop who are not under contractual obligation separates charity shops from the routinely fixed work structuring of first-hand commercial retail outlets.

Whilst these hierarchies are variable and the divisive elements numerous, the structures of informal conditions are based on two concrete categories of obligation, which differ from the contractual/formal obligations of paid employees. These have been termed the *conscientious* (adherence to the charity's authority) and the *collaborative* (committed to the collective aim of helping the charity). The adherence to these informal bonds not only encapsulates the unique nature of the professionalised charity shop, but signifies the limitations of imposing a rational structure in such a complex and anomalous shop environment.

## 6.2 Informal Obligations

It is worthwhile to begin this discussion of informal obligations with a caveat: if paid employees (encompassing managers, assistant managers, till workers, and even outsourced staff like delivery drivers or recycling operatives) operate under a formal obligation that is underwritten by a contract with the charity, formal conditions can still apply to a lesser degree to the workers that work under informal obligations in charity shops. As a rule, all obligations apply in some regard to every charity shop worker, yet it is *the predominant obligation according to their hierarchical position* that incites an individual to provide their labour that is dealt with in this chapter.

For instance, the paid charity shop employee may have many personal reasons for working in the role they do, but their position in the hierarchy is reinforced by their formal, contractual obligation to their employer, although the author acknowledges that, as with most formal contractual agreements, a degree of the contract will always be unspoken (Rousseau, 1995). Equally, a volunteer in certain instances may have some form of contractual agreement with the charity, and the New Deal and Community Service partnerships necessitate a formal agreement be reached between the two parties. Nonetheless, the obligations the volunteers experience are peculiar to their circumstances, providing them with a set of unique conscientious and collaborative restrictions and as a result, creating new tensions on the shop floor. It is these that will be deconstructed below.

Volunteer motivations have been previously theorized in charity shop research (Broadbridge & Horne [1994], Maddrell [2000], Horne & Maddrell [2002]). The concept of working for free is a curious matter, not least because early sociological assumptions about labour forces dictate that labourers are paid a wage in return for their efforts

towards creating use value and exchange value in an object. Consider the Marxist clause that states that profit is just another word for surplus taken from labourers. If true, then expansion in the charity shop sector can be directly attributed to increased profits, according to Marx's notion of growth:

*"To say that the worker has an interest in the rapid growth of capital is only to say that the more rapidly the worker increases the wealth of others, the richer will be the crumbs that fall to him, the greater is the number of workers that can be employed and called into existence, the more can the mass of slaves dependent on capital be increased"*

*(Marx, 2007[1867], 212)*

Yet in the context of the charity shop, 0% of profits go to the volunteers. Formal contract workers may benefit through wage increases, promotions or bonuses. Ostensibly, volunteers will see only intangible and distant pay offs for their labour in the future developments of the parent charity. Therefore, charity shop volunteers can be seen as operating under a different obligation within shop hierarchies to those under waged and contractual (therefore formal) obligations. The first of these is a conscientious obligation; that is, a sense of duty to the cause.

### **6.3 Conscientious & Collaborative Obligations**

A conscientious obligation comes from the need for previously-described organizational social capital (Leana & Van Buren III, 2012) – a fostering of conscientiousness, trust, duty, collaborative goal orientation, social cohesion, and at times a quasi-religious moral imperative. In the IHR, this is manifest due to the direct involvement of

a local convent in setting up the charity, and also the presence of the nun as a volunteer. Formal institutions such as religious organisations have strong links with the nascence of our present understanding of charity (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 17).

But even in the MCR and other charities without direct religious affiliation, there is still a sense of having a 'duty' to perform the tasks given to volunteers, in spite of the lack of input from a religious institution, something that spurs the individual to work collaboratively to earn money for the cause. The researcher's fieldnotes indicate at several points a feeling of obligation, as a volunteer, to act as one would in paid employment and take on the regulations that paid staff are restricted by:

*"I feel like my [major] role in the shop is to 'hold fort' while [Maria] gets paper work done upstairs. Therefore, when I go on my lunch, although technically I can take as long as I like, I am preventing her from getting work done as she has to mind the till. Therefore, I am always conscious of how long I take, even though I know I am not obliged to wait for my lunch. "*

- MCR Fieldnotes

On the same day, the researcher also notes:

*"... when Maria was on lunch I called up to ask if I could go on mine, and was snapped at (in a jovial way) as Maria said "I've only JUST gone on my lunch! When I've finished, you can go.""*

- MCR Fieldnotes

The researcher, as a volunteer, was informally obliged to mirror the role restrictions of paid (formally obligated) staff, in the interests of sustaining a level of organizational social capital (Leana & Van Buren III, 2012) in the workplace. These informal obligations function

similarly to the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995), in that they hold unspoken and unwritten expectations of the volunteer that could be subjectively interpreted. In particular, this understanding of obligations is synonymous with Rousseau's depiction of a 'relational' psychological contract – that is, one with emotional or social implications as opposed to a 'transactional' which is more distanced (ibid.) A notable outcome of these informal obligations to mirror the work structure of formally-obligated staff was a harmonious workplace (thus contributing to collaborative obligations); yet also to some degree, efficient, reliable and calculable work behaviour across the board – in line with Weberian notions of bureaucracy (Ritzer G. , 2011) and characteristic of a more professionalised charity shop.

The situation above was replicated more frequently in the MCR than in the IHR, where Derreck's relaxed attitude toward his staff meant the formal obligations were less enforced, and there were fewer restrictions in terms of timed breaks. This contributes to an overall sense that the MCR volunteer role played out more like a paid job, in terms of responsibilities, breaks and obligations, than at the IHR, attributable perhaps to the increasingly professionalised operations for that charity. But although the sanctions upon volunteer misbehaviour were more explicit at the MCR, they remained present at the IHR too. Maria's fondness for jokingly telling volunteers and paid staff alike to "*do some bloody work!*" or "*stop sitting around on the job*" differed from Derreck's only in their delivery. Maria adopted a personable yet direct, decisive and authoritative response to lax worker behaviour, whereas Derreck's manner was more *informal* – he would make a joke about laziness. The differing method of delivery did not change the fact that taking extra long breaks or turning up late were treated similarly in both shops, and resulted in two concurrent outcomes:

1. A subtle and non-coercive re-assertion of the legitimacy of the paid manager's authority (conscientious)

2. An alert to the threat of 'letting the team down' thus decreasing the social cohesion present amongst workers (collaborative)

Part of the psychological contract of informal obligation is the voluntary acceptance of authority (Fox, 1971, p.35) particularly when the incentive of money is removed from the equation, as is the case with volunteers. Thus, both Maria and Derreck have (Mead, 1934) no need to state rules regarding arrival times or lunch breaks – their authority is underwritten by their hierarchical position. This is also the case with more experienced volunteers in the IHR, as in the following example:

*"I arrive a little bit late and make some excuses. Derreck says "I thought we'd lost you for a second!" Rose [a volunteer] asks me "Did you oversleep." I feel terrible, and although they don't seem annoyed necessarily, I make sure I work extra hard that day so they don't think I am lazy."*

*"Rose is quite poorly today. She doesn't make much conversation and when I ask her what's wrong she tells me "I have been full of cold all week. And with this problem with my lungs, it's so hard to breathe." I tell her to go home and she says "No I can't, I'd have to leave Derreck on his own and I won't do that." I tell her I'll be here until four-ish, and she says "Well maybe I'll leave early then." She still hasn't left when I leave at 4:10pm."*

*- IHR Fieldnotes*

Above, IHR volunteer Rose feels a social obligation to help out her friend Derreck and not 'let him down'. Despite labour being effectively free and therefore not limited in terms of time, the onus upon the volunteer to stick to their psychological contract is reinforced by the informal obligations that are put upon them by others – a set of



collaborative obligations that within commercial business might simply be labelled as 'teamwork', but in the charity shop also represent a group consensus on the drive to achieve organisational social capital.

In the case of informal obligation by volunteers, Mauss' (1966: 13-14) depiction of the desire to 'outgive' others, or more specifically in this instance, not to be 'outgiven', can also come into play. Therefore, the gift of a volunteer's time and effort is an unspoken standard which the volunteer is obliged to living up to – as Whithear (1999, p. 119) points out, volunteers in the future will be increasingly required to provide tangible 'worth' as well as providing 'effort'. Due to the collaborative nature of volunteering as a social activity with the aim of helping others, the perceived value of a volunteer is something that is accountable by the other workers in the shop space. Social judgments and sanctions are made towards those who are not seen as pulling their weight, who jeopardize the collective goal that workers are striving towards. One does not want to, as Rousseau (1995) would term it, 'violate' their psychological contract unwittingly. Thus, as is clear in the exchange with volunteer Rose above, those working under informal obligations monitor themselves, and also the actions of others, to ensure the collective goal is maintained and social capital maintained.

One major issue, also identified as a future problem by Whithear (1999, p. 119) with the valuing of informal work and the adherence to psychological contracts is their juxtaposition with paid contractual workers. Juliet, a volunteer at the IHR who fills in as a temporary unpaid manager when paid manager Derreck is on holiday, feels strongly about what she sees as Derreck's lack of effort:

*"He does the bare minimum he has to but he could do so much more. You know, he won't respond to ideas [...] but for £20 grand a year he should do everything he can, I think."*

Group sanctions upon volunteers are more acute in the IHR because their longitudinal nature: they are a strong group of long-term volunteers, some of whom have been in service since before Derreck arrived 9 years ago. Therefore, there exists a collaborative obligation towards helping each other out, as well as helping the cause – and this is viewed by the volunteers as lucrative business behaviour. This is exhibited in the excerpt from volunteer Steve below, where he describes Derreck’s minimal enthusiasm for new ideas:

*“S: [...] When Derreck’s away, one of the volunteers runs the shop, and she will always have a 50 pence rail. Derreck doesn’t want to know! So as soon as he comes back it’s gone. Who am I to say?”*

*I: Do you not mind either way?*

*S: I do mind, I’d rather have a 50 pence rail [...] to me, it works, because people feel as if “Oooh I’ve got a real bargain there.” And the shoppers go out happy, because they’ve got two or three things off the rail, whereas they might not have bought anything [...]*

*T: Do you think that’s good business sense then, to have sales?*

*S: Yes. Yes, I do.”*

- Interview with Steve, IHR

Whilst exercising a large degree of diplomacy towards Derreck’s role as a paid manager (and thus exhibiting the teamwork, help-each-other-out ethos) throughout the interview, Steve does make some quiet objections to certain procedures that take place in the shop. As well as the absence of a sale rail which he would regard as a making good business sense, he also registers his disapproval with the under-pricing

of books; the unmethodical sorting of goods; the lengthy storage of items that could be recycled or sold to make room for new donations; the slow changeover of stock; and being asked to do things beyond the remit of a volunteer (at one point he states he was asked to *“Put the bloody shelves up in here.”* which he undertook because the unpaid manageress at that time was *“struggling”*.)

In the passage above Steve equates Derreck’s unbusinesslike decision-making with a lack of ‘charitablity’, and as being counterproductive to the aim of making money for the cause. Steve’s informal ‘obligation’ towards the charity conflicts with his loyalty to his friend and colleague, and to the customary adherence to managerial authority that legitimates decision making for managers (Fox 1971). Whilst it is clear that he wishes to be absolved from decision making (hence his remark *‘Who am I to say?’*) and shuns any formal obligations, he is aware that Derreck is preventing the commercial development of the shop, which is in conflict with the collaborative and conscientious obligations that drive his work.

This view is interpreted less diplomatically by other members of the volunteer cohort during the observation:

*“Tamsin is very disgruntled by the fact Juliet and the team work so hard and Derreck doesn’t. “He’s always huffing and puffing. He’s never very enthusiastic. The people who work here for free are the ones who really care about the place.””*

– IHR Fieldnotes

Therefore, the conscientious and collaborative obligations that voluntary IHR staff are under are jeopardised by the involvement of paid staff, despite the equally strong collaborative obligation that they feel about working as a team. Equating a lack of *‘good business sense’* to the only formally-obligated worker in the hierarchy suggests that the

small level of professionalisation that has taken place in the IHR by hiring a paid manager is, ironically, detracting from the level of commercial viability. The belief that “pay is a better guarantee of a good performance” (Whitehear, 1999, p. 117) may offend volunteers, resulting in resentment and scrutiny of their paid co-workers ‘worth.

Equally, critiquing the degree of ‘*care*’ and ‘*enthusiasm*’ Derreck displays infers that the paid manager detracts from the social organisational capital that is cultivated amongst the volunteers. The reflections above from Tamsin and Steve offer a different perspective to traditional bureaucratic theory, that characterise top-down, authoritative discourses in organisations (Weber, 1946), and thus to Whitehear’s (1999) Parson’s (2002) and Parsons and Broadbridge’s (2007) contemporary studies investigating the difficulties managers face when dealing with volunteer staff cohorts. Instead, these insights highlight the importance of peer relationships and associability alongside contractual bureaucratic authority in the collective and successful operation of the charity shop.

Difficulties that arise between paid and unpaid staff due to differing obligations are more muted in the MCR. The lack of a cohesive volunteer unit detracts from the collaborative elements of informal obligation, since volunteers rarely work together, and therefore do not build up the sense of community or level of candid rapport experienced in the IHR. For the majority of the observation, the researcher worked alone, or on occasion shared the till with New Deal sales assistants or paid staff. Both formally and informally obligated workers therefore were limited to ‘information peer relationships’ – in other words, at a superficial level, communicating mainly about work-centric topics (Kram & Isabella in Sias, 2009, p. 61). This may not be unusual for a first-sector organisation, but the lack of cohesive social relations is contradictory to perceptions of third sector or voluntary organisations, which are seen as a site of ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1983) in which volunteers involve themselves more than they even do their

home life due to their high levels of commitment to the cause and their peers.

Another viable explanation for the muted clash of obligations is that the level of standardised, bureaucratic efficiency evident in the MCR leaves little room for individual agency on the behalf of the workers. The main drive for attaining profits is ideologically entrenched in sets of instructions issued from head office, including set targets that must be achieved; therefore the perspectives of individual low-hierarchy workers are effectively overruled.

The rhetoric of informal obligations, in particular the ‘collaborative effort’ and helping people out to benefit the wider cause, takes precedence over those of formal obligations for MCR manager Maria when she refers to her hierarchical superiors outside of the shop space, particularly area manager Melissa. Maria bemoans the poor communication, lack of interest from management, and predominantly, a feeling of being generally unappreciated. Despite her professionalised rhetoric of profit margins and budgets, Maria resorts back to the lack in sentiments of charitability and informal ‘kindness’ when describing how Melissa does not acknowledge her efforts:

*“T: [...] you don’t feel that your managers appreciate you?”*

*M: They don’t, and I know they never will, [...] I mean, when my volunteers finish a shift I always thank them and everything. My area manager, she never tends to do that. Now, I make her more money than [any of the shops] in the whole country, and it’s been a week... I haven’t even had a phonecall or email to say ‘well done, you are a star’ and, you know, ‘I believe in you’ or anything.”*

*– Interview with Maria, MCR*

Maria was interviewed right at the beginning of a new financial year, and her shop had just succeeded in achieving the highest yearly shop takings in the country for that charity. She refers to the importance of social niceties like gratitude and 'thank yous', regular contact through phonecalls, or personal visits, and the general need for platitudes and compliments; all things that could correspond to the 'pastoral' discourses of work, and are often marginalised in professional business. Parsons & Broadbridge (2007, p. 532) note that 'retail' discourses are gradually replacing discourses of "charity and of care", and that charity shop managers often attempt to resist this, something Maria channels in the monologue above.

The rhetoric of collaboration is also present yet absent. Maria describes how she hasn't been told that *she* is a star, or that they believe in *her* when she talks about the money being made; surreptitiously linking the economic and thus commercial development of her shop to her individual, formal worker role. However she begins her comment with reference to her gratitude to her volunteers, and she ends it using the plural 'we' and 'us', emphasising the way that top-down pressures to achieve targets individualise charity shop workers, decreasing the organisational social capital that may have been built up by achieving the collaborative goal.

Maria's disenchantment with how she is treated within her hierarchy is indicative of how informal and formal obligations crossover when workers feel alienated from bureaucratic procedures. When responsibilities are individualised and collaborative work is undermined, paid workers resort back to the informal obligation of duty and karmic reward.

## 6.4 Alienation and Individualisation

Individualisation of paid workers under formal obligations is a theme in both case studies. Ulrich Beck (2000) claimed that due to technological advancements, globalisation, and the decline of previous categories of definition (such as class), the emphasis is now on the individual to be in control of their own destiny, and any social correlation is systematically undermined: “The emphasis today is on individual blame and responsibility [...], personal misfortunes and unanticipated events,” (Beck, 2000a, p.167). By disregarding wider social responsibilities and forcing individuals (in this context, through their paid contract) to take full responsibility, the organisation is distancing itself from traditional values of not-for-profit institutions, those of ‘accountability’ and ‘democracy’ (Goodall, 2000a, p.106).

This is echoed throughout the comments Maria makes regarding the regulatory procedures necessary in professionalised retail operations. She takes issue with poor communication from head office, particularly when it has implications for her personal work obligations. This is illustrative of traditional Marxist themes of alienation from waged labour, and the sensation of powerlessness, lack of agency, suppression of creativity and detachment from the end product (in this case, the charitable cause). This is particularly potent for Maria when she feels she has been subsumed into a vast network of workers but has no involvement or say in operations; as though she has no legitimate voice at all (Sarros et al., 2002). Below, she describes an incident in which a customer tries to pay with a Scottish note, and how her refusal based upon head office orders escalated into her needing to offer a personal apology to the customer for something she didn’t feel was her fault:

*“Head Office asked me, “Where did you get this [rule] from? You’re not allowed...” So I sent them the email I received from Head Office saying that we’re no longer allowed to accept Scottish notes. Then they go “Oh, that’s not what we meant. We meant you should check them properly.” But in the email it doesn’t say that. So they asked me to apologise for something I didn’t even do. [...] It wasn’t my personal fault, because I’m only trying to do my job according to the rules. [...] I was really frustrated with management [...] rather than stand by their decision, they threw everything on me and said “It was the manager’s fault”.”*

- Interview with Maria (MCR)

By individualising Maria’s actions and responsibility, the charity alienates her from her authoritative position in the hierarchy of the shop, and from the charity itself. Maria’s formal obligation to adhere to the parent charity’s rules does not protect her from individualisation by her superiors, and the formal framework then becomes problematic. Richard Scott (1981, p. 147) highlights the vital importance of communication and information transfer within organisation hierarchies, and the need for rules to be set out and formulated “precisely and explicitly” (p. 60) otherwise the professionalised system may break down and become inefficient. In instances such as the one above, the formal obligations of Maria’s role are not satisfactory to her, and as a result, she voices her faith in the informal, social obligation to continue working hard in her role:

*“It’s just my belief, maybe my management won’t appreciate what I’m doing or who I am, but maybe up there, somewhere, the money I make by putting extra into this place, maybe one day I get rewarded, and my children don’t end up like other people’s sometimes do. So I hope a reward will be my children having a good life.”*

Maria links the organisation’s function as a children’s charity to her own belief in a future ‘reward’, suggesting that the ‘warm-glow’



ideology (Andreoni, 1990) and the promise of attainment of social capital that serves as a motivator for many volunteers is not solely limited to unpaid staff. The intangible benefits Maria believes her offspring may reap allow her not only to enjoy her work, but to avoid feelings of disenchantment that go hand in hand with the invisibility of residing in a lower echelon of capitalist organisation structure. Thus, she compensates for the alienation she experiences with an appeal for a future 'reward' or karmic benefit: the quasi-religious motivations previously discussed in relation to conscientious obligations.

By 'borrowing and bastardising' the techniques of commercial organisations, the head office undermines the agency of the shop manager, leaving her feeling as unappreciated and alienated from the parent charity as the managing executives described by Goodall (ibid., p. 109) who abandon the cutthroat private sector to work for charity. It is only through embracing the informal obligations of helping others that Maria is able to comfort herself, and moderate the impacts of professionalisation upon her own work satisfaction.

