Georgia State University
Digital Archive @ GSU

Anthropology Theses | Department of Anthropology

6-9-2006

Consumption Practices and Middle-Class Consciousness among Socially Aware Shoppers in Atlanta

Desiree Lynn Tabor
desireetabor@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalarchive.gsu.edu/anthro_theses

Recommended Citation
Tabor, Desiree Lynn, "Consumption Practices and Middle-Class Consciousness among Socially Aware Shoppers in Atlanta" (2006). *Anthropology Theses.* Paper 13.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Anthropology at Digital Archive @ GSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthropology Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Archive @ GSU. For more information, please contact digitalarchive@gsu.edu.

CONSUMPTION PRACTICES AND MIDDLE-CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG SOCIALLY AWARE SHOPPERS IN ATLANTA

by

DESIREE LYNN TABOR

Under the Direction of Emanuela Guano

ABSTRACT

With the postmodern prevalence of shopping as both a recreational and subsistence activity, social class identity is increasingly constituted around access to the landscape of consumption. U.S. middle-class identity is normalized in commercialized spaces and the exclusion of the lower-class from these spaces perpetuates wider social disparities. For socially aware members of the middle-class, distinction may be achieved by selectively shopping throughout the metropolitan area with the goal of influencing corporate practices. Yet this distinction is not without cost as middle-class shoppers are prime targets of identity marketing schemes and of the neoliberal regime's construction of consent. Through 15 self-proclaimed middle-class shoppers' reported use of Atlanta's postmodern landscape of consumption, this study focuses on performances of middle-classness and representations of commercialized spaces with the goal of furthering the anthropological understanding of class identity and urban space as heterogeneous.

INDEX WORDS: Urban landscape of consumption, U.S. middle-class identity, Consumption practices, Postmodern Atlanta

CONSUMPTION PRACTICES AND MIDDLE-CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG SOCIALLY AWARE SHOPPERS IN ATLANTA

by

DESIREE LYNN TABOR

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2006

Copyright by
Desiree Lynn Tabor
2006

CONSUMPTION PRACTICES AND MIDDLE-CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG SOCIALLY AWARE SHOPPERS IN ATLANTA

by

DESIREE LYNN TABOR

Major Professor: Emanuela Guano
Committee: Kathryn Kozaitis
Cassandra White

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
May 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have possible without the support and guidance of my family, friends, and faculty advisors. I thank you all for the time and effort that you have contributed.

To my family, I am grateful for the emotional support that you have so generously offered along my path to graduate-level study. With this support, I found the courage to ask questions and to explore my interests.

To my friends − both old and new − you continue to inspire me with your determination to bring about change, each in your own way.

To my faculty advisors in the Department of Anthropology at Georgia State University, I am thankful for the valuable advice that you volunteered on my research and professional development. Under your instruction, I have come to consider anthropology a means of conceptualizing the world and its contemporary issues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

CHAPTER

I. AN INTRODUCTION TO CLASS IN THE POSTMODERN LANDSCAPE OF CONSUMPTION 1

Origins of the Materialist Approach 2
Conceptualizing and Representing Social Class Identities 5
U.S. Consumer Capitalism since World War II: A Brief Overview 12
Middle-Class in Postmodern Perspective: Lifestyle, Interest Group, or Both? 14
Global Capitalism and the Development of Social Awareness 17
Cross-Cultural Intersections of Class Identity and Consumption 20
Framing Social Class Identity in the Urban Landscape of Consumption 26
Toward an Ethnography of Spatial Practice and Class Consciousness 27

II. A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF CLASS 31

Developing a Research Plan 32
Applying for Institutional Review Board Approval 34
Finding Socially Aware Shoppers 36
Coffee Anyone? Conducting Interviews 40
Demographic Profile of Study Participants 41