This sense of alienation was exhibited in the IHR mainly by the volunteers, as was seen in the previous comments from Juliet and Steve above. Manager Derreck however, has a degree of freedom from the constraints of a network of hierarchical superiors because he runs the shop relatively independently:

*D: In the past, the person that was in charge before [Henry]; the nuns, Aloysius and Austin... If I needed anything doing it was: "Alan, do you know anybody?" ...You know. And I said "Yeah." And they said, "Right, get it done." With this chap you can't do that. He's got to have the last say.*

*[...]*

*T: Have they ever thought about taking on more paid staff here?*

*D: No. Well, I don't know if they have or not, that's their side of it not mine! I've seen my boss once this year. I mean to me, that's good. I mean he never comes here anyway, but I see him at the Hospice, you know, and he's like "Ey! I want to see you!" ... And I'll see him! [laughs]*

- Interview with Derreck, IHR

In the IHR, a level of professionalisation has taken place but its presence is minimal in comparison to the vast hierarchies in the MCR. Although the charity employs a paid manager, there is no worker hierarchy aside from that of Derreck's authority over his volunteers, and subordination to the charity chairman, Henry. Henry, formerly an architect, is absent from the hierarchy on the shop floor. If one takes a hierarchy to represent a "centralised communication system" (Scott, 1981), then the communication is extremely intermittent and the upper levels are not extensively involved in the shop floor operations. Henry doesn't visit the shop during the entire observation period, and doesn't like to be seen as hugely interfering:

*"I tend to mither Alan when he's overspending, but otherwise I leave him be."*

- Interview with Henry, IHR

Henry, however, has the 'right of the final word' (Simon in Fox, 1971, p. 34) in terms to changes that go on in the shop, in that he legitimately holds authority above Derreck. Derreck mentions at one point that it took "five years to get it [the shop] repainted" and that the roof, which is leaking during the interview, needs fixing but "we've got no money". He mentions that this didn't used to be the case when the shop was managed by the nuns, suggesting that implementing a paid professional in the decision making process has interrupted the natural hierarchy in the shop, and introduced similar communication and

informal issues to those experienced by Maria at the MCR. Under contractual obligation, Derreck is required to adhere to Henry's suggestions, yet the different terminology they use above shows their differing perspectives: Henry speaks of expenditure, very much the discourse of formal business, while Derreck stresses the informal, collaborative, co-operative elements of hierarchical exchanges – being seen as having a colloquial knowledge in how to 'get things done'. The two discourses indicate how both informal and formal obligations are evidenced in the IHR, and how the involvement of contractual responsibilities and hierarchies has not vastly altered operations there.

Whilst important in both of the case studies due to the tensions they create, the responses from staff at the MCR and the IHR differ. In the MCR, paid staff are frustrated by the irrationality of Head Office procedure, particularly the inability to effectively convey information down the hierarchical chain. In the IHR, volunteers are disgruntled by the lack of professional business techniques (and thus irrationality) of the *shop manager*. In summary; the inclusion of paid, formally-obligated staff creates issues up and above the shop floor hierarchy (towards invisible/distant head office management) in the MCR, and from volunteers towards their manager in the IHR. In both cases, the problem lies in a perceived inefficiency of authority figures that may serve to detract from their own labour.

Yet behind all of the breakdowns in professionalised structures is the drive of the workers' informal obligation to the cause, as highlighted by Juliet's comments about Derreck, and Maria's belief in karma that are detailed above. In these cases, the informal conscientious obligation or 'organisational social capital' (Leana & Van Buren III, 2012) they feel they have achieved supersedes the professionalising processes and any failings inherent within them.

Also key to the structure of the IHR and MCR worker hierarchies are the diverse distribution of tasks and roles and tailored working hours that have long been a staple characteristic of charity shops, but which now also incorporate a contemporary work flexibility. This has developed alongside the changing patterns of work in first-sector business.

### **6.5 The Flexibility of Contemporary Work**

In the charity shop, worker use value is treated as flexible - the responsibilities individuals are given and the way they are treated by others is not something that is necessarily fixed according to a job title. This is a trend that can be identified in the field of work in general, and flexibility of work roles is another characteristic of destandardisation and individualisation of work practices (Beck, 2000a; Castells, 2001) although these theses are most often attributed to locational and temporal flexibility (Edgell, 2006) as opposed to diversification and individualisation of duties. However, one thing that Castells in particular highlights is how this diversification of work, although suitable for the strengthening of capital and therefore in line with more professionalised profit-motivated work structures, actually undermines the labour in and of itself and results in work which is “disaggregated in its performance, fragmented in its organisation, diversified in its existence, divided in its collective action.” (Castells, 2001, p.506).

It has been noted that due to the generally ‘messy’ operations of a traditional charity shop, managers must often organize their workers on an ad-hoc, spontaneous basis, dependent upon how much stock comes in, how many volunteers are available and what resources they

are able to employ. Examples of role flexibility taken from the observation notes include the following:

- A community service worker is given tasks to do on the shop floor of the MCR, where normally they are restricted to working in the back room and are not 'public-facing'.
- As an MCR volunteer, the researcher is left in charge of the shop, while all the paid staff were absent or on breaks, as a 'substitute manager'.
- The researcher was required to take money to the bank to pay into the MCR's business account.
- Elderly MCR volunteer Alan was limited to steaming and labelling (but not pricing) goods in the backroom and was not allowed to serve on the till without another worker beside him.
- In the IHR, volunteer Juliet was credited with the responsibility of running the shop when Derreck was off, although she was not paid for it.
- In the IHR, Sarah and Rose get to choose which jobs they will undertake. They both opt only to do ironing; whilst Agatha will only serve on the till.

The last example suggests that volunteer duties are adapted in the IHR to suit the individual volunteer and maximize their use value, or find the role in which they are most comfortable and most able to work, as illustrated by this discussion with volunteer Steve:

*"T: Did you ever do the ironing or any of that sort of stuff?"*

*S: Nope, I've never been involved [laughs]*

*[...]*

*T: Rose used to do it. That was all she did.*

*S: Oh she did yes, she came in and would spend hours and hours doing the ironing.*

*T: She didn't do anything else as I recall! She was brilliant at it so...*

*S: Well some people just fit into a slot, don't they?"*

*– Interview with Steve, IHR*

This data mirrors that found in the 2006 Skills Survey, that found non-profit workers were more likely to believe they had a large degree of choice and agency in how they do their job, more so than workers in the public or private sector (Donegani et al., 2012, p.6). This has much in common with Meijs and Hoogstad's (2001) description of 'membership management systems' in European volunteer organisations. This kind of system operates with tasks being organised around the volunteers' expectations, as opposed to 'programme management systems', favoured by American organisations, which identify what tasks need to be done and then identify volunteers best suited to undertake them (ibid.). This practice has more in common with traditional principles of Taylorism and standardised working procedures, which are quite difficult to implement in a workplace where the participants and their reasons for working are so diverse. Programme management systems are a key element of professionalisation, in particular when enforcing mandatory tasks that may be less pleasant or positive for the volunteer (Meijs & Karr, 2004), although this method has been said to be contrary to the ethos of volunteering. It can also enforce obligations that volunteers actively object to, as Derreck explains in relation to his voluntary manager cover, Juliet:

*“D: Juliet won’t do the cash [...] she won’t do the accounts, so that’s left for me then, when I come back. [...]”*

*T: Is it because she doesn’t want the responsibility?”*

*D: Yeah. I mean, she’s taking responsibility by taking the keys off me for a fortnight, you know what I mean?”*

*- Interview with Derreck, IHR*

Juliet’s ascension to her role as temporary surrogate manager therefore brings (as part of a purely psychological contract) a plethora of additional responsibilities that she is no way formally obliged to undertake. Instead, Derreck concedes that her role is being fulfilled exponentially to volunteer requirements as it is: she is enhancing her ‘use value’ sufficiently by taking on the managerial role. In the context of a membership-managed system (Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001; Meijs & Karr, 2004) Juliet has limited the task to the extent of her personal comfort and capabilities. In a programme-managed system, ensuring the smooth-running of the task would be seen as a priority, and another volunteer who could complete the tasks more fully may be found. This may result in negative outcomes such as a decrease in organisational social capital (Leana & Van Buren III, 2012, p.44) if the volunteer feels they are under appreciated.

Making mandatory unfavourable tasks (such as those which are difficult, tiring or particularly unpleasant) is problematic when the workers hold a mix of formal and informal obligations. It was noted that staff members at the MCR tended to shirk specific responsibilities that they didn’t want to do:

*“Emily is sent to buy some bleach to clean the toilet upstairs. [...] I talk to Pam [GIK office worker] upstairs about this when she comes down to get lunch and she explains, “Well, it’s nobody’s set job, so nobody ever gets around to doing it. Like washing up really. I always run some hot water after the morning in the sink, and by lunch you can guarantee it’s full of dirty plates and cups. I think the job should be delegated out between us all.””*

- MCR Fieldnotes

Even with the array of formally and contractually-obligated workers at the MCR, the delegation of work roles is not always clear. In part this is caused by the extent of differing formal and informal hierarchies, which mean that there is confusion over who is responsible for what tasks. However this is a tenuous part of any contract, as Rousseau (1995, p. 1) notes, contracts are always incomplete due to the fact organisational environments are so consistently altering and adapting. They can never fully encompass all the necessary conditions. A key issue with having informal and formal obligations where some are contract based and some are not is the lack of role visibility, and therefore the reliability on distribution of tasks.

The flipside to the informal and flexible allocation of obligated roles and subsequent volunteer ‘value’ within the charity shop hierarchical system is that if they cannot fulfill the require tasks, some individuals face being excluded or arbitrarily neglected. This is particularly troublesome when it comes to volunteers, who receive no remuneration aside from “perceiving support from the organisation in the form of recognition, being valued, and feeling the organisation cares about one’s well-being.” (Farmer & Fedor, 1999, p.355), therefore are particularly sensitive to exclusion. This can be seen evidenced in the MCR observations, which leads to further questions around the relative, attributed value of volunteer participation, and the way the



formal and informal roles in charity shops may indicate a downside to the professionalisation (and thus, individualisation and destandardisation) of worker roles.

## 6.6 Exclusion

As mentioned earlier, elderly volunteer Alan works a short shift of three hours every Monday afternoon in the MCR, but is not permitted to go on the till unsupervised. His skills are restricted to that which Maria is comfortable having him do, as opposed to what he is *comfortable doing* (as is the case with Rose and Sarah ironing in the IHR). This is an example of how contemporary work frequently instigates a ‘polarisation of skills’ (Penn, Rose, & Rubery, 1994), in which those who are already capable and have knowledge or skills are in demand, and thus can develop their skills further; meanwhile, those with limited skills are not, and their abilities remain undeveloped due to lack of opportunities for growth. Certain skills are favoured over others – in particular speed, efficiency and technical skill (Grugulis, Warhurst, & Keep, 2004). Alan is, in particular, methodical with his work, which is the reason for Maria’s decision about his duties:

*“[Maria] sighs and says, “He pesters me, he’s like “I want to go on the till. Let me go on the till,” but he’s so slow. He’s like, not that useful. So I keep him out the back, but even then he doesn’t really do stuff properly. Like this [she holds up a top with a mark on it]. We wouldn’t bother to steam and label this and put it out. He’s not checking enough.”*

– MCR Fieldnotes

In another instance, the researcher is telling Maria that Alan has phoned up to let us know he won't be coming in as he's unwell:

*"I say "Alan called up yesterday to tell you he's not coming in..." and she says, "Oh I got excited then for a second. I thought you meant he was never coming back!"*

*– MCR Fieldnotes*

Maria does not respond to Alan as somebody who has much 'use value' to the organisation – in fact she sees his presence on the shop floor as somewhat of a nuisance. This opinion is heightened by her description of him during fieldwork as "*rather slow*", something that is also recorded in observational accounts taken when the researcher was working with him on the till.

During an occasion when a drunk gentleman is acting suspiciously in the store, the researcher notes that "*Alan does not seem to be very effective for surveillance – he doesn't pay attention to the man at all*". In another instance, his work on the till alongside the researcher is described as "*slow*" but "*methodical to ensure he doesn't miss anything*", and his attitude "*brusque [...] towards customers*". Alan's value as a volunteer is undermined because of his lack of speed and proficiency with commercial retail techniques, for example, friendly and efficient customer service. Upskilling is a prominent element of professionalised retail sales forces (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007, p. 554) where within the shop context the individual must manage and control themselves in order to conform to a set business standard (ibid. p. 555). This notion of self-management ties in with contemporary understandings of 'individualisation' (Beck, 2000a) where progressively individuals must monitor and improve their own behaviour by being aware of the various threats to their worker autonomy.

Alan's value as a volunteer is undermined by elements of his behaviour that could in part be explained by his age. As he has grown older, his inability to perform to the ascribed volunteer 'standard' leaves him prone, in the professionalised, modern charity shop setting, to be labelled as a failure within the somatic context of 'success' (Jones & Higgs, 2010, p.1518). Aspects that affect his position in the hierarchy relate strongly to Alan's age: his inability to work long hours; predisposition to ill health and tiredness; difficulty picking up new skills and fear of change of routine. In contrast to the traditional charity shop staffed wholly by a retired cohort, a contemporary, professionalised charity shop like the MCR does not naturally avail itself to an elderly person who is not accustomed to technological retail advances. As will be shown in detail in Chapter 7, tills at the MCR are complicated electronic devices with numerous different options for item input, set procedures need to be followed for card transactions, the recording of Gift in Kind purchases, the registration procedure of Gift Aid forms and so on. These are things that can be learnt with the opportunity for practice over time, though this is something that Maria states she is not keen for him to do, instead opting to keep him relegated to the back room space and away from the shop floor.

The back room area is usually occupied by those under legal obligation to work, that is, community service workers undertaking menial tasks like cleaning and steaming. It is indicative of the low hierarchical status of those working there, shielded away from customers and other staff. Although not associated with the rhetoric of deviance in the same way as the CSWs, less-able volunteers like Alan find their value similarly degraded by a generalised deskilling of their roles – something that stems mainly from the administrative and managerial implementations of business models. (Braverman, 1974). As a result, their location in the shop floor hierarchy is degraded to the lowest tier (see Figure 9).

Traditionally, the elderly were associated with charity shop volunteering because the sector was characterised by its social advantages, and the general non-taxing nature of the work involved (Broadbridge & Horne, 1994a). But from a contemporary, profit-driven perspective, just having these people on the shop floor is treated as burdensome. As Maddrell notes, it is time consuming to train up staff who work minimal hours, are resistant to new methods of work and are limited in what they feel comfortable doing (2000, p. 133). In some instances, the management of volunteers is seen as more of an inconvenience than a benefit (Whithear, 1999, p. 117).

As a result of the bureaucratic undermining of his informal, collaborative role, Alan is isolated. He complains to the researcher how he would like to do more hours, mentions that he volunteers because he gets *"bored to tears"* being on his own in his flat, and asks Maria every week if he can go on the till. She sometimes allows him a half hour window at the end of his shift where another staff member must supervise him, because she does not trust him not to make mistakes. Although volunteering is frequently regarded as a therapeutic experience for older people (Maddrell 2000, p. 131), it seems that by attempting to attain professionalised standards, Alan and other less skilled volunteers are effectively marginalised and their use value to the organisation is restricted.

Gregson, Brooks and Crewe wrote about how the 'professionalisation project' of charities results in the "marginality of volunteers" (Gregson et al., 2002) and how the two competing motivations of 'charity as fundraising profit' and 'acting charitably' clash considerably within the charity shop space (p. 1677). Ultimately, one of the main roles of a charity shop is to earn money for the charity. It is the obligation of the charity as a whole to fulfil a 'social' role in order to be seen to be 'acting charitably' (Parsons, 2002, p. 8), however this obligation is informal (or part of another "psychological contract")

- managers like Maria who are under pressure to hit targets and raise store income are formally obliged to manage the store in order to attain the primary goal of profit for the charity. This may therefore at times eclipse the hierarchical status of the volunteer.

Notions of informal obligation are both literally and figuratively diametrically opposed, as is the inherent conflict between charitable action and capitalism. An *obligation* to act charitably presupposes the act to be 'uncharitable' – that is, something that one is doing under some degree of duress. It is fundamentally opposite to the idea of the volunteering as a 'gift' that individuals give back to their community that has been described in Chapter 3.3. Equally, discourses of internal competition (within the chain of MCR shops), with the end aim of encouraging all shops to up their profits to raise money for the cause, introduces a need for ruthlessness and rivalry that is not harmonious with the co-operation and associability built in the form of organizational social capital (Leana & Van Buren III, 2012) and can result in alienation for volunteers as a membership-management system becomes eroded by an enforced programme-management system (Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001; Meijs & Karr, 2004).

Acknowledging the difficulties that social/informal obligations cause in the charity shop space does not fully complete the picture of the contemporary charity shop, as the MCR case study had other staff members whose work complemented the paid and voluntary staff. Again, their hierarchical position was problematic. These workers, as part of New Deal Partnerships and Community Service, illustrate some crucial hidden elements of the hierarchy of the contemporary charity shop: the insidious involvement of the state in the operations of charity; the contentious use of convicted criminals constituting the work of 'doing good' by a formal, legal requirement; and the increasing necessity for these formally obligated workers in the modern charity shop, in light of decreasing availability of volunteers (Whithear, 1999,

p.119; Croft, 2002, p.93) and the issues around reliability, role-flexibility and skill sets that come hand in hand with their informal obligations to work.

## **6.7 State Obligations**

The numerous complexities of the case study hierarchies, in terms of identifying authority, organising roles and maintaining social cohesion, are further complicated by the involvement of conscripted Job Centre 'trainees' from the New Deal Partnership (or NDP) at the MCR. These workers sit between the informal obligations of volunteers, and the formal obligations they have towards the scheme and the government. They work under a formal obligation to receive pay, but their activities are not formally contracted to the charity – they receive reimbursement in the form of benefits, thus they are limited to part-time hours. In terms of their hierarchical position in the shop, they take precedence over volunteers in many cases, however, being long term unemployed they are frequently learning basic skills and require extensive training. The end result is further tension to the informal hierarchies exhibited within the charity shop space.

The New Deal policy was implemented by the Labour government in 1998 in a drive towards labour market reform. Its primary aim was to encourage people (particularly young people) back into employment through various schemes that were set up through the Job centre with businesses and organisations in the public, private and charity sectors. The presence of the scheme within the MCR was downplayed by the other staff working there - the researcher only discovered that the scheme was in place by asking those who she had assumed were paid till staff how they had applied for their job.

NDP placements are a form of internship or traineeship. They are, therefore, subject to a more professionalised work ethos than the volunteer due to the formal obligations of their contract. They adhere to the rules of formally-contracted staff with regards to breaks and hours of work, and must wear a 'uniform' of smart attire. The formal sanctions upon them to conduct themselves in a certain way in the workplace are not only obligations to the shop and its parent charity. NDPWs are formally obligated towards the state, and the benefits agency. Thus, the formal obligations of NDPWs are entangled within both the public and third sectors.

The presence of New Deal Community Partnerships within charity shops is characteristic of how professionalisation is promoted as mutually beneficial to communities *and* to the charitable cause. Issues of unemployment, dissatisfaction at levels of local government community involvement, and critiques of charity adopting capitalist organizational procedures can be tackled simultaneously with the cause, by combining the forces of business, local policy and charities with the overall aim of getting more people joining a skilled labour force, thus 'adding value' to the community in multiple ways (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p.36; Paddison, 2000, p.165).

More importantly for this study, the introduction of New Deal Partnership workers (or NDPWs) within charity shops is only possible with the increased bureaucratisation and professionalisation of charity, and with the input of funding and co-operation from local government. This interdependence of charities, businesses and policy are seen as part of an increasingly formalised process of sustaining the socially cohesive networks that, traditionally, charity shops informally perpetuated in their locality anyway (see Horne & Maddrell 2002, p. 17). Indeed, charity shops have frequently co-operated with local businesses (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 61) and the introduction of Gift in Kind schemes (discussed in detail in Chapter 7) and other joint

ventures occurred informally prior to the introduction of a bureaucratised network.

Due to the fact that NDPW motivations exist somewhere between a contractual obligation to the charity and a formal obligation to 'show willing' to work to the Job Centre, they are set up to act under problematic and possibly conflicting obligations. Add into the equation the presence of an informal hierarchy (within which they hold more jurisdiction than most volunteers) and the resulting tensions that emerge are palpable, especially in their perceived 'use value' in relation to other paid staff, and volunteers. At one point during the MCR observation, a NDPW (Dave) from a nearby charity shop who has been called in to help out is complaining to the researcher about the paid staff and other volunteers not pulling their weight:

*"Dave is on the till when I start work. He immediately goes to decode stock around the store and spends much of the day doing this. He complains most shifts about the amount of work he does in comparison to Arran who has the same [position] as him: a paid SA from the job centre. He says, "Arran just bloody stands there. He never does anything unless Maria tells him to. It's like he's frozen to the spot!""*

*"[Dave] is complaining about the amount of work he has to do [...] he says to me "You're the hardest working volunteer I've met so far!""*

*– MCR Fieldnotes*

Dave's view encapsulates the difficulties involved in assigning 'usefulness' to workers in a professionalised charity shop. If we were to return to Marx's idea of what constitutes business growth, then a sales assistant who is paid by the government to stand there 'doing nothing' is never going to be as 'useful' or 'valuable' to the charity than a volunteer who is paid nothing – in fact they could be considered



detrimental. This view can be contrasted with Derreck's depiction of some of the IHR volunteers below:

*"D: I just recently started two in the last 6 weeks or so, that were customers... I started them and... they're just like two robots.*

*T: Is that a good thing?*

*D: Yeah, they get on here, and they'll do anything [...] they do everything, they'll clean everywhere."*

- *Interview with Derreck, IHR*

Derreck sees having two work 'robots' at hand as ideal, particularly as they are seemingly unlimited in the tasks they can undertake. Dave views MCR assistant Arran differently, he sees him as 'useless' (and indeed, this view is echoed by Assistant Manager Emily who states that he is "*just rubbish*" and "*leaves the place in a complete shambles*" and that she wishes he would be fired). The expectations of Arran are in line with his elevated position within the shop hierarchy and his *formal* obligations, which infer that he should be more 'useful' than an unpaid, informally-obligated volunteer.