III. THE PERFORMANCE OF MIDDLE-CLASSNESS THROUGH CONSUMPTION 43

Young Professionals: Consuming with Consciousness 45
Unmarried Professional Women: Perfecting Distinction 49
Family-Oriented Shoppers: Normalizing Middle-class Consumption 53
Acknowledging Middle-class Heterogeneity 56

IV. COMMERCIALIZED SPACES: REPRESENTING THE URBAN 60

Moving and Consuming within the City 61
Distinctly Urban: Living and Working in Downtown Atlanta 63
Intown Atlanta: Diversity on Display 65
Beyond the Perimeter: Mass Consumption in the Suburbs 69

Shopping Online: The Internet and Virtual Commercialized Space 72
Generating an Urban Spatial Text.....74

V. CONCLUSION.....76

REFERENCES CITED.....83

APPENDIX.....92

Chapter I

An Introduction to Class in the Postmodern Landscape of Consumption

With a hegemonic system of consumption now sustained by labor in underdeveloped and developing nations, commodity consumption practices constitute local manifestations of a transnational social relationship between laborers, consumers, corporations, and material goods (Baudrillard 1969 [2000]; Goss 1992; Holt 2000; Miller 1998a; Trouillot 2001). Stores, as the sites where these relationships converge, have long been used by consumers to subvert their connection to western consumer society. In western cities, where "patterns of consumption come to dictate patterns of production" and use of land (Ley 1978: 11 quoted in N. Smith 1996: 52), the display of opposition and distinction within stores questions historic racial, gender, and class identities. This is evident in, for example, African Americans' boycott of stores that refused to hire African Americans during both the Great Depression and the Civil Rights movement (Gregory 1999; Scanlon 2000b), and shoplifting practices among middle-class women in turn-of-the-twentieth-century New York City as a rebellion against the patriarchy that restricted them to domestic and commercial spheres (Abelson 2000). Drawing on 15 middle-class shoppers' articulations of their social identity and routine consumption practices, this study contributes to an anthropological understanding of postmodern urban spatial practices by exploring the intersection of social class and commodity consumption in the

southeastern U.S. urban center of Atlanta, Georgia to demonstrate the heterogeneity of identity within this context.

The overwhelming number of retail establishments that cater to urban middle-class shoppers enables and even encourages these shoppers to construct distinct identities based on the stores that they patronize (Ley 1996; N. Smith 1996). In turn, the urban retail scene flourishes with the patronage of cities' diverse populations. Yet, with so many stores to select from, how do middle-class city residents decide where to shop? Do they prefer shopping at local specialty stores or mass retailers? How does a person's social and civic ideology influence their consumption practices? Are the corporate ideologies of products deterrents from or justifications for shopping at certain stores? How does shopping with social awareness contribute to the formation of a distinct identity and a new class consciousness? With these questions at the fore, I use Daniel Miller's (1998a: 10) question, "how are the images of society that people live through constituted through material domains," as a guide for centering my research on the intersections of class identity within commercialized spaces.

Origins of the Materialist Approach to Society

Rather than fetishizing the material world, Miller (1998a) advises against reductionist approaches to material and social worlds on the basis that consumption practices demonstrate the public sphere's plurality. This is a timely approach for contemporary anthropological studies of consumption practices as it goes beyond the exchange of material goods to consider these practices as expressions and contestations of existing social relations, and here Miller highlights the continuing applicability of the

Marxian materialist approach, which was first developed in the mid-nineteenth century by German political philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1846 [2004]). Upon abandoning the idealist approach of their mentor on the basis that people construct their worldview around access to material resources rather than ideas, Marx and Engels suggested that society is motivated by hidden forces, such as class struggle. In this light, Miller's application of the Marxian materialist approach to individuals' identity within public, and increasingly commercial, spaces calls attention to these spaces as a contemporary forum for the study of social relations.