Put simply, the profits the charity gleans from organising a New Deal partnership cannot be simply monetary, since the prospective profit from using solely volunteers is 100%. Instead, as with many other professionalising processes in the charity shop, the New Deal partnerships are indicative of a new emphasis upon training and upskilling in the charity shop, which suggests a prospective benefit to the charity in the future in the form of more adept, skillful workers (Whithear, 1999) with the aim of "maximising the efficiency and effective-ness of the retail trading operation, largely incidentally to it being a source of funds for charitable purposes" (Croft, 2002, p. 93). Additionally, the partnerships represent the strength of government and third sector ties, which are necessary to build community links

between the two. In short, charities are 'supplementing' government third sector provision (Bryson et al., 2002, p.51) by becoming involved in wide scale employability drives. This is a bureaucratic system that is being used to enhance community development. By bringing in benefit seekers to work for their benefits and learn workplace skills on the job, they are creating use value for their charitable cause, and fulfilling the role of an apprenticeship or traineeship by initiating the NDWP into the work environment.

As a result, the formal obligations of NDPWs contribute towards the social role of the charity shop, and charity in general. The 'quiet' hierarchy of the charity shop, enabled through bureaucratic and professionalised measures and partnerships and 'programme-managed systems' (Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001; Meijs & Karr, 2004) operates to help engage the community that surrounds it in spite of the use of capitalist ideologies. Though the partnership members may treat this move as fortuitous, the lower hierarchies in shops are being transformed as a result, which may have a lasting impact upon the informal obligations of volunteers in the future. This is the risk that Whitehear (1999) predicted when he studied in the impacts of paid workers in charity shops over 10 years ago.

In addition to state obligations for NDPWs, there is another type of worker in the MCR who are under state-obligation. These are the individuals, assigned to the back room space and often hidden from customers, who are completing community service orders.

## **6.8 Legal Obligations**

The final set of workers who work under state obligations are community service workers (CSWs). These have been categorised in a

subcategory of *legal obligations* because they are required by law to turn up and work in the shop. Retribution for petty crimes and rehabilitation into a working lifestyle are the obligations that community service workers are under; therefore it is another form of formal obligation. However, they are not formally contracted to the charity itself – instead they work under the formal obligations of the state: specifically, the Crown Prosecution Service. These unpaid workers are a virtually invisible minority amidst the hierarchies of paid and volunteer staff in the charity shop. Their work, shrouded in secrecy and frequently ‘behind the scenes’ of the shop floor, infiltrates the charity shop links to the state with an intangible threat of the criminalised other, and forms another extension of the ‘quiet hierarchy’ in the contemporary charity shop.

Most shifts at the MCR involved at least one, often two CSWs stationed in the back room. Working half or full day shifts as their sentence required, CSWs would spend the majority of their time steaming, hanging or sorting items. As they are not permitted to work on the tills or ‘face’ the customers, they work the days and hours required of them ‘backstage’ in the stock room. During the six months observation, the researcher was not once asked to work alongside them. Only two instances occurred when they joined the researcher on the shop floor, and that was when stock ‘decodes’ took place (a systematic removal of items that had been on display for longer than two weeks). Their reliability was questionable, and often they did not turn up for allocated shifts, leaving the manageress struggling:

*“[Maria:] We’ve had two community service call in sick today, so I am so glad to see you!”*

- *MCR Fieldnotes*

They also required a large degree of supervision, and needed instruction on which task they were undertaking on that particular

day; unlike volunteers who would generally take up the same role everyday in both the MCR and IHR alike. Emily describes an instance when Maria is unable to come in due to a personal issue, and she rushes in to work on her day off to be confronted with a store bereft of volunteers:

*"[Emily:] I had no staff, and it was so busy. I had two community service guys, but I didn't have time to give them anything to do. It was that busy. So I sent them home."*

- *MCR Fieldnotes*

Horne & Maddrell report similar findings in their study of Oxford charity shops, with managers describing their CSWs as needing "more supervision" and "not enthusiastic workers" (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 95). They also added to the administrative workload of the manager, who was required to report back weekly to the CPS on who had turned up, for how many hours and so on.

But one particular element of a CSW's formal obligation that can prove detrimental to the social shop environment is their reason for being there in the first place: the fact they have broken the law. The use of convicted criminals in charity shops is commonplace across the UK and America, although at times the use of them is not even imparted to area managers or head offices; let alone the general public (p.92). The use of 'tainted' workers and the subsequent discourses of deviance are the most covert work arrangement in the charity shops that were studied – so much so that the researcher was not made aware initially that they were operating under any other different obligations to normal volunteers. Because of this, the degree of risk and threat of 'otherness' in the shop is exacerbated – the fact that they were *not allowed anywhere near monetary transactions of any kind* is testament to this.

These workers are restricted *spatially* (in their movements around the shop), *temporally* (they work set hours and are only permitted breaks of a certain length of time) and *interactionally* (they only communicate with the manager or assistant manager in charge. Chatting with other staff is prevented by their back room limitations). CSWs are therefore unwittingly stigmatised within the social network of the charity shop, despite theoretical claims that charity shops are viewed as inclusive spaces ideal for meeting and getting to know people (Whithear in Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 79). They represent a type of 'stigmatised self' described by Goffman (1963) as having 'blemishes of character' due to their criminal background. By defining different roles for CSWs, the charity shop distinguishes legal obligations as separate from the social or contractual obligations described above.

The incident described below occurred towards the end of the observation period that resulted in the dismissal of a CSW from the shop by probation services. It illustrates the discourse of deviance in action. Helen, the second assistant manager, interrupts my shift to ask me if I would "*know what drugs look like.*" She then shows me a small bag of white powder that has been found in the upstairs toilet. After speculating that the drug might be Ketamine, Helen flushes it down the toilet and the incident is largely forgotten for that day. On my next shift she tells me what developed following the find, involving a CSW who had been working in the shop that day:

*"[Helen:] The guy we thought it might've been was working. And he kept going to the toilet, and because of what happened I was suspicious. So he worked all morning and then he went to the loo for the 7<sup>th</sup> time, and afterwards I went in there too, and I saw the remnants of that stuff along the top of the hand dryer. It was definitely him and I was up all night worrying about what I would do. In the morning I rang Maria, it was her day off, and I told her what happened. She said I had to report it to*

*probation services. So I did. They [...] said that he wouldn't be coming back and that's all I know.*""

- MCR Fieldnotes

Helen and all the other charity shop participants were, in this instance, exposed to the threat of marginalised behaviour being brought into the backstage area of the charity shop. Although measures are taken to protect customers from CSWs by only involving them in background work, in this example the CSWs actions highlight the possible issues permitting petty criminals into the charity shop space can possible cause. By involving workers like CSWs and NDPWs under formal obligation in a space formerly reliant upon collaboration, generosity and trust through *informal obligation*, the risk of alienation through actions such as that documented above can threaten not only the likelihood of attracting volunteers but customers too; not to mention the charity image as a whole.

## **6.9 The 'Quiet Hierarchy'**

To protect the charity's reputation and the customers who shop in its stores, the *quiet value economy* of the charity shop (described in chapter 5 in relation to the subtle transactional discrepancies that go on in spite of the increased bureaucracy in the shops) is also replicated in the worker hierarchies that are seen in the shops. Invisible 'psychological contracts' (Rousseau, 1995) are present for both paid and unpaid staff; collaborative work that should be contributing to the organisational social capital is being individualised; legitimate authority from superiors is challenged through the informal and social obligations of unpaid workers; upskilling and deskilling is taking place in relation to volunteers in spite of the perceived 'social mission' of

charity; hierarchical chains of command are breaking down due to failures in communication, leading to a re-investment in the more informal obligations to the charitable cause; and most potently, the flexibility and adaptability of charity shop work is threatened by stigma and exclusion leading to restriction of roles for certain types of volunteer, and for those under legal obligation to work there.

The research deems this to be the *quiet hierarchy* of the contemporary charity shop. It has developed alongside the *quiet value economy* of haggling and pricing negotiations to represent a complex network of roles, rights and obligations, some of which are distinctly 'marginal' in their nature. Once again, this hierarchy is not visible to the customers who shop in the store, and as previously mentioned, the extent of the worker diversification may be shielded from the parent charity too (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 92). By operating this hierarchy externally to the bureaucratic processes of professionalised business, the charity shop re-asserts its status as a retail and third-sector anomaly.

The competing discourses that become apparent through the use of marginalised workers is also clear in the charity shop's sale of 'tainted' goods, which will be further explained in Chapter 7 in relation to the *quiet gift economy* of police evidence and goods made by prisoners. All of the marginal elements that enhance the profitability of the shop and build relationships between the state and charity have the additional social threat of the deviant 'other'. They also serve to contribute towards the 'quiet' operations in charity retail practices.

## 6.10 Summary

This chapter has unpicked the hierarchy in the charity shop with an emphasis upon informal obligations and the volunteers who operate under them. Formal obligations are part of the evolution charity shops that only really began in the 1980s with a generalised drive towards 'profit maximisation' (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 85), and this has developed exponentially leading to the introduction of subsidiary workers groups of NDPWs and CSWs. They diversify the quiet hierarchy more extensively and increase the involvement of state operations like the CPS and the benefits agency in third sector retail operations. The next chapter of this thesis will examine the *quiet gift economy*, which expands upon the idea of charity dependence upon public services and incorporates the increasing tendency for mutually-beneficial bulk stock donations from private companies. The intersection between the three sectors will be examined using the examples of Gift Aid and Gift in Kind, and will broaden the idea of an invisible set of charity shop operations that are executed subtly in addition to the professionalising processes documented elsewhere in charity retail literature.



## CHAPTER 7

### The Philanthropic, The Public & The Commercial:

#### The 'Quiet Gift Economy'

The charity shop currently exists at an intersection between the first sector and the third sector, and as we have seen in the previous chapters, it acts on behalf of both commercial and philanthropic endeavours, which are negotiated through a *quiet value economy* and through *quiet hierarchies* that develop as a result of these aberrations. As previously mentioned, these two subtle processes are taking place within two of the more bureaucratic and professionalised elements of the charity shop operation: the structuring of pricing, and the stratification of worker hierarchies. As these begin to problematise the cohesive argument for an organised 'professionalisation' of charity shops (Parsons E. , 2004) through their subtle and flexible subversion of administrative rules, a further example of the quiet charity shop economy is found to extend beyond individual shops, through the network of ties that they have with the public and private sectors. In this research this is termed the *quiet gift economy*.

Through the process of this research it has become apparent that these more covert management networks temper the process of professionalisation and allow it to be profitable for the parent charity, whilst still retaining and utilising the more unpredictable elements of a traditional charity shop (flexible pricing and a diverse workforce). Shops have exercised a pragmatic response to the regulatory practices of governance of charity retail, and the pressures of commercial money-making, by finding a lucrative niche the rests in between the two. This chapter will examine the presence charity shops have within a wider network of commercial and state links, using the examples of

Gift Aid and Gift in Kind to show their implicit dependency upon commercial and governmental resources. The shops studied provide interesting case studies that highlight not only the resourcefulness and adaptability of charity that has benefited them during the recent economic downturn; but also how they utilise their heterogeneity in terms of stock, prices and workers as a powerful tool for profit. This develops upon past research which has described charity retail being run as an irrefutably 'professional retail environment' (Parsons E. , 2002, p. 3), to include the adoption of quiet economies, hierarchies and the quiet gift economy described below, in order to temper the contradictions thrown up by the collaboration of charity and consumerism.

Charity shops, although inconsistent in nature and varying in their level of commercial development, are required to operate under standardised UK laws and governance. In relation to goods sold, they are subject to trading safety laws (for instance, certain safety standards in toys must be met, and electrical goods for sale must be tested to ensure they are not dangerous before sale [Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 21]). VAT is payable on 'bought-in' goods, in the same way as it is for first-sector shops, but the law is tenuous in this respect, and rate discounts are given to charities if they sell 'mainly' donated goods (Horne & Broadbridge, 1995). The definition of the term 'mainly' is not concrete, meaning many charity shops operate under generous taxation allowances, permitting the shops with a majority of bought-in or new goods to escape from taxation at the discretion of their local authority (*ibid.*), although these operations again form part of an unrecognised or 'quiet' economy of charity shop finance.

Also, up for dispute is the definition of a 'new good'; a term that is debatable in a shop where the sourcing of items is frequently concealed from customers, volunteers and even the tax man, as will be detailed below. Introduction of 'Gift in Kind' donations (massed

donation of goods from both large and small profit-making companies) illustrates an intrinsic tie to commercial endeavours that is not made explicit in the shop or by charities in general. Although a reliance upon business investment in the form of social enterprising or 'venture philanthropy' has been acknowledged by previous literature (Bornstein & Davis, 2010; Frances & Cuskelly, 2008; Pepin, 2005; Borzaga & Defourny, 2001), this has rarely been attributed to the work of charity shops, who were treated frequently as self-sufficient establishments that operated without a large degree of 'help' from either the parent charity or the first-sector. Instead, they traditionally relied almost entirely upon free labour and donated goods to make their money (Horne & Maddrell, 2002). As we have seen earlier in this thesis, contemporary charity shops are changing. Not only are they becoming savvier about how to employ commercial organisations to service their needs; they are also using their position as recipients of mandatory tax relief to enhance the benefits they receive from these commercial links.

In other words, charity shops now represent a symbiotic relationship between legislative governance and corporate profiteering. The result is a seemingly profitable balance, which is treated as beneficial to all of its constitutive elements – not only the recipients of the charitable earnings of the cause, but also those who rely upon the philanthropic provisions of the charity shop: the low cost goods, for example.

In this chapter, the balance between governmental and commercial imperatives will be examined and critiqued using two specific examples from the case studies: Gift Aid, and Gift in Kind. These two 'strategies' are already recognized elements of third sector fundraising, but they hold special significance within the charity shop as the point of crossover between policy, philanthropy, and capitalism. Both Gift Aid and Gift in Kind represent the emergence of a 'quiet gift

economy': that is, a system of symbiotic exchanges between the three sectors. The existence of these illusive ties goes some way towards explaining how the status of 'charitable goods' is controvertible, and how the definitions used when monitoring or processing charity shop sales are mitigated by governmental and commercial proscription. As a result they are frequently apocryphal or misleading. Thus, both Gift Aid and Gift in Kind required further investigation as to the implications they hold for the professionalisation of charity shops.

Gift Aid and Gift in Kind will be described and evidenced with data in turn, and their contribution to the quiet gift economy discussed. Within the discussion of Gift in Kind, the author will introduce a particularly contentious category that falls within it: that of *tainted cultural goods*. These are items from marginalised donors, including objects formerly from police evidence and items made by prison inmates. The categorisation of these marginal items as 'Gifts in Kind' in the sales receipts is then used to illustrate how the subtle subversions of the gift economy contest our understanding of charity as a 'gift', question the tenacity of the links charity shops hold with public and private institutions, and test the validity of arguments for increasingly 'professionalised' charity shop operations put forward by Elizabeth Parsons, Richard Goodall and their contemporaries.

## **7.1 Gift Aid**

The concept of Gift Aid has been around since the 1990 Finance Act, although initially it only applied to cash donations. By completing a Gift Aid declaration, the charity could claim back the basic rate tax paid upon it (Browne & Adam, 2006). This is set at 20%, meaning that it can add up to a significant amount of money for the charity. In 2006,

the law was amended so that charity shops could sell goods as an 'agent' for the individual, and then hope that the donor donates the sale and Gift Aid amount at the end of it, in a process known legally as 'Retail Gift Aid' (HMRC, 2012). To do so, the process in store varies, but typically involves the donor filling in a form with their details and signature, which is then entered into a system which monitors how much each of their donated items sells for, and how much is made in additional Gift Aid.

Already it can be seen how rationalised and methodical this process is in a charity shop where exchanges were previously ad-hoc, often unscripted and frequently unrecorded. Below is a breakdown of the paper trail required by the Inland Revenue in order to conduct any Retail Gift Aid transaction:

*“- A copy of any written agreement with the owner to sell the goods on their behalf*

*- Any documentation to show that the owner has been notified of the sale proceeds and that they have been given the opportunity to receive all of the net proceeds - this is essential for the donor's own tax records*

*- Any documentation from the donor confirming their donation to your charity or CASC*

*- Internal accounting records to show how the goods are identified as belonging to a particular owner*

*- In the case of a trading subsidiary of a charity - records to show how the sale proceeds are remitted to your charity or CASC “*

(HMRC, 2012)

By involving the complicated tax procedure of claiming Gift Aid into the formerly unscripted and bureaucracy-free process of donating goods to a shop, the charity shop has been forced to organise and formalise not only transactional sale of the items, but the receiving and

sorting process too, since items must be tagged differently to enable their prices to be tracked. In the MCR, the Gift Aid procedure begins at the point of 'over the doorstep' donation, when the donor is asked if they would like to Gift Aid their donation. If they agree, they are given a form to complete with their details, which confirms that the shop can act as an agent in the sale of their donations. This form is then attached to the bag of donations, and a small card is detached from the top and given to the donor so they can donate and 'Gift Aid it' again and again without repeatedly providing their details, therefore simplifying the Gift Aid transaction. The card, the form, and all the subsequent items they have donated which go on sale are tagged with a unique identifying number, which means the sales are traceable to the individual and their Gift Aid and total donations can then be calculated. For the customer, the card both resembles and to some extent operates as a loyalty card, encouraging the customer to donate items again.

The implications of this are, even on the surface, manifold. Firstly, Gift Aid is embedded in much of the in-store marketing materials. There is a sign on the door which donors will see as they enter which states that the charity can earn an extra "25p for every £1" if the person signs up for Gift Aid when they donate their goods. There are also leaflets in store to explain the details of how the charity obtains this additional money. All of the marketing materials, additional bureaucracy and cost of labour involved in monitoring the Gift Aid process country-wide has apparently been deemed worthwhile for the 20% additional income it generates through tax redemption. Thus the shop operates with a degree of reliance upon governmental relief, yet uses commercial techniques and promotion to harness the potential profits. This cements the aforementioned symbiotic relationship between the shop and the public and private sectors.

While the use of Gift Aid and its marketing potential has been incorporated into the operations at the MCR, in the IHR Gift Aid is

spoken of to the researcher, and it soon becomes apparent that it has not been considered for the shop:

*“A woman donating some bags of stuff asks “Do you do Gift Aid here?” I have no idea, and when I ask Juliet, she has no idea either!”*

*- IHR Fieldnotes*

In fact, none of the volunteers at the IHR had ever used Gift Aid, and the manager Derreck told me it had never been discussed with him. The charity’s secretary stated that setting up Gift Aid was unrealistic when the shop was being run on such a small scale:

*“The shop only generates about 30,000 pounds a year in profit. You have to factor in operational costs. To run the shop alone, last month it cost us £40 in rates to the council, £2600 in salary, £278 insurance, £541 rent and £300 repairs [...] Our average earnings per month are £3,200. It was £2,500 last month, though.”*

*- Interview with Henry, IHR*

Henry suggests that it’s not feasible for the IHR to invest money in ventures such as Gift Aid due to the shop frequently not making enough money to cover its day-to-day costs as it is. The notion of speculative investment that tends to spur profits in first hand businesses is not treated as an option here. This may also be in part due to the customer demographic, who are frequently low income, or on benefits, in line with the findings of Williams (2002, p. 1902):

*“[Derreck:] “This area, I don’t mean it rudely but it is a poor area. A lot of people are on the social [...] Lots of them haven’t got cars, they are reliant on families and the social, you know.””*

- IHR Fieldnotes

*“We have the shop in a depressed area. It’s more of a social outreach for local people, which is what we are about.”*

- Interview with Henry, IHR

The location of the IHR means that regular customers are less likely to be taxpayers, thus rendering any Gift Aid scheme unlikely to pay off. Although the MCR is also located in a low-income area, it is innercity and near to important transport links. But whilst the IHR has only one shop, and thus does not adopt a Gift Aid policy as the additional income and donor take-up may be minimal, the MCR does not operate independently in this way, and is required to represent Gift Aid country wide in a standardised (and ultimately, commercialised) format.

The MCR manageress makes several comments that are indicative of how important adhering to the ‘company’ line of promoting Gift Aid is. The researcher was instructed on the following during her first shift at the shop:

*“[Maria:] “We need to ask people who donate if they will Gift Aid their items when they give them to us. This is important, it can make me an extra 15, 20 grand per year if they do!””*

- MCR Fieldnotes

It is not evident to the customer when they are asked if they wish to add Gift Aid to their donation that the idea of enhancing profits and achieving targets for the employees who work there may be one of the main imperatives. This is representative of a conformity between governmental taxation, donor participation and worker satisfaction.



Maria is adamant that Gift Aid be exploited for the sake of enhancing her own shop's success and thus her own success in her role, hence the use of the personal pronoun 'me'. The disingenuous 'goodness' of charity is revealed by statements such as this, which privilege the pursuit of capital for the benefit of the individual.