By promoting a top-down communist society, Marx hoped to move society toward an elimination of classes (Zukin 2004: 261-2), yet his push for society's upper-class members to assume responsibility for the well-being of lower-class members is an overtly paternalistic notion that goes against both the current capitalist regime's goal of maximizing profit and upholding individuality as a social value (Kottak and Kozaitis 2003: 238). However, with society dependent on the propagation of a false consciousness among the bourgeois or the working-class, who sell their labor to the very people whom Marx calls upon to act in the shared interests of society, it is unlikely that society will become classless. In his account of the British working-class's struggle to maintain their class position through a period of job insecurity, Edward Thompson (1964) presents the bourgeois lifestyle as moral and the shifting social relations of the time as potentially devastating to this moral lifestyle. This approach reinforces the false consciousness of the working-class, who see no reason to question their options of either working for the capitalist class or being without a job, and this false consciousness normalizes the social stratification system.

In the United States, a widespread identification with the middle-class rejects the oppositional, two-class model that served as the foundation for Marx and Engels' materialist approach to society. After all, how can society regulate itself through class struggle if everyone is a member of the same class? Though the U.S. middle-class articulates its status as a distinct group existing between the lower-class and the upper-class, a general hesitancy to identify with either the lower- or the upper-class throughout the United States indicates that identification with the middle-class is a reinforcement of this class's normalization rather than an assertion of its class consciousness. Instead, Thompson's concept of class consciousness may be applied to understanding how society's multiple layers are overlooked in times of social harmony, and consciousness of opposing or differing class positions arises only in times of transition. Here Max Weber's articulation of class must also be considered as it introduces the concept of social stratification. Though Weber builds on Marxist theory, he departs from the view that classes are homogeneous units.

Weber (1922 [2004]), a German sociologist, takes a more idiographic view of class identity than Marx and Engels as he considers the possession or the lack of property to be foundational to class identity. Both Marxian and Weberian conceptions of class view social position as a function of the means of production, yet unlike the Marxian view that society will become classless, Weber normalizes the existence of a social hierarchy. According to Weber, each person's class position is determined by their status as either a capitalist or a laborer in the capitalist market. Among society's upper members, membership in an elite status group maintains and even enhances access to the means of production. These shared economic interests encourage, but do not necessarily

ensure, that members of a status group will form a common lifestyle, which may be measured by members' similar occupations or levels of education (Weber 1922 [2004]: 117). So, while economic interests are powerful inducements for class organization, they are not sufficient for maintaining social ties or for grounding the construction of cultural meanings.

Conceptualizing and Representing Social Class Identities

Despite Weber's position that classes are inadequate for producing cultural meaning, a number of social scientists have examined the cultural meanings that exist within social classes. North American anthropologists have historically viewed social class as a peripheral concept best considered in conjunction with other identifiers (Rutheiser 1996; N. Smith 1984), yet sociologists and human geographers have long realized the relevance of social class as a key organizing concept in contemporary society (Ley 1996; N. Smith 1996). From contested identities of new middle-class consumers in Nepal and Brazil (Liechty 2003; O'Dougherty 2002) to those overlooked in North America (Bourgois 2003; Dunk 2002); from subcultures among British working class youth (Hebdige 1983; Willis 1977) to yuppie gentrifiers in North American cities (Ley 1996; N. Smith 1996); from representations of western upper-class elites (Bourdieu 1984; Shore 2002; Veblen 1899 [1994]) to lower-class women in the United States (Ehrenreich 1989; Tea 2003), there is a dynamic discourse on class identity. Yet caution must be exercised when representing class identities, particularly a lower-class identity, to avoid the perpetuation of negative stereotypes.

For anthropologists who are studying down, Philippe Bourgois (2003: 11) notes that "any detailed examination of social marginalization encounters serious problems with the politics of representation, especially in the United States, where discussions of poverty tend to polarize immediately around race and individual self-worth." While conducting fieldwork in East Harlem, Bourgois worried that he would affirm negative stereotypes of crack dealers by writing about them, but he carried out his research with the hope that he would display his Hispanic lower-class subjects' humanity. Bourgois's fear of affirming negative stereotypes is legitimate, especially as the dominance of middle-class identity in the United States blames lower-class members of society and racial or ethnic minorities for their less than favorable living situations (hooks 2000). Alternately, among the displaced Canadian mill workers studied by Thomas Dunk (2002) in the 1990s, each individual assumes blame for their displacement. Dunk critiques the role of neoliberal ideology in reinforcing each worker's misperception that they could have prevented the mill from closing simply by being more productive. However, with their inability to obtain employment at a comparable level of income or camaraderie after the industrial restructuring process, the mill workers are economically and socially marginalized just as the residents of East Harlem are marginalized from mainstream society by their inability to obtain legitimate forms of education and employment that will integrate them into mainstream society.

Opposite the displaced ethnicities and laborers in North America, Afro-Caribbean women in Barbados have redefined their gender and class identities through work in offshore informatics offices. Carla Freeman (2000: 65) presents her Barbadian subjects as matriarchs and wage-earners, who, through their government's economic development

efforts, have come to depend on transnational corporations for employment. Unlike the Canadian mill workers' favorable employment situation prior to their displacement, these women are offered job insecurity and a low wage, yet their employment with a transnational corporation elevates their local status. The women dress in western professional wear to demonstrate their elevated status and their perceived integration into a global work force. As Barbados continues to attract transnational companies, the national government reduces its economic support for these workers with the hope that they will be incorporated into a global system of social mobility. For members of the world's rising middle-classes, however, the goal of establishing an identity independent of western models of social class differentiates them from the working Barbadian women.

With consumer society spreading from western centers to urban areas in developing nations, the issue of class and taste distinction becomes more pronounced. Mark Liechty (2003: 5) explains that residents of Kathmandu, Nepal, are now attempting to acclimate to a built environment and a system of meaning that originated outside of their culture. While these people traditionally identified as members of a caste, their participation in a market economy introduced Kathmandu residents to class-based distinctions, in addition to the concept of "middleness." Similarly, among middle-class residents of São Paulo, Brazil, this "middleness" is perceived as a distinctly western European and U.S. middle-class identity, which is problematic for the salaried liberal professionals and white-collar business people of São Paulo (O'Dougherty 2002). These people feel that the western middle-class identity connotes a privilege to which they lack access, and thus, residents of Kathmandu and São Paulo attempt to overcome their

marginalization by rejecting the hegemonic western class hierarchy and producing a distinct identity within their own societies.

Rejections of hegemonic class identities are not restricted to the rising middle-classes. Among British youth and North American yuppie subcultures, members' oppositional class identities are maintained through their juxtaposition to mainstream society. British sociologist Paul Willis (1977) studied the attitudes displayed by working class males, who he refers to as "lads," toward education. He concludes that the inability of the lads and the bourgeois school administration to relate to the other's expectations led to a strengthening of the lads' working class identity. Alternately, David Ley (1996) observes that the residential shift towards downtown Vancouver, Canada in the early 1990s represents a rejection of the normalized middle-class suburban lifestyle. Ley's conclusion mirrors that of Neil Smith (1996: 39), who states that gentrification is now about "the class remake of the central urban landscape" in New York City where yuppies' enhanced capacity to consume distinguishes their claim to the retail and housing markets.

Along with other sociologists (Dunk 2002), Pierre Bourdieu focuses on class as a lifestyle by observing that for members of the upper-class, the development of tastes or "manifested preferences" is mediated through an "aesthetic disposition" that frees them "from urgency through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves" (Bourdieu 1984: 54). This aesthetic disposition reinforces cross-class barriers, as according to Bourdieu, members of the same class participate in similar activities and have similar practices. With his focus on the social aspects of class, Bourdieu neglects to address the elite's shared economic interests or the level of income necessary to

participate in their leisure activities. Alternately, Stuart Hall (1986: 14) interprets the mid-twentieth century writings of Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci to state that a group exercises hegemony when their interests engulf the interests of lower or subordinate groups. While, like Bourdieu's elites, the U.S. middle-class participates in a distinct set of activities, such as conspicuous consumption, their economic purchasing power positions them as hegemonic in shaping the landscape of consumption that is experienced by the rest of the population.