Yet donors are able to benefit from this too, as their donation can 'go further' and contribute yet more. The integral thread between these factors is the 'quiet gift economy', where the monitoring and auditing of personal information is utilised in symphony with tax rules on charitable donations to enable both parties to benefit. A serendipitous harmony develops out of the nexus of positive responses: the 'warm glow' of passive donation and the achievement of targets and thus job satisfaction for the shop workers, alongside the additional benefit to the charitable cause. As a result, the outcome of these ties is rarely questioned.

The quiet economy of Gift Aid also bolsters the feelings of philanthropic warmth generated by the act of giving by informing the customer how much money they have made for the charity at certain monetary intervals. Although framed at the MCR as a 'letter of thanks' to encourage and congratulate donors, this is actually a requirement, in which the small print must state that the donor has the choice to donate the money and gift aid percentage, or claim it back from the charity (HMRC, 2012). The letter has a second purpose of serving as a marketing technique (along with the card that can be used by the donor to 'speed up' the donation process): to remind the donor of the charity and the good work they have already done, perhaps inciting them to donate goods to the charity more regularly.

Most importantly, the donors must forsake the previous anonymity of item donation by submitting their details to the charity. Gregson & Crewe (2003) discuss how second hand objects benefit from

the 'removal of traces of former ownership' (p. 144) and the "importance of the unknown and the unknowable" for the construction of new uses when the items are re-sold (p. 154). Although the items are "cloaked in anonymity" for the purchasing customer (Gregson et al., 2000, p.119), the original donors are registered as such with the charity on a system where every penny their items earn for the charity will be recorded and monitored. This removes the invisibility of a previously 'out of sight' donation (Gregson et al., 2002).

One of the most active participants in the Gift Aid system is the volunteer, who is required to undertake additional paperwork, sorting and labelling, thus adding to the pressure of their role. They also pass on the weight of their own bureaucratic obligations to the donors, who they must encourage to take additional time to fill in forms, essentially becoming more 'active' in their philanthropic role. But the implementation of an awkward new routine to follow for volunteers can be framed by charity board representatives as beneficial for volunteers, as it enables them to develop further interpersonal skills. The IHR charity's CEO describes this below:

*"The really intelligent shop managers will delegate the responsibility to the volunteers, and the cost from that perspective – well it doesn't cost any more money, and **it can be more meaningful for the volunteers... to have something more meaty to do**. So we don't clearly know the cost of it... it's just a question of what you do with your time, and what we haven't done is formally costed it up, **we've just absorbed it**, if you like, into each shop and the tasks that they're asked to do."*

- Interview with Frank, IHR

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To extrapolate this, the bureaucratic process necessary for Gift Aid to be used in charity shops is treated as rewarding for volunteers, and not necessarily a burden on paid staff. By 'absorbing' the additional costs and workload of the process and 'intelligently' delegating the process to unpaid members of staff, the Gift Aid scheme can be seen as another example of 'upselling' (as mentioned in Chapter 5) where additional money is earned through the building of social ties during economic transaction. In this instance, a simple Gift Aid card acts as a 'loyalty card', ensuring donor loyalty to the charity.

Crucially, there is little additional financial or temporal burden upon the charity itself. It forms a part of the regulatory superstructure of the charity shop network, and becomes embedded within other processes of professionalisation, for instance, stock circulation: a process that is only possible for charity shops that have gone through the phase of 'trading up' (McNair in Horne, 2000) and expanded beyond the restrictions of single shop. Gift Aid stickers are the only signifiers that remain on items that have been circulated through stock rotation from other shops. All other labels are replaced and items are frequently re-priced according to the average APU for that particular shop<sup>13</sup>, but this cannot happen if the item already has a Gift Aid pricetag. The taxation system thus overrides traditional shop processes and hierarchies. This again ties back to the emergence of a new system of governance within the charity shop sector, which privileges external ties in the quiet gift economy over those between shops within the same charity chain.

The volunteers are also acting as *Gift Aid gatekeepers*. They are in charge of ensuring the smooth running of the process that adds revenue to the sales. The small, green stickers that are added to the

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<sup>13</sup> As mentioned in chapter 5, all charity shops in a Multiple Charity Retail chain will have an Average Unit Price that is estimated based on how well items sell in that store. These tend to vary depending upon the local customer demographic.

labels of Gift Aid items have to be peeled off and retained by the till attendant in order for the amounts to be claimed back from the government, thus placing a degree of value on the seemingly insignificant tag. The value of the stickers (which are often dislodged from items and found on the floor) again represents an embodiment of the quiet economy, and the hidden tripartite system of tax benefits, corporations and the charitable cause. The numerical database of unique identifying numbers (which are traceable back to the individual donor) highlights the degree to which the contemporary charity shop is entrenched in bureaucratic professionalised processes.

Breakdowns in this system are common due to the difficulty in policing such a formal, regulated process in the disorganised and frenetic charity shop environment. In fact, the fallibility of the system allows for it to be manipulated covertly in a way that is most profitable for the shop. The following observation notes from the MCR indicate how this can happen, and how Gift Aid labels exhibit their inherent value within the quiet economy of the charity shop:

*"I have seen Maria pick [Gift Aid labels] up from where they have fallen off an item (which they often do) and stick them on to something of the same price, whether this is the right item or not. This is quite common. I have also seen her pick up stickers from items that have gift aid stickers on that have been stolen and just stick them onto the 'gift aid' pad, to claim the money."*

*"I bring some donations in to the shop [...] [Maria] asks me "Do you have your Gift Aid card?" I have my boyfriend's card in my wallet (as I cannot give Gift Aid as I pay no tax) but that is upstairs in my locker. Maria says "It's okay. I have to get the form for these (she gestures to a bag of books on the side [that another customer has just Gift Aided]) so I will just put those stickers on yours too."*

*I'm pretty sure this isn't the point of Gift Aid, but donations are not policed – nothing is checked into a system before it goes out in the store, so how would anyone know?"*

- *MCR Fieldnotes*

The possibility of using the numbers from past donors to donate the Gift Aid on items that are donated by a non tax-payer means that like all formalised bureaucratic systems, the Gift Aid process is fallible, and prone to adaptation and contravention. This is also seen within the *quiet value economy*: the adaptations to universal pricing structures described in Chapter 5. The expectation of anonymity for donors is subverted in the pursuit of profit.

This is particularly the case if it means the charitable cause and/or the opportunity to hit targets will benefit. The act of 'using' another's Gift Aid allowance presents many problematic issues about civil responsibility in terms of who dictates where their tax money is 'given'; however, there is a more pressing issue. The threat to data privacy for donors in light of the increasing involvement of first-sector companies in the charity sector is a very real concern, as is documented later in the chapter in the discussion of Gifts in Kind. The level of anonymity present in charity shop donation used to be regarded as part of its appeal (as opposed to the physical proximity of selling your own personal items at a car boot sale), yet anonymity is effectively erased through the bureaucratisation of the process of Gift Aid donation. As the excerpts above illustrate, once the form is completed and the donor is 'on record', they have no control, or even knowledge, of what their personal tax allowance is being used for. The assumption of charity as being synonymous with 'goodness' or at least democratic, accountable and acting in the public interest (Goodall, 2000a, p.106) is taken for granted in spite of the other incentives that

are becoming increasingly prominent as charity shops become more professionalised.

Thus, the quiet gift economy of the charity shop is enabled by the administrative co-ordination of tax laws and profit-making, alongside the desire for philanthropic and goal-oriented achievements for the unpaid and paid staff involved. The scheme for using Retail Gift Aid is only applicable to larger Multiple Charity Retailers due to the cost of implementation being high – yet it provides a large mark-up on the generally low AUPs found in charity shops, and offers further opportunity for shop workers to hit company targets and encourage further repeat donations. Although the process is governmentally regulated, shop workers can subvert this and thus many aspects of Gift Aid donation exist as part of the quiet economy of the charity shop. Integrally, this is in terms of the burgeoning audit culture that supports professionalised organisations, as Gift Aid requires a traceable database of the personal information of donors. This is a clear example of the bureaucratic development of charity shops, which indicates they are becoming increasingly rational: in particular the emphasis upon the quantifiable organisation of as many variables as possible. This aids efficiency, calculability, predictability and control via non-human technology: the four integral parts of McDonaldisation (and rationalisation of business) described by Ritzer (2011).

The value of such a data bank to the charity is insurmountable and certainly contentious when considered in relation to the second example to be explored in this research: Gifts in Kind from large commercial organisations. When ‘quiet’ ties to profit-making businesses are developed alongside the maintenance of data sets of willing and loyal donors, the line between charity and capitalism becomes increasingly blurred.

## 7.2 Gift in Kind

A 'Gift in Kind' could be described as a generalised non-monetary donation that benefits an institution or individual. Although this has received some academic attention in the form of book collections donated to academic libraries (Canevari de Paredes, 2006) or inducing worker reciprocity through gifts (Maréchal, Puppe, & Kube, 2011), charity shop Gift in Kind activity hasn't been addressed in sociological literature in any kind of detail. An NGO survey in 1999 noted that charities showed a willingness to take part in inter-sectoral co-operation with first sector establishments (Phelan, 1999) and the market for Gift in Kind merchandise proved to be one that extended to both the MCR and IHR charity shops in this more contemporary study.

Although the degree of involvement with Gift in Kind donations in the two case studies differed greatly, both shops did operate with a degree of compliance with profit-making corporations. As this research hopes to demonstrate, Gift in Kind processes bring into question the role of the charity shop in 're-presenting' goods – firstly their role as a 'cultural' detritus, using up residual goods left over from the mechanisms of capitalism, and secondly the contentious origins behind charity shop goods, where the 'social life' of an object (Appadurai, 1986) changes course through re-enchantment and new ownership.

As an agent of the discards of capitalism, the shops are savvy and selective, and able to maximise the potential of leftovers by reviving consumer 'waste', in what O'Brien describes as 'the alchemist's dream' of turning metaphorical base matter into gold (2007, p.5). The items donated become a raw material. Associated with this are discourses of previous object histories or 'cultural biographies' (Kopytoff, 1986), which have moved away from the individualised histories of the singular donation to massed, and occasionally

questionable, life stories that demonstrate a nexus of institutional, commercial and philanthropic imperatives. By understanding Gifts in Kind in light of these theories of rejuvenation, redemption and reuse, charity shops can be seen as redemptive spaces opening up the opportunity for the item to be revived because it has not been thrown away but merely 'put in a different place' (Hetherington, 2004, pp.166-7). Gifts in Kind are also goods that differ from the traditional heterogeneous stock of charity shops, in that they are often mass donations of the same item. This means stock can be more rationally organised, distributed, monitored and sold. Again this has implications for the bureaucratic professionalisation of the shops, and for the conflict of values this represents for the charity.

For the MCR, the Gift in Kind (GIK) process was a professionally managed system that operated throughout their network of shops. The particular shop in the case study was part of the main GIK office for the North of England, and housed the GIK Account Manager, Mike, along with two administrative employees who would contact businesses to attempt to develop GIK links, occasionally collect items, and keep a spreadsheet of local contacts. The emphasis for the office was upon sustaining local ties with businesses that operated in the surrounding area of the city, but the bigger the business, the better:

*"We deal with Tesco, but not on a national level. It's on a store-by-store level. So some Tescos will give us stock, some won't."*

- *Interview with Mike, MCR*

Mike's role as GIK Manager was unusual as he wasn't directly linked to the individual shop in question, but was in charge of sourcing large corporate donations from private retailers:



*“I work for the retail sector, and we approach businesses to donate stock. We don’t want money, that’s a different side of the charity [...] I don’t manage any shops, I don’t manage any managers of the shops, I don’t deal with any HR issues, it’s almost like, I’m a supplier that [the charity] use to get stock, and it’s almost like the shops are our customer.”*

- Interview with Mike, MCR

In the quote above, Mike deliberately distances himself from the idea of charity as philanthropic, caring or community-minded entirely, preferring to consider his role to be on the more ‘commercial’ end of things, something he illustrates with the business language he employs (he speaks of stock, profits, growth, margin, budgets, AUPs, and so on). In his own words, he states:

*“The charity, touchy-feely end is at the other end of the spectrum.[...] it’s a good sentiment, but, it doesn’t pay the bills.”*

- Interview with Mike, MCR

By abstracting his role from the ‘sentiments’ held by the parent charity and the cause they aim to help, Mike justifies the connections he orchestrates with commercial, profit-driven corporations. He posits himself more as a middleman, facilitating the relationship between the companies and the charity.

As Mike is in charge of Gift in Kind relations across the whole of the North of England, he only has a loose affiliation with the case study MCR store, due to the location of his office above the store, and the fact that the MCR was aiming towards stocking 80% GIK (and thus only 20% donated stock) which was a benchmark that was being tested in the MCR as the highest-earning shop in that charity chain. However, the latter point means that GIK forms a major element of the charity shop processes that go on there, and is implicit in the augmented commercialisation and formalisation of their retail procedure.

These large donations had a startling impact upon the stock make-up of the shop:

- Choice: Customers could select from different sizes and colours of the same item.
- Quality: Items were more often than not brand new, with labels still attached. They were also sometimes from expensive brands.
- Quantity: There were frequently more than one of an item, reducing the opportunity for sourcing individuality, one offs and unique items (a 'hallmark' of charity shops according to Gregson, Brooks and Crewe [2002, p. 1679]).
- Price: The items were often labelled at a lower price to that on the original price tag – homogenising pricing to some extent.
- Classification: GIK items were clearly labelled in blue in the MCR, while individual donations were labelled in purple. They were also recorded under a separate category on the itemised till. They were not classified as different in any way from other donations within the IHR.

Classification of GIK items in particular caused controversy, because all other shop purchases in the MCR were categorised by what they were (a dress, a toy, footwear, etc.). Gift in Kind was merely categorised as 'GIK' on the till, regardless of what the item was. At the IHR, no classification of Gift in Kind was made, and customers were not alerted to where the items were sourced. Bowker & Star (1999, p. 16) state that "classification systems are integral to any working infrastructure", yet ambiguities like that of the GIK classification highlight the difficulties of classification in this context.

The IHR does not have any formal GIK classification on their tills, nor formal corporate links or bureaucratised procedures. In spite of there being no dedicated GIK team or office, and nobody employed

to contact potential donors or monitor donor lists, the IHR does use GIK and informally sustains links with corporations:

*“We get Christmas donations such as... some of the bigs like John Lewis have just donated a load. All their Christmas decorations that they had in the shops; display stuff. They donated all their stuff. [...] One of the things was paint, you know, what they use on the displays when they’re painting the windows and stuff, [...] they sent it here. So I’ve sold it all. They’re all part tins [...] we did have about 40 tins.*

*T: So do you ever get anything from any other shops?*

*D: We have in the past. “*

*- Interview with Derreck, IHR*

Here Derreck describes how the shop manages to ‘encompass commercial activities’ (Brace-Govan & Binay, 2010) whilst not achieving the same level of slick professionalisation and hierarchisation of the GIK process at the MCR, which is more in line with Parsons’ (2004) characterisation of a professionalised charity shop. Of course, being a single retail outlet for a small hospice charity, there was no real necessity to expand their GIK, as the store would only be able to accommodate a limited amount of donated stock anyway. However, in spite of its small scale, the IHR *did* still participate in commercial associations and hold ties with profit-making enterprises in a way that mirrored the larger charity’s involvement with corporations. Derreck also described the IHR’s reliance upon first sector ‘dress agencies’ for good quality donations:

*“[...] We used to have a children’s agency that... you take your stuff to the shop and give you, say, six, eight weeks to sell it, and then if it’s not sold it goes to charity. [...] And we’ve got another one now. One of our volunteers knew this person that has got a ladies dress agency [...] it’s all*

*pretty good stuff. It's from a good area. So, you know. We always put the price up a little bit on that stuff but it goes well."*

- *Interview with Derreck, IHR*

Dress agencies generally act as a third party agent selling pre-owned clothing on behalf of its owner. They will list items for sale or sell them in a shop and then take a proportion of the sale for themselves, with the rest returning to the customer. Derreck frequently alluded to his links with various dress agencies, although the presence of their goods was not made apparent to the customers, as was the case with all of their GIK products (whereas the Gift in Kind items sold at the MCR were very clearly marked as different from donated stock, and recorded under 'GIK' on the till receipts). Donations from agencies were only noticeable by their increased pricing, which would extend beyond the set prices on the hand-written sign in the back room that were described in Chapter 5:

*"Dresses normally go for five to six pound. But we put eight or nine pound on these...and they went."*

- *Interview with Derreck, IHR*

Gift in Kind, therefore, did not have to adhere to the pricing rules that regulated the prices of donated stock. Derreck's knowledge of where the goods have come from (that is, a for-profit business) affects his perception of their value, and results in him flouting the standardised pricing structure. Thus, his knowledge of the past history of an object plays a clear role; it develops 'singularisation' (Kopytoff, 1986) as distinct from the 'masses' of other second-hand goods, due to the perceived quality of the item.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This can work both ways with GIK goods, as those in the MCR frequently do NOT achieve singularization as they are bought and sold en masse, and for deliberately low prices. Whilst the past 'life' of the object is visible through the labels, often this is obscured to protect the reputation of the companies.

The GIK association with capitalistic imperatives and their degree of separation from the donated goods was more explicitly evident in the MCR, where all items that were donated as Gifts in Kind were labelled with a bright blue tag, stating the origins of the item. Donated (and presumed to be second-hand or pre-used items) were labelled with a purple tag. During the period of observation, mustard yellow tags were also being introduced to signify items collected through 'bag drops' as opposed to over-the-counter donations. GIK items would frequently be grouped together on a rail so that customers could access the range of colours or sizes that were available, one of the acknowledged benefits of Gift in Kind in charity shops. Alongside this formulaic labelling system was a complicated till-pad, which separated the three donor sources. It is this system of recording sales that will now be examined in relation specifically to Gift in Kind, and how this differs at the IHR.

### **7.3 Till Itemisation**

The MCR till consisted of a soft key pad with a numerical set on one side, and in the centre a number of classificatory terms through which an item could be described. These were divided up into item categories for things that were regularly sold. The table below depicts the classifications used:

Men's Coats/Jackets	Women's Coats/Jackets	Childrenswear
Men's Footwear	Women's Footwear	Toys
Men's Trousers	Women's Trousers	Bric-a-Brac
Men's T-shirts	Women's Blouses	
Men's Knitwear	Women's Knitwear	Accessories
Men's Suits	Women's Suits	GIK
Men's Shirts	Women's Skirts	Cards/Giftbags
	Women's Dresses	Plastic Bag

*Figure 11. Multiple Charity Retailer Classification of Goods*

Gift in Kind was represented by only one button, which was blue. All other categories (with the exception of new goods such as card/giftbags and plastic bags) were split buttons, one half being purple, and the other mustard yellow. The sales assistant would check the label of the item and choose purple if it was labelled as donated stock, mustard yellow if it was labelled as a bag drop, and the blue GIK button if it had a GIK label. The manageress Maria informed the researcher on her first shift that all GIK items were priced up with an decimal value of .98 – for example, £1.98, £3.98, £9.98 etc; whereas all other items would be labelled with standard .99 ‘just below’ pricing (Schindler & Kibarian, 1996). This was to prevent volunteers or staff accidentally recording donated items as GIK, or vice versa (the till would emit an error sound if you tried to submit an invalid amount under these categorisations).

The requirement for stringent classification of GIK goods forms part of the bureaucratic audit culture that relies upon accurate sales figures, and operates behind the scenes in GIK transactions. This is in part ensuring transparency and thus 'accountability' (Goodall, 2000a, p.106) can also be mitigated. Although difficulties surrounding the assurance of accountability when using unpaid staff have been explored in Chapter 6, the paid staff and upper levels of the shop-floor hierarchy are under no doubts as to why such formal regulations and monitoring take place:

*"M: From this year, we're not allowed to sell any childrenswear.*

*T: Oh really?*

*M: Yeah, because we've got a shop opened [nearby] which is toys and childrens... so we've been told to bag them up. Doesn't matter if it's bad... we send it to that shop, because that shop needs feeding...*

*T: That's bizarre because you always sold a lot of children's stock.*

*[...]*

*M: \*nods\* But... because everything is computerised so management can see what's selling where and what isn't selling, do you understand what I mean? Because figures go into the computer every day and they can monitor it, and they can tell, so I suppose in their eyes we're not making enough money, because they said we make more money on Ladies[wear], so we can put more ladieswear out, which is common sense, because if we can make more money on ladieswear why should we waste space or time on childrenswear? So I know where they're coming from and I am more than happy to go along with it."*

- Interview with Maria, MCR

Maria highlights how the monitoring of shop sales forms part of a bigger countrywide picture, which enables the head office to identify which items sell best in which areas and distribute their stock accordingly. By doing this, the charity is able to 'maximise' their profits and thus their fund-raising abilities (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 102) but this is dependent upon the large scale of their operation. Stock circulation and classification to this level requires a large initial monetary outlay that would not be readily available to an independent charity with one or two shops such as the IHR. In the same way that Gift Aid cannot be realistically implemented there due to budgetary constraints, so too is the opportunity for Gift in Kind stymied by the size of their operations.

To offset the costs of such extensive sophistication of the charity shop processes, GIK at the MCR is (comparatively) quite simplified. GIK items are coded on the tills simply by the one blue button; however, a GIK item can be defined under the shop rules as *anything* from an item of clothing, to a book compendium, to a motorcycle helmet, to a hand-carved jade Buddha statue: so long as they are a company donation<sup>15</sup>.

In the IHR, the monitoring of GIK items is made difficult by the relatively primitive coding system the store has in place:

*"When items are rang into the till, there is no option to select the category of what's sold. So instead I key in the amount, work out the change in my head, and then I have to write down a one-word definition of the item/items and the amount tendered [in the book on the counter]. There is no real consistency to this; the same item can be recorded as "toy" or "doll"; specifics are not really insisted upon. Any mistakes made*

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<sup>15</sup> The exception to this rule is the items donated from police evidence or prison labour. These items are labelled and recorded in the tills in GIK, but are not in fitting with the definition above as they do not come from a profit-making corporation.



(for instance, somebody changes their mind about something) Derreck waves it away without any concern."

- IHR Fieldnotes

The image below is a photograph of a page from the till book. It clearly shows the diverse nature of goods that are sold, and the disorganised coding system that is in place.

ITEMS	PRICE
SHIRTS	5-00
ORNAMENTS	6.75
BOOKS	1-50
BOOKS	2-00
TOP	3-00
CARDS	1-00
EARRINES	7-50
2 Items	1-50
BOOKS CARDS	4-20
Various Item.	7-35 25
" " BOOKS	12-20
CARDS	1-50
MIRROR	4-00
Various ITEMS	6-50
" "	4-00
Broches	3-00
BOOKS	50
39 Jigsaws	5-00
VASE	75
shoes bag purse small	5-00
Baby clothes	8-00
Food	23-00
Shoes.	3-00
Game, book.	2-25
Dog ornament.	2-50
Flower holder.	0-50
Belt.	1-00
owl.	1-50
Jigsaws.	5.00
Toys, bag.	6.00
books.	0-50
books.	1-50

*Figure 12. Independent Hospice Retailer Classification of Goods*

Thus, the items that are donated by large retailers are indistinguishable from individual over-the-counter donations – they are labelled with the same tags, and inconsistencies in the way goods are recorded means that GIK items cannot form a coherent category of their own. The IHR represents the less developed GIK relations that are only possible on a local level – whereas the larger MCR intends to extend its capacity for liaising with commercial organizations to a national scale:

*“Ideally, what I would love is to have great relationships with lots of big companies and ... scale it up I guess, over the years.”*

- *Interview with Mike, MCR*

So GIK is envisaged to be a saving grace for charity shops in the light of the recent decline in certain other locally-sourced methods of recycling such as the jumble sale (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 127), as it depicts their absorption of the middle man role of ‘detrivore’ to the retail sector, using up the things that would otherwise be rendered a costly waste byproduct of profitmaking. By taking on this role, charity shops have taken over the previously routine processing of the ‘waste’ of capitalism by the ragman or waste disposal firms by processing it into something useable themselves (O’Brien, 2007, p.2). It also strengthens the bonds charity shops such as the MCR have with private corporations, and their reliance upon the first sector in general.

## 7.4 Private Sector Affiliations

The development of private sector ties through GIK is lucrative for the charity shop, and is posited as necessary by advocates such as Mike at the MCR, but is also something that is played down within the shops themselves in terms of displays or presentation of goods. In fact, any visible association between the business and the charity is not wholly encouraged by the companies who are donating, as Mike explains in relation to a large Gift in Kind donation of clothing by lifestyle brand Bench:

*“...With the Bench stock, I think we opened a bit of a can of worms. Because, [...] they also have retail stores, and obviously have a lot of concessions, [...] you’re relying on people paying £120 for that brand and that lifestyle and I guess spending time and money building up that brand and obviously... when we got it, we splashed it everywhere, and we probably de-valued their brand, I think, they got a lot of negative feedback from **their legitimate customers**, their retail customers, you know, the JJBs... but I think even higher up the chain, buyers from JJB or [...] The story we were told is, the retail managers got off the train... came down, saw obviously Bench [gestures] all over the window, half the prices of current season stock. Obviously, he’s trying to achieve his targets, his objectives. They pretty much said that they won’t be able to donate again.”*

- Interview with Mike, MCR

Therefore, it is in the interests of the charity *and* the private businesses to sustain these ties covertly, rather than actively promote their collaborations. As Mike states here, the charity shop image was seen as negatively impacting upon an expensive brand, and putting off

the 'legitimate customers': those involved in the perpetuation of the capitalist for-profit system.

This was not an isolated incident, as it occurred again with another city centre retailer who donated a large number of brand new shirts. The manageress had put up a window display that prominently featured the brand name and the low price points. One morning, arriving for her shift, the researcher arrived to find it all gone:

*"I notice the Zara display in the window is gone. I ask Helen about it and she says "Yeah, a guy from Zara came down and told us we had to take it out of the window!""*

- MCR Fieldnotes

The relationships that are formed between profit-making retail establishments and the charity shop are not concrete – they depend upon a mutual understanding of the brand identity, and the lifestyle image the company is attempting to capture with its items. Philanthropic motives can therefore be detrimental to the company, and by incorporating GIK goods on a large scale into charity shops, once again the shop must be wary of the 'social life' of the brand, and act as an arbiter of the potential value of the item. This role of arbitration also extends to the way that GIK goods from large shops are altered through the removal or defacement of labels, to ensure the business that donated them will not suffer monetary losses through customers attempting to return charity shop items to their original store.

Although Phelan (in Paddison, 2000, p. 165) notes that charities have increasingly expressed a willingness to be involved in 'inter-sectoral' links with first-hand shops, it must be careful not to 'bite the hand that feeds' and damage their collaborator's brand image:

*“You obviously wanna advertise it, flaunt it a little bit but you’ve gotta be **subtle** at the same time, not too blatant [...] [the charity shop] potentially carries a negative connotation doesn’t it?”*

- Interview with Mike, MCR

The ‘negative connotation’ Mike describes above highlights the charity shop’s traditional association with a certain level of social status (Chattoe, 2006, p. 154) and as a site populated by the disadvantaged or socially excluded. These are the non-legitimate customers within the capitalist system. This association with the material constraints of poverty depicts the charity shop as an ‘abject space’ (Sibley, 1995); a direct opposition to the slick, organised, fundamentally mainstream charity shop that the MCR aims to be. As a result, GIK relations with companies remain relatively ad-hoc. They rely upon a *quiet gift economy* of unspoken agreements and negotiation in terms of promotion of their goods, and are dependent upon the shop discreetly arbitrating their presentation of the GIK brand. Thus, the professionalised networks formed in unison with first-sector companies are mitigated by the unavoidably ‘abject’ and anomalous nature of the charity shop, and the connotations that go along with it. As Mike describes above, the shop must flaunt their stock in a ‘subtle’ way, to avoid economic repercussions for their private partners.

There is one other type of Gift in Kind classification which is labelled up and categorised on the tills in the MCR under the same umbrella, but is not sourced from a commercial organisation. These GIK anomalies are from *marginalised donors* – prisoners, police evidence or stolen goods.

As previously mentioned, Gift in Kind donations are always physical items (as opposed to monetary gifts) from for-profit organisations that enter into a partnership with the charity shop to

take unsold items off their hands. In order to promote the object's 'newness' and set up a boundary between these items and donated 'over-the-doorstep' goods, they are labelled with distinctive blue tags. Yet on several occasions, other items that were *not* donated by first-sector companies are labelled with these tags. Items that have a negligible place of origin, particularly those related in some sense to criminality, would also be labelled with blue tags and recorded on the tills as Gift in Kind. This research terms these items *Tainted Cultural Goods*; goods that have been negatively affected by elements of their past history. They demonstrate firstly, the impenetrable links between the governance of law and charity shop operations; and secondly, the masking of the origins of goods from the recipients. Both aspects serve to contribute to the charity shop's quiet gift economy, disguised and facilitated by professionalised structures of operation.

### **7.5 Tainted Cultural Goods**

Based on the observation notes collected, tainted cultural goods can be clearly defined into two separate categories, from which the customer is *actively protected* from knowing the origin of the item. These are *Reclaimed Police Evidence*, and *Products of Prison Labour*. Both of these categories of goods were regularly sold at the MCR, and police evidence was also sold at the IHR, yet the customers were not made aware of the distinction these items held from the standard GIK goods. In the case of the MCR, the labels stated that this item was new, or a 'shop-second'. This practice brings into question the hidden origins of second-hand goods (Brace-Govan & Binay, 2010), and the implication of GIK as a means of disguising the 'quiet gift economy' of marginalised donation, in effect concealing the discourses of illegality inherent in the items with a mask of first-hand commodity fetishism. If

considered alongside the Marxist assumption that capitalism aims to use up surplus “to stave off collapse” by absorbing or re-consuming it (Sweezy & Baran in O'Brien, 2007, p. 160), then charity shops are an active participant in their profit-making motivations. This again addresses the tenacity of the juxtaposition of the legal, the charitable and the commercial within the charity shop space.

### 7.5.1 Police Evidence

The first experience the researcher has with the quiet gift economy of tainted cultural goods is on only her second shift at the charity shop. A delivery of an array of new, tagged underwear arrives:

*“[...] Some of it has police evidence tags! This is obviously a load of stolen goods that have been seized. They include Calvin Klein, Elle, Debenhams and Ann Summers underwear, as well as a decadent Christian Dior set of matching bra, knickers and suspender belt, complete with tags. Maria tells me to ‘make a sign for it’ so that people can see that it is designer – it is put in the locked cabinet where jewellery normally goes. The underwear set is put on sale for £99.98.”*

- MCR Fieldnotes

The researcher was required to set up the item for sale, including making a special sign to signify that the item is designer, and brand new. The sign included the RRP of the item, which came to over £200 according to the attached store tags. The police tags on the items were removed and the goods were displayed in a locked cabinet due to their value.

The process of detaching the meaning of an object from its origins of production is a traditional Marxist argument. In this case in

particular, this form of disassociation through resale renews the desirability of the item, and thus its perceived value, so much so that the item acquires its own display and secure storage. It also redefines the item from something bad (a stolen good, perhaps) to something good (a good that earns money to help others). This is indicative of the process of restoration that results in object 'redefinition' (Gregson & Crewe, 2003). Unlike restorative practices that physically alter the material state of the item to improve saleability (Gregson et al., 2009) these items shed their non-physical ties with criminal or marginal activities, and develop positive discourses – of high fundraising potential, and a bargain to a customer. The social life of the item is therefore over-written and it is presented as Gift in Kind: a sale item, a shop second perhaps, but not a legally ambiguous item. Although previous work suggests that the attraction of an item can lie in the “imaginative potential of its former life” (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p.145), this is something that is constructed by the individual shopper and relies upon speculation and nostalgia. They are unlikely to speculate if the item is labelled as 'new' or a factory second in the shop.

As a result, the life history of the object is actively concealed through the charity shop's attempt to restore the item's status back to a form of 'newness'. This enables customers to evade the presumed ethical quandaries inherent in the act of consuming marginal goods, which would otherwise be 'entangled' and implicated in the wider negative social relations and meanings that deviancy suggests (Thomas N. , 1991). Nevertheless, there are instances when the boundary that is strategically placed between the 'criminal' and the customer is at risk, particularly due to the unpredictable nature of the goods:

*“ [Emily] brings down a couple of clear plastic bags, inside are brown Police evidence bags, some of them still inscribed with the details of who*



*they were seized from. We go through it all, Emily tells me “Watch out. Some of this stuff might have like, blood on it. Because sometimes it’s removed from people who have been in a fight or whatever. You never know.”*

- MCR Fieldnotes

In this instance, assistant manager Emily warns the researcher about the liminal nature of the bag contents. The people she mentions are the marginalised donors, and the proximity of the workers to that is what necessitates her warning. Also, the precarious anonymity of the ‘donors’ is threatened by the fact that sensitive evidence information still remains on the items.

*“We cut into the bags with scissors and pour the stuff onto the counter. I’m pretty sure Maria wouldn’t allow this if she were in charge as it’s right in front of the customer. The contents of some of the bags are useless – one crusty sock, and a really battered, single shoe.”*

- MCR Fieldnotes

Although the customers are shielded from the reality behind the goods, volunteers and workers are not. They are required to confront the liminality of the objects and sort through the disposed items like cultural detritives, in spite of the threat of the criminalised ‘other’ that remains in the form of residues of the object’s former life. It is only through the charity shop worker’s efforts that these items can be redefined and revalorised in the shop space.

What makes marginalised donations so much more compelling (and thus, perhaps, worthy of the risks involved) are the high profits they can bring. It is a gamble as to whether the bags will contain a brand new Armani watch; or the soiled trousers of a convicted

shoplifter<sup>16</sup>. Although this risk is acted out every time a second-hand donation bag arrives at the shop, the police evidence bag not only de-anonymises the donation, but also augments the threat to that of a 'criminalised other', along with all the connotations that infers. The past 'life' of the item becomes constructed as something dangerous or even taboo.

Similarly, in the IHR the life history of 'police evidence' items occasionally comes to the fore:

*"A man comes in and goes up to Derreck, saying he is donating a bike from a family who lost their little boy "It was sudden... but it's been a year now and they want it to go here." is all he says. Derreck has to sign some kind of form, and takes a boys bike and a football in a plastic bag from the man. When he comes back in I ask him what it was about. "A boy died." is all he says. I ask why the ball is bagged up and he just says, "It's from the police. It's evidence."*

- IHR Fieldnotes

The poignancy of the back-story of this item will likely not be revealed to its future owner. The process of re-enchantment that a children's charity shop sale can offer will mitigate the tragic history of the item. The family of the boy have accepted and endorsed the dispossession of the item – something that Ekerdt (2009, p.64) describes as a metaphysical and emotional disconnection; as opposed to simple disposal, which connotes the act of throwing something away. The item's proximity to their loss, the legal requirement for police evidence to be retained for extended periods of investigation,

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<sup>16</sup> All of these are actual examples of police evidence items that turned up at the MCR, along with items such as a used Ipod Nano, a single crusty sock, and a selection of designer bags including Kenneth Cole.

and the fact that the IHR operates on behalf of a local children's charity, may well have been implicit in their desire to donate the item. Therefore, the marginalized donation often operates as a form of 'divestment ritual' (Gregson & Beale, 2004, p. 697; Gregson & Crewe, 2003) where an item is symbolically detached from its previous ownership through the act of disposal. The connotations of this act extend to 'transformative rituals' (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 144) that distance the item from its marginal roots. In the case of the bike in the IHR, the links between a child's death and the focus of the cause (caring for dying children) lessens the negative implications of a donation of police evidence.

It is important to clarify the importance of the volunteer and shop worker role in the process of object redefinition. The researcher (as volunteer in the above scenario) was only privy to the origins of the item by chance; as she happened to be serving at the till when the item was donated. Therefore, had she not overheard the conversation, it's very possible that the researcher would have been oblivious to the symbolic connotations of the item. It is predominantly an ethical decision reserved for paid staff as to whether they reveal the origins of an item to other workers and customers, and therefore the quiet economy of item knowledge is dependent upon those who hold formalized roles within the charity shop space. Rather than actively deceiving customers or volunteers, shop workers take on the role of arbitrating the potential threat from items of police evidence or the 'discarded effects of the dead' (Gregson et al., 2000, p.104). Once again, the shop workers become the gatekeepers and custodians of tainted goods, protecting customers and volunteers from the threat of marginalised and tainted cultural goods; as with the Gift Aid gatekeeper role, the processes are strategically disguised in order to obtain profits for their charity.

The role of the charity shops in this study as the arbiters of marginalised goods and their intrinsic link, through the quiet gift economy, to first-sector companies, is compounded by one other form of donation that is labelled as GIK. These are the items that are donated to charity as the product of prison labour.

### **7.5.2 Products of Prison Labour**

Marx wrote that a product or a good is differentiated from a natural item due to the element of human labour involved (Lury, 1996, pp.40-43). In the case of charity shop items, that human labour may extend from the volunteer, or the donor. But in certain instances, that labour develops negligible connotations – for example, if the item has been previously stolen as described above. Another means for marginalisation however, is the identity of the labourer who created it. On two distinct occasions at the MCR, ‘dump bins’ next to the till were filled with what was described on the sign attached to them as ‘Bags for Life’. These were priced relatively cheaply, 98p to £1.48, and were recorded on the till under GIK. The following excerpt describes the point at which the researcher discovered the origin of these bags:

*“We have some new GIK ‘bags for life’ being sold for £1.48. They are all mismatched, made from various swatches of materials. When I ask Emily about them, she says “Oh, we get them from the prison”. I ask her to elaborate and she says, “They make them for us. At the women’s prison. I guess it’s something to keep them occupied and to fill up their day.”*

*- MCR Fieldnotes*

The degree of knowledge that the manager and assistant manager have about the marginalised goods sold is not expressly given to volunteers and it is actively disguised from the customer. Although the item is technically 'new', its origins are camouflaged by its GIK label, mirroring the Marxist discourse of abstraction of goods from their inherent nature through the act of sale: the social relationship between the prison labour they embody and the finished article (a new GIK bag) is severed. In Chapter 3.1, the idea of commodity fetishism was suggested as a characteristic of charity shop goods. GIK tainted cultural goods are the epitome of this: the relationship between the producer of the item and the eventual recipient is completely hidden. Equally, in Chapter 6, the discussion surrounding Marxist theories of labour value indicated that profit was surplus taken from labourers. These labourers are not only estranged from the product of their labour; they are likely unaware of it. Again, this illustrates the complicit role the charity shop is playing around the exploitation of resources.

For the volunteer or the shop worker, however, marginalized donations still retain this element of their past life. Hetherington (2004) describes the 'haunting' of an item by representation of elements of its past life, and how it is necessary to 'avoid' such haunting through the management of social behaviour, describing consumers in such scenarios as 'doorkeepers' who enable the reinterpretation of value in such items (2004, p.171). In a sense, the charity shop workers act as the middlemen again for these 'quiet' transactions, which protect their customers from the liminal meanings, or the 'spectral horror' (p. 164) of illegality, deviance and death behind the items they buy. This can be solved through 'reciprocal individuation' (Reno, 2009), which describes the efforts put into revalorising an item to create worth and give it identifiable values. In the case of marginalised good these values erase the liminal characteristics previously held. The irony of the example of the 'bags

for life', made by prisoners who may well be serving life sentences, is perhaps the only subtle callback that is made throughout the transaction to the history behind the item.

The act of concealment of item origins through the use of GIK labels expresses the two-way mission of the charity shop in a sense: it protects the customer from the negative discourse of criminality, *and* commercial business donors from brand damage or loss of income. The charity shop is therefore taking on a responsible societal role, protecting individuals from the perceived threat of liminality in the same way that a society will protect its borders (Douglas, 1966). The capacity for the shops to participate in joint ventures and partnerships with government institutions or commercial organisations requires an adoption of corporate responsibility by the charity itself, whereas previously the burden of corporate responsibility lay with businesses interested in cause marketing (Smith & Alcorn, 1991) or social enterprise (Cornelius et al., 2008). Charity shops must now be aware of the impacts, positive or negative, that such affiliations may invoke. The blue GIK label is an embodiment of the increasingly commercial, fast-paced and profit-hungry narrative that has developed in charity shops in recent years – and how the maximisation of GIK profits using non-commercial donations again marks the necessary cohesion of legal, charitable and commercial endeavours.

## **7.6 The 'Quiet Gift Economy'**

The case study examples of Gift Aid and Gift in Kind were chosen as indicative of the wider structural links that charity shops have become increasingly reliant upon. These were the allowances within the British tax system that favour charities, and large donations from

profit-making corporations who in turn can maximize their profit by not having to pay for disposal, and by reclaiming VAT. In a sense, the wording of both schemes is crucial: they refer back to the concept of a 'gift' as discussed in chapter 3, and the questions that surround that notion come once again into question: must a gift be reciprocated, as suggested by Mauss (1970), or is it a means of asserting power over capitalism (Bataille, 1988)? The analysis above suggests that the 'Gift' in the sense of Gift Aid and Gift in Kind is one that proves mutually beneficial to the charity and first-sector businesses, whilst utilising the flexibility of tax restrictions on charity to maximise the money this earns. However, the loss is on the behalf of the taxpayer, who is indirectly footing the bill for the discreet co-operations between charity and profit (Weisbrod, 1999, p. 18); also, smaller businesses such as the second-hand shop or the ragman are also losing out as their roles as the cultural detritores of capitalism become usurped.