Thorstein Veblen's influence on Bourdieu is evident in Bourdieu's description of the aesthetic disposition among those who are upper-class or who are striving towards acceptance by the upper-class. In his early twentieth century book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen (1899 [1994]) formulates a cultural domain of upper-class leisure activities. He goes beyond Marx's observation that this privileged group is free to pursue their own interests by detailing their practice of conspicuous consumption, which is mediated by their earning potential or access to other forms of wealth. In a society where conspicuous consumption is practiced, over-consumption is the rule rather than the exception. Though Veblen, an economist by trade, was documenting the practices of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century upper-class when he developed the term "conspicuous consumption," the concept is still ever present in the discourse on U.S. consumption practices, particularly as retail outlets are used as social hangouts and the act of shopping is marketed as a means of reinventing, and implicitly improving, oneself. Yet another economist, Andrew Trigg (2001: 99), states that consumer behavior is now mediated by lifestyle rather than social class identification, however, this position seriously undermines the growing discourse on the influence of social class over postmodern

consumption practices, especially in the United States where the middle-class has been normalized and the working class has come to embody a number of social ills (Ehrenreich 1989; Tea 2003).

When turning the focus of research to, for example, Ley and Smith's North American yuppies or to Bourdieu's French elites, an anthropologist is said to be "studying up" (Nader 1969). Studying up introduces a number of ethical and methodological issues to anthropological research, which has traditionally focused on groups that are either exotic or lower in social standing (Marcus 1994). Cris Shore (2002) warns anthropologists who are studying elites to be reflexive since anthropologists are members of an intellectual elite. Elites have historically displayed status markers that signal their elite status to other members of the upper-class, yet with the rise of conspicuous consumption as Veblen (1899 [1994]) first detailed, mutual recognition among elites has been complicated as middle and lower-class members of society are compelled to overspend in their quest to acquire elite status markers. This is demonstrated by U.S. middle-class women's participation in conspicuous consumption as a demonstration of their distaste for the lower-class and, ironically, out of fear that they will soon join them (Ehrenreich 1989). This latest development in recognizing elite identity suggests that the material aspect of this identity is less important than the exclusivity of the lifestyle.

Few people in the United States openly identify as elites, yet they also do not readily identify as members of the lower-class (Kottak and Kozaitis 2003: 214; Shore 2002: 3). As U.S. models of social differentiation spread to other postindustrial nations and to developing nations, the question of whether this model of social middleness will

be appropriated by individuals in other nations through their interaction with mass consumption regimes and commercial spaces that are designed in the United States is increasingly relevant. Commercial spaces are not used uniformly even across the United States, and this is supported by ethnographic accounts of the variable applications of middle-class privilege throughout the world (hooks 2000; Ley 1996; Liechty 2003; Low 2006; O'Dougherty 2002). For example, the fear of declining in class status sparks creativity among both middle-class women in Italian cities (Guano 2006) and in the United States (Ehrenreich 1989). However, while the U.S. middle-class women are driven to consume, the Italian middle-class women depend on others to consume the material status markers that have traditionally signified their class status.

The idea that a uniform middle-class profile may be generated across the world's economic, political, and social spheres is continually perpetuated in popular media contexts despite the specificity of class relations to their society of origin. Further, as Miller's (1998a) materialist approach to society highlights, people have the capacity to view society differently depending on their position in the social stratum. Focusing on the intersection of class identity within commercial spaces, Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell (1997: 3) support Miller's approach to material culture studies by pointing out the role of individuals as social agents in the landscape of consumption, which serves as an outlet for their display of distinction or their performance of class status. For this study, I integrate diverse perspectives on how the middle-class interacts with their local retail scene, and while I do not suggest that my findings on these interactions are universally applicable, they do serve as a starting point for understanding the cultural meanings that ground the consumer experience of the U.S. middle-class.