Both 'Gift' processes exist within the quiet gift economy of the charity shop, in the sense that the processes through which profits are secured are disguised or hidden from many of the participants, and in particular the customers, who are shielded from their origins, especially when this enters marginalized or deviant territory. Claims that the charity shop is becoming more and more professionalised are certainly not discounted by the evidence shown above, but the observation that they are mimicking first sector establishments with "increasingly sophisticated operations" (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 36) is tempered by the presence of the quiet gift economy, which is often executed externally to professionalised regulatory systems. Unlike the quiet value economy employed in relation to pricing, or the quiet hierarchies of workers in the shops, the quiet gift economy is not a subverted retrogression to 'traditional' characteristics and regulation of the charity shop. Instead, by utilising contemporary public and commercial resources to extend profitability, the quiet gift economy

represents how the charity shop employs the characteristics of professionalised business (databasing and building networks, in particular) to multiply profits in a way that is obscured from the customer. Throughout the quiet economy and hierarchies described in the preceding chapters, a theme of undercover rule-bending develops, where secret activities are shielded from the view of the parent charity, as well as the customers or workers. Quite often, the processes in place to facilitate additional funding (such as Gift in Kind and Gift Aid, although they are not limited to these) are subverted by workers themselves, either to enhance profits (when Gift Aid stickers are misused) or to protect the customer from the origins of an item (as with tainted GIK goods). Thus, charity shop workers have become to the *Gift Gatekeepers* of the charity shop, irrespective of centralised management and efforts to rationalise this responsibility.

Therefore, this research questions the validity of the argument of Goodall (2000a, p.110); that charities are distinguishable by the characteristics of accountability and openness, and that of Bryson et al. (2002, p.49); that the third sector operates relatively independently of governmental or corporate interests. As Weisbrod (1999) notes, the co-operation between non-profits and private firms has led to the suggestion that non-profits are merely “for-profits in disguise” as the competition for resources becomes more severe. The charity shops depicted within these case studies would indicate that, through strategies such as GIK and Gift Aid, surreptitious and hidden connections to both the first and second sector remain, and indicate not only the irrationality of rationality (Ritzer, 2011) inherent in the professionalised structures of charity shops, but also how their own social mission becomes threatened by their efforts to capitalise on public and private sources. It also adheres to Mauss’ claim that a gift is merely a “formal pretence” which must be reciprocated, either through the rehabilitation of petty criminals, the claiming of unpaid taxes, or



the redeemed cost of waste for corporations. The presence of the Quiet Gift Economy in charity shops reminds us all too clearly “just how formal and ethically blind is the bureaucratic pursuit of efficiency.” (Bauman, 1989, p. 15)

## 7.7 Summary

The previous three chapters have aimed to address research questions 1 and 2 in the following ways:

- 1. What processes are taking place at a micro level on the charity shop floor?** By recording what went on in the shop as a participant, a descriptive account of the specific practices that constitute the charity shop has been compiled. This enables the processes to then be categorised as indicative of professionalisation or not, thus testing previous theoretical standpoints; and the MCR and IHR looked at comparatively to see whether professionalisation is nuanced within the sector.
- 2. How do charity shop participants negotiate these processes?** As this research operated from an interpretivist standpoint and methodology, the experiences of those who work, volunteer and shop in the charity shop are vital. In particular, it has highlighted a ‘bottom up’ approach that revealed issues with the ‘top down’ emphasis on professionalisation put across in work such as that by Whithear (1999), who examined how best to deal with volunteers in order to professionalise a charity shop. The way these participants describe their feelings towards their roles and the changes they may be undergoing are revealing of a wider notion

of what charity means to those people who take part in charity retail work.

These findings will now be discussed in Chapter 8 in relation to established sociological theory. The chapter will answer research questions 3 and 4:

- 3. Is there a consistent 'professionalisation' in charity shops, or is the process more nuanced?**
- 4. What does this indicate about the professionalisation of charity, and wider conceptions of charity in general?**

## Discussion: The Quiet Economy in Context

The findings of this thesis have offered a window into the world of secondhand consumption, volunteering as work and intersectoral ties that illustrate the ever-shifting role of charity in modern society. In doing so, the research has addressed some of the most compelling issues studied in wider sociology: capitalism, work, social obligations, the role of the state and the fundamental concept of charity. Lucy Morris (2009) states that the key characteristics of a charitable organisation are defined by their leadership practices, their espoused ethics and values, and the integration of spirituality and equality. But charities have, she suggests, been subject to an ‘economic rationalist approach’ (2009, p.32). The application of business-like methods plays a large part in the *professionalisation* of charity shops discussed throughout this thesis.

To recap, professionalisation was the term used commonly within charity shop theory to describe the change from idiosyncratic to more systematic operations (Goodall, 2000b; p. 44) and the privileging of discourses of ‘retail’ over those of ‘charity and of care’ (Parsons & Broadbridge 2007, p. 552). It was also about specific changes to organisational “structure and process” (Ganesh & McAllum, 2012, p. 153), and was regarded as a relatively modern trend within the third sector. The literature treats professionalisation as the primary source of conflict and contention due to its affiliation with for-profit enterprise: “many nonprofits have used marketbased criteria to measure the costs and benefits of interventions, evolving into bureaucracies that are increasingly disconnected from community concerns.” (p.154). Thus, the growing concern at the capitalism/charity dichotomy within the charity shop was an acknowledged area of sociological inquiry.

Throughout chapters 5, 6 and 7, the research findings supported the claim that money-making (profit on behalf of the cause) was a primary objective for the charity shops, and was valued over and above the (social on behalf of the community) values considered inherent to charity. Goodall deemed the values of not-for-profit organisations were those of “openness, equality, accountability and mutual respect” (2000a, p.110).

However, the findings have also indicated that rather than an aggressive professionalisation of charity shops akin to the claims of previous theorists such as Goodall (2000b) and Parsons & Broadbridge (2007), the need to fit into an increasingly volatile market is being mediated through the use of professionalised processes *and* socially-oriented processes alongside one another on the shop floor. This is the ‘quiet economy’ of the charity shop; a specific facet of what Gregson & Crewe (2003, p. 106) term ‘alternative economies’ in reference to second-hand shopping in general. Unique to the charity shop, the term ‘quiet economy’ describes the small and subtle operations that indicate how discourses of charity remain powerful in spite of the bureaucratic changes within the sector. It takes the form of the flouting of head office rules, deviations from ‘professional’ restrictions, an ill-defined hierarchical structure with diverse worker roles and a range of public and private ties that symbolise the complicated and conflicting responsibilities charities have towards society and their own fundraising objectives.

By conducting a close observation of the operations of two charity shops, using an interpretive methodology to study the shop floor microcosm, the research engendered a large amount of data. This data illustrated the more understated workings going on behind the scenes of professionalised charity shop processes. The emergent theory of a quiet economy operating at the level of everyday social interaction was most evident in the following three impacts of

professionalisation that were observed on the shop floor: the pricing decisions and negotiations, the worker hierarchies and the oblique involvement of the state and private businesses.

Each of these issues examined in the preceding chapters contribute to the discussions prompted by the work of Goodall (2000a; 2000b) Parsons (2002), and Parsons & Broadbridge (2007) on how professionalisation is impacting upon the charity shop and fundamentally changing its mode of operation, thus altering our perception of charity as a whole. These authors emphasised that shops privileged fundraising over the other societal benefits they have previously offered - recycling of waste, volunteering opportunities for older people, and cheap goods for the less well off (Chattoe, 2006, p. 106). The assimilation of charity with inherent 'goodness'; whilst profit-orientation was synonymous with the dark side of contemporary capitalism, prevailed through these theories. But the notion of profit-orientation over and above social endeavour is challenged by the identification of a quiet economy, as will be elucidated by this chapter.

This chapter will engage the findings from Chapters 5,6 and 7 with sociological literature and wider contexts in order to answer the remaining 2 questions:

**3. Is there a consistent 'professionalisation' in charity shops, or is the process more nuanced?** In particular, issues around what constitutes professionalisation in this context – the training/payment of staff, homogenisation of stock, organisation of roles and increasing interactions with structural institutions such as the state all occur, but they remain *unpredictable* and are often flouted in favour of socially-oriented acts.

**4. What does this indicate about the professionalisation of charity, and wider conceptions of charity in general?** Charity is thought by contemporary Marxist Slavoj Žižek to be a fundamental part of

capitalism as we know it (Žižek, 2009a; 2009b) and continuing to support charities as they grow is merely the result of the consumer burden of guilt. This perspective sheds new light on the way we may study charity shops in the future. Through examining changes in charity retail (arguably the most consumerist of all fundraising endeavours), we can in turn examine the impacts these are having on the common perception of what charity is, and whether social obligations and 'charitable gifts' can be further problematised by the professionalisation of contemporary charity shops. The current climate of risk (Beck, 1992; 1999) has led to trepidation and cynicism about many previously unquestioned areas of social life. Negative public perceptions relating to the high pay of charity executives (Weisbrod, 1999; Hope, 2013); the prevalence of aggressive street fundraising; the involvement of many charities in highly criticised government workfare schemes and benefit sanctions (Beresford, 2012) and a lack of transparency in how charitable funds are spent, have all contributed to a public feeling of doubt towards the sector. The quiet economy of the charity shop can be seen as yet another questionable characteristic of non-profit organisations in the modern market economy.

This chapter will look at the findings from the research in relation to the following areas: the performance of knowledges (Crewe & Gregson, 1998; Gregson & Crewe, 1997a); the individualisation and the decentralization of modern work (Beck, 2000a; 2000b; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002); redemption and moral cleansing of items and people; Philanthropic Superpanopticism (Poster, 1996), and the possibility for 'pure' altruism (Andreoni, 1989; 1990) in the charity shop.

## 8.1 Performing Knowledges

Performing knowledges refers to the ability of staff and customers to “see and unlock the imaginary potential of a commodity” (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p.112) through having knowledge on its potential value. Knowledges of various kinds were crucial mediators of the professionalisation process in the charity shop. They play out in two major negotiations: the performance of *pricing knowledges* when a price is challenged, and the performance of *community knowledges*. This is the offering of discounts due to a familiarity with the customer’s personal circumstances.

The research described a performance when customers challenged value judgments. Doubt of value knowledge was common, and evidenced by the acts of pricing consultation described in Chapter 5 by Maria and Juliet. Tied into this was the presence of *pricing knowledge acquiescence*, where workers absolve themselves of the responsibility of pricing, and enter into a dialogue with the volunteer about the value of an item. Authority is deferred to volunteers, emphasising the diplomacy and rapport used often in management of volunteers (Parsons E. , 2002, p. 13). Also, when paid managers redistribute pricing responsibility, the quiet value economy of the charity shop operates with the quiet hierarchy described in Chapter 6 – the difficulties in managing such diverse staff require a subversion of the bureaucratised practices that may be in place. Therefore pricing knowledge acquiescence is a key indicator of how the quiet economy and quiet hierarchy successfully reconcile professionalisation, their social objectives, and the ‘messiness’ of the charity shop through pricing negotiations.

The research in performing knowledges elaborated upon the past studies of value and second hand shopping that privilege

economics - whether it be through an emphasis upon merchandising (Horne & Broadbridge, 1995), retail strategy (Gregson et al., 2002), or the second hand 'market' (Chattoe, 2006). Approaching the negotiations as a two-way interchange involving 'performance' between customers and workers allows them to be active agents and the 'bubbles of humanness' (Cova & Rémy, 2007, p.52) to permeate the impersonality of professionalisation. As Cova and Rémy state, this is not a "direct confrontation with the commercial system" (*ibid.*), but it is a means of negotiating and thus coping with the infiltration of capitalist rhetoric and practices in the shop. This tension must be successfully ameliorated in order for the shop to thrive.

The four forms of pricing negotiation that went on in store indicated that pricing knowledges could be used to either further profit, or to further social ties. Two of these were worker-initiated ('Favours for Regulars/Volunteer Discounts' and 'Upselling'), and two customer-initiated ('Haggling Up' and 'Seeking Reprieve'). This dichotomic system of negotiating prices embodied the smallest part of the wider struggles of charity shop professionalisation: sometimes the amounts being debated over were as little as 20 pence. In the contemporary market economy, these transactional discrepancies are so minute they may be overlooked. But they in fact illustrate the pervasive presence of the social within the context of the charity shop purchase. Rather than a completely instrumental fundraising device, there is still a cultural expectation that charity shops will be responsive to issues such as inequality, poverty, and social exclusion; as evidenced by the negotiation behaviours of some shop customers.

These four main categories of price negotiation show the crucial differentiation between the external and internal charity shop economies, and their dependence upon performance. The external charity shop economy (structured, rationalised, efficient fundraising for the parent charity, who then use that money in an equally



accountable and democratic way) is only really emphasised in the pricing negotiations when haggling is attempted by customers but declined by workers.

*Community knowledges* also played a role in the giving of favours for regular customers. Thus, the impersonal nature of modern work and the 'emotionally detached' professional (Weber, 1978) was interrupted by the emotional response shop workers had to individual circumstances. By allowing favours and discounts for locals they knew, charity shop workers were making both a profitable and a social connection. Regulars were encouraged to return because they are being treated as valued customers, and their needs were met; however they were also serving a profit-centric function as the act of giving a favour promotes reciprocity: that is, the tendency for the customer to therefore spend more money again with the store. It is what Godelier refers to as a 'personal act' of gift giving (Godelier, 1999, p. 14), that is, the element of personal relations play the most important role in 'giving' and reciprocation, in spite of the capitalist world we live in being oriented to "market and profit" (ibid.). What is occurring is in fact a careful mediation of charitable customer relations, which acknowledges the dependence all businesses have upon the satisfaction of their customer base (Kotler & Levy, 1969, p.13) and the simultaneous dependence of charities upon their local community and their own responsiveness to local need (Parsons E. , 2004, p. 34). The IHR relied more heavily upon people in the local area because it was a single shop unit operating on behalf of a small hospice charity. Local ties meant more than for a larger chain on a busy city-centre thoroughfare like the MCR. The performance of knowledge in this sense is one of local social awareness.

Shop workers would perform a role of mediator of local knowledge, alongside the value knowledge described in Chapter 5 of the goods for sale. As the core of this thesis examines how charity

shops walk the fine line between profit-orientation and social-orientation, the use of knowledges (both of value and of personal circumstance) proved to be an important tool for shop workers. These knowledges were performed subtly. Steve, for instance, would not make it clear that he was discounting items to the customer and certainly not to anybody else in store. Gregson & Crewe (1997a, p. 250) suggest that the performance incorporated in car boot sale shopping (the haggling, the pretence of indifference when first viewing an item, etc.) is key to the participant's enjoyment of the experience. The author would suggest that the performance of knowledges from charity shop staff is equally important to their experience, and enables them to express individual autonomy, social-orientated gift-giving and thus reciprocity in spite of professionalised restrictions.

The internal charity shop economy (the *quiet economy* of this thesis) works within external bureaucratic rules, but essentially it *must* operate with some independence in order to negotiate its local social function. Instrumental bureaucratic acts were mediated by the performance of local or pricing knowledges, and the crucial role shop workers play as intermediaries of the dual function of the charity shop.

## **8.2 Individualisation**

Another finding of the research was the prominence of individualisation of workers and customers. Beck paraphrases Sartre in stating that "people are condemned to individualisation" (2002, p4.) and the contemporary charity shop and its workers are not immune to this process. The MCR operates as one of many shops that represent its parent charity and this introduces within their chain of shops a sense of competitiveness, which is used to encourage failing shops to

improve their sales figures. Shops in the chain compete with one another to hit targets; again, distancing the motivations of the shop workers from traditional socially-oriented aims of charity. The impact of competition develops a form of *individualisation* that is more in line with neoliberal capitalism than the collectivist ethos of charity. Managers such as Maria compete in order to retain the title of most lucrative shop branch, an accolade that holds as much benefit for her career as for the charitable cause. The charitable 'gift' in this instance has significant reciprocal benefits for the individual, illustrating Godelier's (1999, p.207) interpretation of a gift as "a subjective, personal and individual matter"; and the economic market, as "located beyond the spheres of the market and the state" (*ibid.*).

Upselling, described in Chapter 5, can be seen as an example of a price negotiation, which does not have a social orientation, but contributes to the wider process of individualisation. Upselling occurred in an effort to secure a sale, to increase profit on a sale, get rid of stock that will otherwise be surplus or to placate a customer who is already purchasing. It is an instrumental subversion of rational, established bureaucratic pricing structure with an individualistic motivation. In addition to the benefit to the manager who may gain individual reward for their sales, the shop becomes a conduit of individualisation, subject to new constraints and controls that it must solve through individual action (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 2); as the blame for underperformance will be levelled individually. If the shop has too much stock that it can't sell, the external economy of the charity shop will cycle it to another store – but the quiet economy enables staff to cut prices of unsold stock or offer discount deals, ensuring the shop's (and manager's) individual survival.

In the risky contemporary market, the charity shop is presented with few other options in order to remain afloat, and the manager is compelled to behave this way to keep her position. Prioritising

fundraising for the individual shop rather than the charity can help build social relationships on the shop floor (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007, p. 559), but ultimately it perpetuates the contradictory nature of profit-oriented non-profit organisations (Guo, 2006, p.124). The charity shop's need to succeed in an inhospitable economic environment has made individualisation to some degree unavoidable. Prosperity is only possible at the 'deficit of solidarity' (Godelier, 1999, p. 209)

Customer-initiated price negotiations indicate the tangible impact customer perceptions of charity have upon the way charity shops operate. They also indicate how individualisation due to the modern, unpredictable 'self culture' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 42) causes customers to shop as if it were a political decision rather than a mundane choice. The individual becomes the central focus of the experience.

Most common of these negotiations was *seeking reprieve*, where a customer disputed the price due to a personal circumstance, or a belief that the price does not reflect what a charity shop 'should be' – a place selling low-cost goods (Williams C. , 2002). In this instance, the customer falls victim to individualisation where the statement 'I only have £n on me' personalises the discount to their own circumstances and stubbornly defend their perspective that charity shops should not charge high prices. This type of individualism is slightly different to that described in relation to workers above. It is psycho-social, akin to that described by Christopher Lasch in *'The Culture of Narcissism'*: customers "have merely become more adept at exploiting the conventions of interpersonal relations for their own benefit." (Lasch, 1979, p.66). This has its roots in a "widespread loss of confidence in the future." (p. 68); again, this can be related to the omnipotent contemporary sense of risk and 'precarity' (Berardi & Empson, 2009). Lasch sees that underlying exploitation and power struggles

undermine the 'co-operative' and sociable society we try to construct. It is therefore telling that one of the examples from the research was of a customer describing how aghast she was at witnessing haggling in the IHR. The shame and embarrassment associated with the utilisation of charity out of need (Williams C. , 2002; 2003) is superseded by the individualistic belief that charity should be extended to them in addition to the cause the shop is trying to fundraise for.

The contradictory responses to the professionalisation of charity shops extend from the ideas in Chapter 3.3 of the charitable gift as creating 'indebtedness' (Godelier, 1999, p. 12). By 'giving' their custom to the charity shop, the customer feels a personal entitlement to a discount. This is exacerbated by the individualisation of contemporary life, which leads to a decreased sense of community care and empathy for others. Thus the act of seeking reprieve in the charity shop enables us to see how the duality of professionalisation (and increased bureaucracy in general) and charity invokes the challenges to prices that are characteristic of the quiet economy

By bringing in their individual circumstances, the customer interrupts the rational, depersonalised process of charity shop price-lining. Beck describes how "the density of regulations informing modern society" means that an individual must be proactive in order to remain in with a chance of securing resources (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 2). The act of seeking reprieve was common in the MCR precisely because the shop employed a more rational and bureaucratic pricing structure than the IHR; as a result, it had generally higher prices. Manageress Maria's defence was that she must reluctantly stick to the rules for the sake of changing wider perceptions of charity shops, and ensuring a consistency in that respect. This shows that there is still an awareness of the external economy the charity operates in, and that it is part of a Weberian bureaucracy, aiming for calculability and universality for co-workers in the charity shop sphere.

The fifth characteristic of bureaucracy: impersonality (Weber, 1946, pp. 196-203), jars with the individualised price negotiations of the contemporary customer.

Individualisation was also discussed in relation to worker types in Chapter 6. There was an experience of individual accountability for action (rather than the wider social responsibility associated with third sector organisations) and personal responsibility for failures or mistakes. Individualisation was also acknowledged as playing a big part in the switch from formal/contractual obligations to social obligations, particularly for MCR Manageress Maria. In general, it was observed that she spoke in managerial terminology, but would adopt a discourse of charity and moral obligations when describing how let down or frustrated she felt by her management team. The formal obligations of the manageress are superseded by informal obligations when systemic, bureaucratic failures (for instance, in communication) took place with the charity's head office. Maria then resorted to rhetoric of conscientiousness and collaboration, and her reliance upon her own informal sense of obligation developed.

Staff also experienced a Marxian sense of alienation from the work process they are involved in. One effect of capitalist labour is the individual being estranged from their work by its creation of private property (Marx, 1844/1974). The experience described in Chapter 6 of deskilling and enforced upskilling, as well as the competitive nature of the work managers like Maria must undertake, result in a sensation of lack of control and creative input, a detachment from the final product of their labour (the charitable work the parent charity does) and a feeling of de-legitimisation of their formal role within the organisation. This is a phenomenon widely associated with work for profit, but previously less attributed to work in the third sector, which is seen to preference openness and equality (Goodall, 2000a, p.111).

The alienation and individualisation of charity shop workers results in a difficult contradiction. Those who are formally obligated to work in the shop through a rationalised worker structure experience the fallibility of bureaucratic professionalisation described in Chapter 3.2, where a complicated and depersonalised hierarchical network serves to alienate workers and cause them to be “emotionally detached” (Weber, 1977, p. 231). To compensate, the interviews with both IHR and MCR shop managers showed a reversion to informal (conscientious and collaborative) social obligations in place of the flawed formal obligations. Altruism and the sensation of the ‘warm glow’ (Andreoni, 1989; 1990) and, in particular, a discourse of ‘care’ (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007) are adopted by the MCR staff, enabling Maria to continue to maintain social capital in spite of deteriorating bureaucracy. By comprising, the professionalisation process is mediated by informal obligations in spite of top-down pressures and obligations. What has been observed is a reliance upon the informal, the unscripted, and the socially-orientated as a back-up, and in many ways a *defence mechanism*, against the impersonal and ruthless business world. As with the transactional negotiations discussed in Chapter 5, the social mediates the rational “pervasive business paradigm” (Morris, 2009, p.32) within the worker hierarchies of the charity shop.

### **8.3 Changing Labour: The Detraditionalisation of Work**

In addition to individualisation processes, the diverse structures of work in the charity shop were discussed in Chapter 6. A *quiet hierarchy* was seen to have developed behind the scenes and in the back room, alongside the more overt professionalisation of staff and formalising of work roles. The messy and inconsistent worker

hierarchies were a feature of the anomalous nature of charity shop operations, whilst also indicative of contemporary 'cross-functioning' in business: the co-ordination of different authorities, usually across different departments, but also a horizontal distribution of authority (Parker Follett, 2012; Landsberger, 2012). The vertical authority structure is visible in the IHR (Figure 10), but the more 'professionalised' MCR (Figure 9) exhibits a nuanced structure with distinct and multiple roles and subordinates; thus "different organisational subgoals but interdependent activities that need to intermesh." (Landsberger, 2012, p.87). The importance of these hierarchical differences cannot be understated, since they are seen to dramatically affect the interactions and processes on the shop floor, including the aforementioned pricing negotiations. In some ways, they could be said to mirror the change and deregulation of modern work, but they are also indicative of larger-scale changes in charities particularly, and the way their expanding labour force is utilised (Beck, 2000a; Castells, 2001). In this respect, charity shops are merely developing their processes in the same way as profit-making businesses in order to 'keep up' with a changing market economy. Yet the varying obligations of these workers - and the hierarchies they form part of - are what constitute a key element of the charity shop's anomalous character.

The hierarchies shown in diagrammatical form in Chapter 6 indicate the difference between the authoritative roles in the IHR and the MCR. The hierarchy of duration of service (in the IHR) is vertical in its distribution, relatively simple to navigate and therefore quite rationalised and business-like (Powell, 2012, p. 34) - however it is more akin to traditional business structures, which ensured stability through a clear definition of roles. The MCR has adopted a less familiar, less defined and imprecise hierarchy, with more characteristics of the 'detraditionalised' nature of contemporary industry (Beck, Giddens, &



Lash, 1994, pp. 14-16); that is, flexibility, decentricity, role-sharing and temporary work. In the work of Beck (2000a) this is treated as a side effect of the individualisation of work, where employees are working increasingly on personalised tasks, having to 'sell' their individual skill set to the market and adapt to a globalised economy.

However, the involvement of the state in the MCR (the Department for Work and Pensions in relation to the NDPWs, and the Crown Prosecution Service for CSWs) negates this and implies an extra dimension to the hierarchical structure of a contemporary charity shop. That is, the charity shop operates as a voluntary operation that is supported by public sources – forming an extension of the 'shadow state' (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 121). This has further implications in the results found in Chapter 7, where an intersection between the public and charity sector further problematises the concept of the 'charitable gift'; it also offers a perspective in response to Research Question 4, about the wider conception of charity as an entity that is separate from the state. It suggests that the third and the second sector are closely tied, and overlap indistinguishably.

Integral to the diversity of shop workers in the MCR was the division of labour that cemented the positions of each within the hierarchy. Primarily, that division is one of front and back-space work (Goffman, 1959). CSWs and inexperienced/unskilled volunteers are designated backroom tasks. NDPWs, experienced/skilled volunteers and paid staff were predominantly on the shop floor, or 'front room'. This division did not aid the accumulation of organisational social capital (Leana & Van Buren III, 2012) needed for the shop to run efficiently, as teamwork was fragmented, and those working under informal obligations did not have any explicit demarcation of their roles. The quiet hierarchy did not facilitate the shared trust imperative to the formation of this capital (ibid.), due to its lack of clarity, vague allocation of authority and the fuzzy distinctions between the

obligations of workers. In the contemporary working world in general, the need for organisational social capital and the security and support it offers can be seen to be decreasing due to an increase in individualised and precarious work patterns (Beck, 2000b). Thus, the issue extends beyond that of the problems it creates on the charity shop floor to many other types of work and work practices.

In both shops, volunteers were observed to operate under informal obligations, which could be divided up into two categories: conscientious, and collaborative. Conscientiousness was defined as the quasi-religious sense of duty and adherence to the authority of those higher in the shop hierarchy. It required the volunteer to act 'as a worker' in a similar way to those under more formal obligations, and formed a relational psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995) with the parent charity. Collaborative obligations were the commitment not only to the cause, but also to the team effort that strives to support it. The obligation to fulfil your role was therefore that the other volunteers and workers were not 'let down'. If other workers are let down, social judgments and sanctions deter volunteers from 'violation of psychological contract' (*ibid.*). This can result in clashes with paid staff due to perceptions of worker value. Both conscientious and collaborative obligations came under the bracket of the 'social' as opposed to the 'profitable'. Beck would describe these collaborative characteristics as akin to traditional work – a collective and locally-managed pursuit (Beck, 2000b). But the unpredictable nature of the work, the individualisation of roles, working hours and the plethora of worker 'types' are a contradiction to this familiar work ethic. The disputes that arose are a direct result of this contradictory work environment. This finding offers an alternative to Whithear's (1999) top-down analysis of worker contribution in charity shops. Instead, they offer a bottom-up perspective, highlighting how volunteers

themselves negotiate the complex hierarchical relations in contemporary charity shops, and fulfil their worker obligations.

Another key element of a contemporary, globalised understanding of work is the notion of flexible working, individualisation of job specifications, and geographical fragmentation of organisations; which has emerged alongside a general sense of globalised 'risk' in job markets (Allen & Henry, 1997; Beck, 2000b). In particular, roles and responsibilities fluctuate and are unfixed, as are demonstrated by the observations in both case studies. This supports the findings of Horne & Maddrell (2002, p. 99) that charity shop managers are attempting to recruit 'creatively', using episodic volunteers or offering flexible work patterns to match the changing world of work. The roles in the shops were tailored to what suits the organisation *or* what suits the volunteer and their capabilities (for instance, elderly volunteer Alan is prevented from work on the till in the MCR, yet elderly volunteer Rose at the IHR only wants to do ironing and won't serve on the shop floor). Again, the degree of professionalisation affects the degree to which volunteers have their say: in the IHR, roles are distributed according to a 'membership management system' (where volunteers are asked what they feel comfortable doing) rather than a 'programme management system' (where tasks are identified and then a suitable volunteer is allocated to them) (Meijs & Hoogstad, 2001; Meijs & Karr, 2004). The latter is observed in the MCR, and is partly in place due to the higher number of formally contracted staff and the need for them to have set roles.

Rousseau attests that no formal contract is ever fully complete (1995, p. 1), and therefore specification of roles within ANY form of work can be open to interpretation. This is ever more common in the world of contemporary, detraditionalised work; where zero-hour contracts, temporary posts, unpaid internships and workfare schemes are becoming the norm. The non-profit sector in particular has come

under fire for its involvement in unpaid internship schemes that undermine traditional volunteering – some charities have even been described as ‘exploiting’ loopholes surrounding the definition of internship (Third Sector, 2013). The recent outcry about these unpaid roles has been centred the fact that they privilege people from affluent backgrounds, who can afford to work without pay (Dennis, 2013; Steffen, 2010). Essentially, the detraditionalisation of work has become a traditional class debate; in which the elite are able to take a hit financially in order to gain skills and experience, whilst those from poorer backgrounds cannot. Not only does this go against the ethical values espoused by the charity sector, it also undermines the value of paid charity staff, by depressing wages and reducing employment opportunities (Gerada, 2013, p. 10). Therefore the informal obligations of working for charity shops have become embroiled within the difficulties perpetuated by an unstable and unforgiving wider labour market.

The issue of informal obligations operating alongside those that are formalised highlights the wider question of work value – those who are not being remunerated are still expected to provide work of equal worth according to Whithear (1999, p. 119). In the quest for professional efficiency in charity shops, their former viability as a place to work and develop skills for those with learning difficulties, mental health problems, physical disabilities and the elderly is threatened.

#### **8.4 Exclusion, Redemption and Moral Cleansing**

An identified issue within the research was exclusion due to certain physical or mental characteristics, particularly observed in the MCR. Rather than being a ‘user friendly’ and ‘inclusive space’ to those

who are marginalised in society (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007, p. 562), less able volunteers were relegated in the quiet hierarchy to more menial tasks, and treated as a hindrance rather than a help. Their informal, social obligation to help was degraded to a similar status to those who work there under legal obligation – the community service workers. These workers, as described in Chapter 6, are kept in the back room, away from the customers. In relation to Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, the positioning of both marginalised volunteers and CSW's in the back of the shop is indicative of their stigmatised identity – they are 'discredited' or 'discreditable' (Goffman, 1963, p. 42) and treated differently to those higher in the quiet hierarchy. Thus, professionalisation of work in its contemporary, flexible form leads to further alienation of volunteers, many of whom come from marginalised groups in society.

As mentioned in Chapter 6, CSWs are under a legal obligation to fulfil their community service. Hierarchically, NDPWs rank above CSWs – they are not stigmatised by a known criminal conviction, and they tended to work for longer periods in the shop. NDPWs work in order to receive benefits from the Job Centre, and with the aim of receiving on-the-job training that will lead to a permanent, paid (formal) contract. Rather than having their work tarnished by a 'blemish of character' (Goffman, 1963), they are regarded positively and offered training, a front-of-shop role and more responsibility. This elevates them in the quiet hierarchy, emphasising the importance of upskilling in charity shop professionalisation. "Developing a higher skill base" is described as a key element of the emergent 'contract culture' in the third sector (Whithear, 1999, p. 118), and the New Deal Partnership aims to tackle the issue of unemployment and low-skilled charity shop workers simultaneously. Again, the ethos of community development and the 'helping hand' to those struggling to find work finds itself working (albeit sometimes inharmoniously) alongside the professionalisation of

charity. Whilst aiding the local community in one sense, this is still creating exclusion and divisions between worker types – and furthering the notion of charity as part of the ‘shadow state’ (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 121).

By utilising CSWs who are ‘paying their debt to society’ in a similar way, the charity shop allows an opportunity for societal retribution. The semantic associations that charity has with religion and spirituality are affirmed by the fact that CSWs are taking part in redemptive work – they are subject to the traditional charity ethos of ‘saving the souls’ of those who have gone astray (Morris, 2009, p.44). These moral undertones temper the ‘rampant’ professionalisation detailed by Parsons (2002; 2004) and reflect the means with which charities and their shops deal with societal issues alongside profit motivations.

CSWs reside in the bottom tier of the MCR hierarchy and are restricted temporally, spatially and interactionally - by both the knowledge of their own role (as something they legally have to fulfil) and by the pre-conceptions or stigma (Goffman, 1963) of other workers in the shop. Using the sociological concept of the ‘gift’ discussed in Chapter 3.3, we can see that a form of reciprocity is being exercised. CSWs are required to compensate society for a criminal act, and again, the legal obligation coincides with the social obligation to pay for wrongdoing.

An additional issue to the use of ‘tainted’ workers such as CSWs is the need to protect other staff and volunteers from the intangible threat of the criminalised ‘other’, as highlighted in the observation of an instance of suspected drug-use at the MCR. Gregson, Brooks and Crewe (2002, p.1676) describe the peripheral nature of the charity shop as a site of transgressional shopping; somewhere that is more open to those on the fringes of society, such as the homeless. Rather

than looking at ‘transgressional’ shop customers, Chapters 6 and 7 theorised that the CSWs (*tainted workers*) and the sale of police evidence and products of prison labour (*tainted cultural goods*) were also evidence of the charity shop’s risky, transgressional nature.

The professionalised charity shop struggles with the conflicting ideologies that this throws up: a discourse of tolerance and community ‘care’ can only extend so far. As Gregson, Brooks and Crewe attest, earning money for the charity “overrode [...] acting charitably towards others.” (2000, p.1679), and this can include the safety of volunteers, staff and customers. Thus, the division of a ‘front’ and ‘back’ space workers is multi-purpose: it protects those on the shop floor from the ‘tainted’ workers (CSWs); it enables the shop to function efficiently by providing ad-hoc menial labour which suits the way the employment market has changed; and it still enables the ‘intergrated spiritual(ity)’ of charitable values (Morris, 2009, p.32) to benefit the general public. This variety of benefits enables the quiet hierarchy to function in spite of (and in some sense because of) the anomalous and ‘messy’ nature of the charity shop.

Also complicating the moral function of the charity shop are *Tainted Cultural Goods*. They are representative of the intersection between charity and the law, and how charity shops as the conduit of second-hand items conceal their sinister backstories. The origins of tainted cultural goods are disguised from potential customers, and are classified in both shops in a manner that is “morally problematic” (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 6), This classification forms the archetype of the intersectoral ties between the charity shop and the first sector.

*Reclaimed police evidence* (identified in both case studies) and the *products of prison labour* (in the MCR) were covertly sold under the guise of being GIK goods. The objects were disconnected from their negative past by the act of ‘purification’ that a charity shop fundraising

sale offers. As with the redemption of 'tainted workers' described above, the goods were subject to redefinition – but this was down to the arbitration of the charity shop workers. They were made privy to the object's origins, and served as doorkeepers (Hetherington, 2004) of the permeable boundary between the item's marginal past and its future 'life' with a new owner. Workers had to be implicit in resolving the problem of taintedness before the goods reached customers, through a process of "removal of traces of former ownership" (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p.144); transformation, and literal or metaphorical repackaging (Gregson et al., 2000, p.105). The tainted GIK goods are redefined as a secondary raw material (Pongrácz & Pohjola, 2004, p. 148) through the essential removal of the inherent "traces of memory" (O'Brien, 2007, p.114) that all discarded objects possess. This is managed by charity shop workers, according to O'Brien (p.123) through a social/legal/political negotiation that establishes a new ideology and economic context for objects. It is this process that transfers tainted cultural goods into a new stage of their commodity existence, and it is only possible through intersectoral synthesis of the public, the private and the philanthropic.

The contemporary charity shop, therefore, becomes a mediator of danger and polices societal boundaries, distinguishing threats and re-imagining them as untainted by the effects of a deviant act (police GIK, or the CSWs completing their community service) or a deviant space (products of prison labour). It also polices one more area of social life that is state-sanctioned, but still holds moral repercussions. It mediates the effects of rampant consumerism.

Statements on the evils of submitting oneself to capitalist consumption by religious figures (such as those made by the Pope that are described by Slavoj Žižek as a "disgusting spectacle" of "cheap moralisation" [2009b, p. 37]) have accentuated the piety of moral arguments against the 'sins' of over-indulgence in bodily pleasures –



rendering this almost as taboo as the tainted goods, acts and spaces that other aspects of the charity shop.

Thus, elements of the quiet gift economy can serve to neutralise the 'bad' leftovers of capitalism. Most Gifts in Kind were predominantly provided by private sector companies as a disposal strategy; thus they can be reframed as a business deal rather than a philanthropic gift. The use of private sector goods as charity shop stock shone light on some characteristics of modern capitalism now incorporated into charity shop practices, including the homogeneity of goods, collaboration with ethically-dubious companies, and damage to brand identity of more expensive companies like Bench and Zara. Unsurprisingly, GIK relations were described by their MCR manager as 'subtle' and 'not too blatant' – the epitome of the quiet gift economy, and certainly not in line with the ethics and values we have come to associate with charity.

By examining the GIK process, what became clear is that the charity shop's enhanced role as a *cultural detritivore* (absorbing and using up the waste products of society and capitalism) was a key part of its redemptive nature. Through doing this, the contentious prior biography (Appadurai, 1986) of unsold for-profit goods can be reframed on behalf of 'a good cause'.

This supports prior theoretical assertions that donating to charity shops makes people feel better about themselves and their over-consumption (Morgan & Birtwhistle, 2009, p.195). The need for the leftovers of capitalism to be hidden within in the charity shop space highlights the discomfort we feel with the amount of waste our system produces (De Coverly, O'Malley, & Patterson, 2003, p. 17).

The redemption of tainted goods and workers is one of the primary facets of the quiet economy. It is a cultural phenomenon of ritualistic and symbolic cleansing; moving both workers and goods through a system that recategorises them as useful and within the

boundaries of societal acceptance. Prior to this, as described above, the deviant biography of the object is disguised. De Coverly et al. (2003, p. 11) describe how many waste processes are 'deliberately hidden' from the public gaze. The charity shop has become one of the many 'spaces for things we don't want to face' alongside prisons, psychiatric hospitals, dumps, sewers and so on (Hawkins & Muecke, 2003, p. 41). By putting an item in a certain place, thresholds can be established and threats diminished. Taussig (in De Coverly et al. 2003, p.11) describes these as 'public secrets' and to be exposed to them would be a 'traumatic' revelation (Hawkins & Muecke, 2003, pp. 49, 51), upsetting our most sacred societal boundaries. Just as tainted workers are kept in the backroom; tainted cultural goods are repackaged and resold with their past histories erased; and the increased obsolescence and consumerism of the modern age is de-labelled and sold on behalf of a charity; these 'public secrets' are protected by processes on the charity shop floor.

The idea of moral redemption brings the discussion back to the concept of the charitable gift. Behaviour that may be deemed to be 'philanthropic' in nature is complicated by professionalisation, and increasing interdependence with the public and private sectors. The final section below discusses how the perception of charities as being characteristically independent of 'governmental and corporate interests' (Bryson et al., 2002, p.49) is further complicated by the involvement of Retail Gift Aid in shops, and how this supplies and perpetuates a *philanthropic superpanopticon* of digitised, trackable donor information.

## 8.5 The Philanthropic SuperPanopticon

Angela McRobbie's (1989) work on second-hand markets characterised them as free from the systems of control and surveillance that one came to expect within the conventional retail space. Intersectoral relations such as those observed between the charity shop and private and public organisations have disrupted this. They have also tested the validity of arguments touting a clear professionalising process within charity shops. Perhaps most importantly, the examination of the procedural operations of Gift in Kind and Gift Aid have offered an insight into the changing economic status of 'charity' – in terms of the extensive bureaucracy and the inevitable 'quiet' characteristics that are external to its rules.

In particular, the involvement of a retail gift aid system that enables wider tracking of the donor behaviour of individuals contributes to the formation of a 'philanthropic superpanopticon'; a database of information that records how much money each donor makes for the charity, and sends them updates at various intervals. The possible implications of this are further loyalty to the cause, but also concerns about data use, targeted marketing, and other risks that link to the digitisation of data.

Gift Aid was only possible in the MCR due to the charity being larger and more capable of investing in setting the process up. Yet there was another reason why the IHR had not been considered for Gift Aid: their regulars are described by the manager as being on benefits or low income. If a donor is not a UK tax payer, Gift Aid cannot be claimed on their behalf (HMRC, 2012). The incompatibility of the IHR with this process is predominantly due to the shop's lack of professionalised structure: it is not part of a network of shops, thus the Gift Aid is not likely to accrue to a vast amount of money. Nevertheless,

the socio-economic background of the shop customers and donors (since the majority of customers donate, and vice versa (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 66) also negates the implementation of Gift Aid. In short, there are socio-economic limitations to the professionalisation of the IHR, in terms of Gift Aid intersectoral ties. This is in part because of its geographic location, and the implications this has for those who live there. Weiss states: “people tend to live with others like themselves, sharing similar demographics, lifestyles and values.” (2000, p. 305), thus individuals clustered in the proximity of the IHR will be assumed to share numerous similarities. This can then be used as a ‘powerful predictor’ of their consumption habits, tastes, and values (Burrows & Gane, 2006, p. 795). It can also be used to predict their potential to donate, as will be explored below.

The Gift Aid regime at the MCR was found to require an intersection of three elements: *Shop Worker Participation*, *Donor Participation*, and *Government Taxation*. The workers in the shop are key gatekeepers within the process, and ‘upskilling’ can take place, as with commercial retail sales forces (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007, p. 554) as workers must learn and take part in the systematic process. They collect and input the initial data into the ‘philanthropic superpantopticon’ databases.