U.S. Consumer Capitalism since World War II: A Brief Overview

In her most recent book, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*, Sharon Zukin (2004) provides an overview of how the opportunity for home ownership and consumption of household goods influenced conceptions of social class in the United States with the onset of the post-World War II surge in consumption. Integrating Marx's social evolutionary prediction that society will eventually become classless, which was a view shared by the majority of Americans at the time who equated the proliferation of consumer goods with a uniformity in access to those goods across class lines, Zukin (2004: 261-2) notes that to middle-class consumers,

> social class, and the ideologies it spawned, were dead. The new social movements of the sixties − focusing on social and political rights more prominently than on labor inequality − for the most part underlined this conclusion, which was confirmed by changes in consumption patterns at both ends of the social scale. At the high end, access to a college education and higher income jobs reduced differences in cultural capital between the upper and middle classes. At the low end, a real reduction in income differences and an equally real expansion of shopping opportunities in supermarkets and discount stores gave the working classes access to goods that represented a middle-class style of life.

As consumers' purchasing power increased overall, the act of shopping transitioned from a quest for needed products to a social experience that allowed consumers to interact with brands, not just products. This altered relationship to the material world guided U.S. middle-class consumers' subsequent efforts to attain better lives through conspicuous consumption.

While some considered social class to be obliterated by the 1950s, this perspective did not extend beyond the middle-class to lower-class individuals who still struggled to consume. As the urban middle-class retreated from cities to suburbs out of class fear, their misperception that class stratification systems had been leveled was

normalized within a narrowly middle-class visual landscape (Berman 1986; Hayden 2006). A buffer was imposed between the middle-class and their social Others through this residential shift, and though it may not have been consciously imposed, this buffer positioned the middle-class as dominant in suburban public and commercial spaces. Zukin (1995: 45) observes that suburban commercial spaces, such as strip malls and other postmodern consumption sites, are now hailed as the premiere public spaces of the United States despite their commercial function. Yet rather than facilitating vibrant social interactions in centralized, communal spaces, these suburban spaces are described by Marshall Berman (1986: 481) as "less risky but a lot less alive" due to their isolation and exclusionary function.

The rise of suburban retail districts reflected the residential de-centering that occurred across the United States after World War II with men commuting to the city and middle-class women remaining in suburban homes to care for children and carry out routine tasks, such as shopping for the household. This led to a feminization of suburban public spaces, which was merely perpetuated by the construction of isolated retail districts. These suburban housewives constituted the majority among U.S. middle-class women after World War II, yet with only a select few white, upper-class women working in advertising firms, the average housewife was bombarded by advertisements that aimed both to educate and to bring her into a new relationship with name-brand products (Friedan 1963 [2000]; Scanlon 2000a). Rather than viewing their role in disseminating these campaigns as exploitative, however, the elite advertising women considered themselves progressive in guiding housewives toward a rediscovery of their innate

sensuality and sexuality that was purportedly sapped by the demands of marriage and family life.

Despite their exploitation at the hands of marketing campaigns, women ascribed meaning to their purchases as domestic purchasing agents and they asserted their right to occupy new commercialized spaces through consumption. Though middle-class women were positioned as consumers rather than producers, their appropriation of commercial spaces for social interaction veils the depth of cultural meanings that are invested in these commercial spaces (Cohen 2000: 248). When these cultural meanings are challenged, however, the multiple social roles of commercial spaces are highlighted. For example, upon African American women's rejection of hair straightening practices as a larger rejection of white conceptions of beauty in the 1970s, they subsequently lost the opportunity for social networking that usually takes place in hair salons (Weems 2000). Michel de Certeau's (1984: xiv) theory of practice, which suggests that consumers appropriate hegemonic cultural messages and retrofit those messages for their own benefit, is significant here for studying the postindustrial model of consumption that currently dominates the visual landscape across the United States and for understanding the middle-class's seeming complicity in the homogenization of that landscape.