Donor participation in Gift Aid schemes has previously been seen as a passive charitable act. Donations of goods usually occur because the owner believes an item has more life in it and does not wish it to go to waste – a form of ‘strategic disposal’ (Ekerdt, 2009). But ‘convenience’ is second only to ‘support of the cause’ in the reasons why a particular charity shop is selected to receive a donation (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, pp. 65-66). Nevertheless, once an item is brought into a shop for donation, the owner is relinquishing responsibility for it; the ‘biography’ of the item (Appadurai, 1986) for that person ends there. However, Gift Aid enables an item (and the donor) to be kept

track of throughout the stage of second-cycle consumption, prolonging the act of disposal. In addition, the donor submits their details to a national database, operated by the charity, which will inform them when their charitable donations reach a certain earning threshold. It also offers this same information up to the Inland Revenue, so that non-monetary charitable donations are also monitorable by the state. In return, the donor receives a card that acts as a loyalty card, to encourage further donations.

Through the use of extensive databasing and rationalisation, an act of convenient disposal is converted into a philanthropic donation; recorded, and embedded within the information held by the public sector. This donation is not only monitored by the charity, but by the Inland Revenue, which calculates what percentage of their tax can be Gift-Aided. Through a nexus of technology, bureaucracy and a tax system of charity benefits, the 'gift' of an individual is mediated, and philanthropic behaviour rationalised.

With the combination of these donor details and government taxation comes what this research has termed *philanthropic superpanopticism*. The term is derived from Foucault's (1979) use of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon vision in *Discipline and Punish* and the conformity it induced within the modern institution. Poster (1996) suggests that we are now all subject to the Superpanopticon – the many interlinked databases, electronic profiles, online data trails and other intangible information that can be used to make up a simulated version of an individual, often without their knowledge. Their identity is 'multiplied' and 'decentred' and their subjectivity threatened (Poster, 1996, p. 184). The philanthropic superpanopticon works in much the same way, through transmitting information on donating (and shopping) practices via electronic systems, swipe cards, microchips, barcodes and identity databases. The individual has little control or knowledge of what information is held about them, or what

it may be used for. Manipulation of the system (such as the swapping of Gift Aid stickers described in Chapter 7) is not made evident to them, yet it is recorded into a system that is “infinitely preservable in time” and “everywhere” (p. 182).

The information could be used to map the geographical propensity for ‘giving’, leading to future targeting from charitable organisations. Equally, it could be used for the ‘black listing’ areas such as the locality of the IHR, who may be seen as less likely to give due to socio-economic conditions. Thrift argued that the signifiers of where you live and your identity are “inexorably linked” (Thrift, 1997, p. 160), therefore the details of this being contained in a database of philanthropy is one way in which the professionalisation of charity shops and the resulting *quiet gift economy* can be seen to take a tangible form.

Now, a charity shop donation can no longer be regarded as necessarily “cloaked in anonymity” (Gregson et al., 2000, p.119). The trajectory of the Gift Aid object post-donation continues, and this information is now recorded and tracked in the same way that the donor’s details are retained. This process has changed from the purely material movements of objects, their “temporality, circulation, exchange and possession” (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 145), to the hyper-real; an invisible, constructed simulacrum, which can be acted upon by third-parties in a similar way to the donor data, with no prior knowledge or consultation.

The previous discussions of moral cleansing, redemption and the philanthropic panopticon in relation to Gift Aid and Gift in Kind have indicated that both of these processes are not really ‘gifts’ at in the generosity sense. They are, as Frow describes, not objects but “transactions and social relations” (1997, p. 124) within a market economy. Charity shops are often viewed as participating in a “moral

economy of redistribution” (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 106) and therefore market-centric operations are particularly contentious.

Because of this, the final question asked was, can there be such a thing as pure altruism within the contemporary charity shop processes observed? And how does this work alongside professionalisation?

### **8.6 A Possibility for ‘Pure’ Altruism?**

It has been established that the ‘gifts’ described in Chapter 7 are more representative of reciprocity: a cycle of exchange that can be beneficial to both parties. The core argument of the work of Mauss (1970) is therefore supported: there is a moral obligation to ‘reciprocate’ a gift. Companies receive the benefit of good press from their involvement, as well as saving on VAT and disposal costs. The taxpaying donor receives updates by post of how much their donations are earning thanks to the philanthropic superpanoptic database. They also benefit from the convenience and ‘warm glow’ (Andreoni, 1990) from their ethical disposal choice. Charities aim to be open and accountable in order for the visibility of their work to ‘repay’ those who have contributed. Even volunteers, as seen in Chapter 6, work under conscientious and collaborative obligations from which social and psychological benefits are gleaned.

So is all altruism and gift-giving in the charity shop inherently ‘impure’, in line with Andreoni’s original theory of giving? The author believes there is one possible challenge to this, and it stems from a pricing negotiation discussed in Chapter 5: the act of haggling up. This negotiation stands out because for three reasons. Firstly, it offers no monetary benefit to the initiator and is in direct opposition to the idea that charity shops are a site to glean pleasure from finding ‘bargains’ at

low prices (Williams, Hubbard, Clark, & Berkeley, 2001, p. 213). Secondly, it is potentially unique to the charity shop space, therefore it is a process born of the dichotomy of profit-making and charity. Finally, it is in *addition* to a charitable gift already being made through the act of purchase.

Haggling up results from a failure in price knowledge. Charity shops have been perceived to become savvy with such judgements due to the introduction of paid staff (Parsons E. , 2002, p. 11), who are meticulously trained in merchandising and stocking. However, one issue with the traditional charity shop is the unpredictability and diversity of goods, meaning that a breadth of general value knowledge is needed in order to ensure the best price is secured for any given item. Using the input of various price knowledges to make a final price decision (as described in Chapter 5) was common in the MCR, but occasionally items are overlooked, and their value not recognised in spite of the many knowledges consulted. In the past, these would have constituted what Parsons (2008, p. 392) describes as a potential 'find'; an item that has unacknowledged value. But the research noted that customers would intervene at times if they felt an item was being undersold, resulting in 'haggling up'. This negotiation relies upon pricing knowledge conflict, but unlike the other negotiations described, the customer insists upon paying *at least* that which is owed, in some instances more, because of the perceived value of the item being higher than the asking price. They may also add on a donation "to go in the box" on the counter post-purchase.

This process exemplifies the problematic embodiment of charitable action within a shop setting. The purchase is not merely a transaction; it is also imbued with the discourse of charity. The 'bargain' factor of charity shopping is therefore negated because the customer refuses to 'profit from the ignorance' of charity shop staff (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 48), instead informing them just how



much more value can be made from a particular item. This act is more emblematic of altruism than any of the other negotiations that occur on the shop floor for this reason – because it supersedes the assumption that everyone loves charity shops for their bargains and ‘finds’.

Often haggling up is not a debate about authenticating the value, but about paying that *little bit more*, usually a pound or two, which asserts both the value judgement and the social orientation of the customer. In a broader sense, it represents the failure of the pricing structure system or the ‘irrationality of rationality’ (Ritzer, 2011, p. 143), as these structures exclude the opportunity to maximise profits that the charities so desperately seek. But most potently, it provides an opportunity for the possibility of pure altruism, giving to the disadvantage of the self, that James Andreoni found so difficult to find.

## **8.7 Summary**

The portrait of the contemporary charity shop that has been painted throughout this research is one that is shrouded in secrecy and full of discrepant characteristics. There cannot be a meticulous ‘professionalisation’ of charity retail processes without some allowance for these idiosyncrasies. The two different case studies showed that in particular individual shops for small charities, such as the IHR, do not experience professionalisation on the same scale, and some of the concluding theories mentioned above are not universally applicable. By looking at the two different shops in depth, this study has depicted the similarities (the Gifts in Kind, the pricing negotiations, for example) as well as the differences (presence within the Philanthropic Superpanopticon, and more traditional worker hierarchies) between the shops discussed in Parsons’ (2004) typology of charity shops. The

quiet economy is present in both, as is a degree of professionalisation, but theorising the extent to which they appear must be done with caution precisely because of the dynamic and varied character of the contemporary charity shop.

Whether it be through the mediation of social and profit oriented pricing negotiations; the arbitration of diverse worker structures and roles within the current employment climate; or the burgeoning degree of crossover that charity shops have with other sectors; the quiet economy of the charity shop offers a novel understanding of an extremely nuanced field of sociological interest. It also sheds some light onto how we understand charity in a wider sense.

Slavoj Žižek (2009b), underlined a major contemporary issue with charity when he claimed that welfare and aid for the needy in society is not seen as solvable by simply handing money over to them – instead a ‘dynamic’ and ‘productive’ intermediary must be used to allocate and ‘lend’ it (p14). In this case, the intermediary is the charity, and by extension the charity shop; using all the knowledge and resources possible (free labour, free stock, private-sector collaboration, public sector tax allowances and so on) to make the most profit on the behalf of the ‘needy’. The traditional process of professionalisation – with its bureaucratic characteristics of efficiency, predictability, calculability and control (Ritzer, 2011, pp. 24-25) – is modified by complex negotiation techniques, diverse staff, and integral intersectoral ties. Thus, the quiet economy of the title becomes the embodiment of the unique nature of contemporary charity; it is the dynamic, productive intermediary that Žižek deems integral to support those in need whilst the capitalist system still exists.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to discover 4 things: how charity shop processes had changed, what were the reasons for these changes, whether these changes indicated anything about the evolution of charity in general, and whether they were indicative of a wider societal change.

Since this thesis began in 2010, the climate in which charity shops exist economically has continued to evolve. There is evidence to suggest that charity shops are booming while other mammoth retailers go into liquidation (Ward, 2012; Crowhurst, 2012) The retail divisions of charities are increasingly relied upon as a stable and lucrative means of income for their parent cause. Thus, since the commencement of this study, charity shops have become a precursor to the way charity in general is adapting and changing alongside late modern capitalism. The research has shown that to some degree, charity shops have undergone a transformation, although the term 'professionalisation' is a simplification of its nuanced nature.

The findings offer an insight into how understanding the concept of charity contextually is very important. The modern British charity shop's unique nature means that extrapolating to other countries (where 'thrift stores' [USA/Canada] or 'op shops' [Australia/NZ] exhibit many different characteristics) or even looking at the chronological development of charity shops in the UK over time is an extremely difficult exercise to undertake comprehensively. Therefore, it is undeniable that a sociological understanding of what is changing within the shops could benefit a wide range of stakeholders, from those within charity retail, up to charity managers and even private business. The lack of debate as to the importance of charity shops external to their physical functions – that is to say; the neglect of

examining what they tell us about contemporary society, capitalism and how the two interact – was an issue that this thesis has addressed.

The main argument of this thesis states that, by way of the quiet economy, the charity shop is able to negotiate the conflicting ideologies of charity and capitalism. Contrary to prior work, this thesis has found that there is a strong social orientation alongside the acknowledged orientation towards driving profits, even for paid staff. Also emphasised throughout has been the importance of crossover, interdependence and, crucially, *co-operation*.

The terminology used within this thesis has been specifically used to highlight certain links. ‘Profit-orientation’ and ‘social-orientation’ are used to describe haggling techniques, whilst ‘formal/contractual obligation’ and ‘informal/social obligation’ are used to describe constraints of worker roles. Consider also the ‘Tainted cultural goods’ sold as GIK, and the ‘Tainted workers’ (CSWs) who work solely in the back room of the charity shop. Both are inherently linked to the legal system. Gift Aid and NDPWs are both extensions of the shadow state described by Goodall (2000a). It is no coincidence at all that these categorical overlaps exist. The contemporary charity shop is contingent upon private, public and third sector co-operation. The co-operation is not made evident to the customer or even the volunteers working in the shop, but it is a crucial and necessary intermediary in the negotiation of charity shop workings in modern capitalist society. It is also dependent upon fundamentally social interactions, in spite of the professionalisation that is necessary to initiate such links.

Zizek writes that, as part of a wider societal shift towards a ‘new holistic, post-materialist spiritual paradigm’ (2009b, p. 34), the capitalist system has become ‘socially responsible’. Exploitation now takes on a socially conscious form, yet this is merely a smokescreen to

further its own ends. This can be seen in corporate/charity partnerships, social enterprises, venture philanthropy and the individualisation of affluent benefactors or ambassadors of charities. This move towards, as Žižek would describe it, the 'humanisation' of the capitalist system, is the lens through which the recent evolution of the charity is best viewed. De-humanizing elements of Weberian bureaucracy and the 'professionalisation' that previous charity shop literature theorists fixated upon are nowhere near as efficient or as practised as the literature would seem to attest. They are wholly dependent upon social negotiation and co-operation. Considered alongside the mobilisation of a new form of socially-conscious capitalism, the professionalisation perspective seems outdated, as though charity shops are seen as only just catching up with the neoliberal conservative business boom of the late 1980s.

To regard charity shops in this way is to do them a disservice. In fact, their success during the economic downturn has been reliant upon their evolutionary skills, their interactivity with other institutions and their ability to adapt. Over-emphasising their tendency towards managerialism, implementation of business techniques, streamlining and increased digitisation has ironically mimicked the simplifying nature of bureaucratic efficiency; erasing the nuances of the sector, ignoring individuals and their unique responses to the changes, and representing the charity shop as a cheap imitation of a first-sector shop.

In fact, this thesis has shown that behind the scenes at the charity shop, workings are increasingly complex, diverse and difficult to calculate. The IHR and the MCR share characteristics, but both differ significantly from one another, and negotiate their individual professionalisation processes in unique ways.

This has been shown to take place via an internal economy that has grown up in response to change but which cannot be simplified to a calculable 'professionalised' economy. The contemporary charity shop does operate by certain rules that extend beyond the shop (an external, 'professionalised' economy, if you will), but on the shop floor, the quiet economy repeatedly supersedes and undermines this. Without it, charity shops would not only suffer in terms of lucrativeness, but also in the eyes of the general public whose perceptions are very important considering their co-operative role in charity shop donation and shopping.

The wider implications for charities in general have also been illustrated by this study. The charity shop has long played a role in raising awareness on behalf of a cause (Horne & Maddrell, 2002, p. 28) and acting as the 'public face' of a charity, therefore their interactive role with prospective donors is of great importance. Cova and Rémy (2007, p.54) stress the need for 'incursion', - absorption of the commercial, economic world into the non-commercial in a way that 'works around the manipulation' associated with it. It is not an attempt to "flee the market or to struggle against it" but to interact and co-operate with it (p. 62). The quiet economy makes this possible within the charity shop space. But it can be seen external to this, in the 'decommercialisation of the commercial sphere' (p.52) in general. Companies are eager to enter into partnerships with charities, promote fair and sustainable trade, and exercise corporate responsibility. There are even for-profit companies emerging that specialise in facilitating partnerships with charities and corporations, such as Three Hands ([www.threehands.co.uk](http://www.threehands.co.uk)) and The Giving Department ([www.thegivingdepartment.com](http://www.thegivingdepartment.com)). The incorporation of philanthropic investment and collaboration is seen as 'essential' for the successful marketing and promotion of companies, and maintaining a competitive advantage in business (Rao, Ramesh, & Kishore, 2013). Likewise, such

partnerships can be extremely useful for non-profit skills development, enabling organisations to become more self-sufficient (Guo, 2006, p.124).

Therefore, the fine line between profit and charitable endeavours in the charity shop is ambiguous as ever; if indeed it ever was distinct. Public sector involvement is just as pervasive. Maple and Murdock (2013, p. 80) note that the UK government's plan for a reduction in public spending will result in non-profits taking on far more responsibilities that were previously state-governed. They also cite an NVCO study that gave charitable income from 'statutory sources' as £13.9 billion over 2009-10, across over 163,000 non-profit organizations. This direct governmental investment in charities does not include the substantial role that public sources play within the quiet economy of the charity shop. Therefore the monetary estimation above can only account for the visible side of public involvement in charity operations.

The findings of this research into charity shops support the idea that charity plays a supporting role in the wider capitalist system, (Žižek, 2009a; 2009b) and that charities in general "justify and rationalise [...] economic injustice." (Morris, 2009, p.16). Acknowledging this contribution to societal inequality highlights some of the key points of interest that have not been possible to explore within the scope of this study. The idea that professionalisation is fundamentally due to an influx of male managers and their techniques into a typically feminine sphere of work has been implied by some authors (Parsons & Broadbridge, 2007; Morris, 2009). Traditionally charity (due to associations with caring and social concerns) is a predominantly female arena, and it has been debated as to whether this is changing alongside the wider restructuring of charity shop operations. It was indicated within the study that female volunteers made up the majority in the IHR, and that Steve, as the male volunteer,

was expected to fulfil certain roles that female staff would not attempt. The MCR had more male than female volunteers, although in general their volunteer make-up involved younger people and was less akin to the 'traditional' retired, female volunteer described by Horne & Broadbridge (1994b). In addition, the dearth of non-white participants in charity shopping described by Gregson, Brooks and Crewe (2000, p.108) is contradicted by the wealth of workers, volunteers and customers observed at the MCR from varying ethnic backgrounds. This may correspond to the city centre location used in the study, and further investigation as to whether Gregson et al's claim is outdated would certainly be merited.

However, the pertinence of these issues around identity is not unique to the charity shop sphere, and therefore it can be argued that they do not singularly represent a change on the charity shop floor that cannot be identified in other areas of society. For this reason they are not a primary focus of this study though their potential for future exploration is acknowledged.

One area in which this study could be expanded is to encompass the 'online' charity shopping experience. As this study was concerned with the physical charity shop - still very much a part of the high street and yet to be eclipsed by its online counterpart - online charity shopping was considered to be a small part of the wider contextual evolution that charity in general is undergoing. Its growth, however, is indicative of the way the 'shopping experience' is changing, and considered to be a potentially emergent means of fundraising for charitable organisations (Horne & Maddrell, 2002). Previous theory on the prosumer has highlighted how an 'invisible' economy now exists where customers produce goods themselves. The application of theories of a quiet economy, with an intersection of customers, donors and volunteers as part of the digital Philanthropic Superpanopticon,



would be a useful area of further development in relation to the online charity shop.

A broadening of the analysis to include more case study shops and compare impacts of the quiet economy is an additional speculative consideration for the future of this study. Having identified its existence, further examination of this phenomenon as distinct from other shopping spaces would be worthwhile, whilst not possible within the temporal constraints of this study.

This thesis has concluded that the quiet economy is the result of several aspects of interactions coming together in the contemporary charity shop:

- The unpredictability of pricing negotiations and the fallibility of pricing knowledges (the 'Quiet Value Economy');
- The collection of worker types employed under differing obligations, and the non-meritocratic hierarchies (the 'Quiet Hierarchy');
- The impenetrable connections and relationships formed with private and public sector organisations through reciprocal exchange (the 'Quiet Gift Economy').

Each of these elements relies upon professionalised practices that are reinterpreted to achieve the highest combination of profitable *and* social gain. They occur in smaller, independent shops as well as the more professionalised charity chain stores. At times, the operations of the quiet economy seem covert, underhand and not in line with the 'epoused ethics' (Morris, 2009) and 'accountability' (Goodall, 2000a) expected from non-profit organisations. Yet, it is through the mediated practices of the quiet economy that the charity shop continues to thrive in the contemporary epoch, and thus remains a compelling focus for sociological inquiry.

# APPENDIX A



## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Participant Observation

One copy of the form to be left with each participant; one copy to be signed by each participant and kept by the researcher/moderator.

Researcher: **Triona Fitton**

Title of Research Project: **'Prosuming Charity: The Commercialisation of the Charity Shop'**

*This is a study on the interactions within the space of the charity shop, including ideas about value, differences between first and second hand shopping, and volunteer participation.*

**Dr. Sarah Nettleton** is supervising the project. Should you have any questions she can be contacted at:

Department of Sociology  
Wentworth College  
University of York  
Heslington  
YORK  
YO10 5DD  
Tel: +44 (0)1904 433062

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. Before we start, I would like to emphasise that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary
- You are free to refuse to answer any question
- You are free to withdraw at any time

Excerpts from the results may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will any names, locations, charitable organisations or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

Please sign this form to show that you understand the contents and agree to participate.

(signed)

(printed)

(date)



## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Interview

One copy of the form to be left with each participant; one copy to be signed by each participant and kept by the researcher.

Researcher: **Triona Fitton**

Title of Research Project: **'Prosuming Charity: The Commercialisation of the Charity Shop'**

*This is a study on the interactions within the space of the charity shop, particularly focusing upon the commercialisation of charity and how this affects all levels of social relations within the sphere.*

**Dr. Sarah Nettleton** is supervising the project and may be contacted if you have further questions:

Department of Sociology  
Wentworth College  
University of York  
Heslington  
YORK  
YO10 5DD  
Tel: +44 (0)1904 433062

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. Before we start, I would like to emphasise that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary
- You are free to refuse to answer any question
- You are free to withdraw at any time
- The charity will remain anonymous in the report unless you explicitly request otherwise

The interview will be tape-recorded, but the data will be kept *strictly confidential* and will be available only to members of the research team. Excerpts from the results may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

Please sign this form to show that I have read the contents to you.

\_\_\_\_\_ (signed)

\_\_\_\_\_ (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_ (date)

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Definition</i>
13. MCR.....	Multiple Charity Retailer
14. IHR.....	Independent Hospice Retailer
15. CSW.....	Community Service Worker
16. NDPW.....	New Deal Partnership Worker
17. GIK.....	Gift in Kind

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