Middle-Class in Postmodern Perspective: Lifestyle, Interest Group, or Both?

In restricting my focus to the U.S. middle-class, I encountered a number of issues, foremost of which is the widespread claim to middle-class identity across the United States. What is middle-class identity? How is membership in the middle-class determined? With such a wide range of people all claiming this identity, is one

supplemental identifier − such as race, ethnicity, gender, or income − more important than another? Does middle-class identity unify self-proclaimed members both in the United States and abroad? As middle-class identity in the United States contradictorily emphasizes both social mobility and conformity, I conceptualize the middle-class as a group that is constituted through a rejection of the social Other, particularly the lower social Other, rather than as an internally homogeneous, bounded group.

Anthropological studies of the middle-class increasingly focus on class identity as a lifestyle (Descartes 2005; Hoey 2005; Reno 2005; J. Smith 2005), in addition to a capitalist, corporate group of interests (Buck 2005; Freeman 2005; Harvey 2005b; Zibbell 2005). Among the factors that constitute membership in the middle-class are, property ownership (Low 2004); racial, ethnic, and religious affiliation (Harris 2003; hooks 2000); sexual orientation (Faderman 2000); appreciation for quality education and leisure activities (O'Dougherty 2002); professional employment (Freeman 2000); and purchasing power (Liechty 2003). While the presence of these factors may vary within the middle-class, Bourdieu (1984) points out that class identity is, in part, claimed in relation to other people. Bourdieu's approach is fundamental to studying class identity as researchers must understand how classes are defined, which classes are present, and how individuals from those classes interact with each other and with members of the upper and lower-classes in a society before approaching their subjects.

Setha Low's (2004: 26) exploration of the exclusionary lifestyle offered by gated community living, which she equates with a "microcosm of the American dream," leads her to view white middle-class homeowners in the United States as representatives of the normalized suburban identity. This approach to the middle-class demonstrates that class

may serve as a mechanism for excluding lower social groups from spaces that have historically been considered public. Cheryl Harris (2003: 80) complements Low's perspective of U.S. class identity by arguing that whiteness is both a commodity and an identity that can be employed as a resource by its owners to access a host of privileges. Alternately, the relative invisibility of the black middle-class in the media necessitates consideration of this demographic group's potential for gaining visibility through the practice of conspicuous consumption and the attainment of educational capital. Both Low (2004) and Harris (2003) demonstrate the link between race and class in the United States, and this link is key to studying both of these contemporary identities.

The interaction of social, economic, and political conditions within each nation mediates the construction of class identity and can lead to the formation of a global capitalist class. While this global capitalist class, according to David Harvey (2005a: 35), shares economic interests, they do not necessarily constitute a lifestyle group due to their cultural diversity. This leads Harvey to urge that class identity be studied within each nation, even as the diffusion of consumer society imposes a postindustrial model of U.S. class identity and capitalism on residents of other nations. With the ideological component of this political-economic system posing a potential threat to the maintenance of local cultural meaning systems, studies of class must acknowledge the role of global capitalism in perpetuating existent class divisions despite the general public's obsession with the visual targeting of racial difference (Fiske 2002).

Global Capitalism and the Development of Social Awareness

With the growing influence of a neoliberal capitalist regime, which suggests that humans' well-being can be secured by liberating markets, lifting trade restrictions, and promoting private property, social relations are increasingly commercialized around access to space, both on a global and on an urban level (Harvey 2005a). While some people in the upper levels of society benefit from neoliberalism, the majority of people cede civil liberties in the hope of achieving more favorable living conditions. Controversy over outsourcing of production and loss of manufacturing jobs in the United States over the past two decades has led to protests against corporate use of sweatshop labor. For example, laborers in Mexican *maquiladoras* manufacture clothing for export to the United States, yet in order to generate a high profit for corporate employers, these workers are paid a low-wage (Tamayo-Flores 2001). A similar system of exploitation operates along the Pacific Rim where North American corporations establish export processing zones (EPZ) in which laborers live and work under dangerous conditions (Klein 2000). There are numerous other examples of corporate outsourcing and exploitation of laborers in developing nations, yet the liminality of these sites accounts for the confusion over who is responsible for regulating the actions of transnational corporations.

While a corporation may be based in North America and have outposts in the Philippines, it may legitimately ignore North American labor, safety, and trade policies in its foreign outposts since it is not violating these fair trade and labor policies within the boundaries where they are enforceable. Further, with national governments now promoting the activities of corporations, whether those activities are conducted with

attention to or disdain for human rights, with the hope of cultivating economic development opportunities, the responsibility for disciplining irresponsible corporations is passed to the individual consumer. Yet how can one person influence the practices of major corporations without the backing of their representative government? In a society where people are identified as consumers rather than citizens (Canclini 2001), people who are able and willing to pay higher prices for responsibly produced goods may exercise agency in commercial spaces by avoiding products distributed by offensive corporations and purchasing products that are in line with their socio-political views.

On a local level, middle-class socially aware urban shoppers display their social awareness and their conscientiousness by putting their socio-political views into practice through a rejection of the mass produced goods and discount stores that dominate the suburban and rural landscape across the United States. Socially aware shoppers consider their routine consumption choices to be significant to the wider society, and they demonstrate this by challenging and deconstructing popular rhetoric regarding consumption. Yet this form of agency is limited to people who have discretionary funds or an alternate form of income to alleviate concern over daily survival; whereas, people who are consumed by their subsistence are less likely to develop a broader awareness of their position in the transnational consumption network. In addition to an above average income level, cultural capital is required to stay informed on the actions of various corporations, to see the macro-scale value of consuming with social responsibility, to identify responsibly produced goods, and to afford the higher prices of goods that are produced according to fair trade and fair labor regulations. This emphasis on social value

over economic value adds an additional level of distinction to socially responsible consumption practices.

People who practice social responsibility in commercial spaces may even come to look down on their social Other for failing to recognize the larger significance of their purchases (Micheletti 2003: ix). In this case the social Other may consist of lower-class shoppers who cannot afford to practice this distinct form of consumption; however, it may also extend to other members of the middle and upper-classes who are financially able to practice socially responsible consumption and who are aware of the far-reaching effects of global capitalism yet do not put this awareness into practice. The shoppers who do choose to put their socio-political principles into practice may thus be described not merely as socially aware but as socially responsible or conscientious consumers. Consuming with social awareness lends practitioners an oppositional identity due to their minority status in the range of contemporary consumption practices, yet they are alternately subject to the very forces that they actively attempt to reform. These consumers, as members of the U.S. middle-class, are not exempt from the mechanisms of persuasion employed by Harvey's global capitalist class and further, their commitment to consuming responsibly produced goods and occupying commercial spaces reserved by the neoliberal regime for those with financial means places them in an even more susceptible position.

With her focus on the branded essence, or the meaning of various brands to people within their culture of origin, Naomi Klein (2000) delves further into Harvey's (2005a) conception of how global capitalists extract consent from lower members of society to restore and to maintain a dominant position under the neoliberal regime. When

corporations discovered that consumers were increasingly motivated by concerns of cost rather than brands during the economic recession of the 1980s, they contemplated alternate means of captivating markets and middle-class social activists soon found that their struggles for representation were being appropriated by corporate forces. Klein (2000: 113) calls attention to this by warning that identity politics could open activists and socially aware consumers to corporate control. This critique of identity politics as corporate fuel is useful in understanding how U.S. social status markers, such as a college education, civic ideology, and the financial means to consume, are represented among a range of middle-class shoppers who practice socially responsible consumption.

Cross-Cultural Intersections of Class Identity and Consumption

As the majority of international investments are now held within what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2001: 128) terms a world economy triad consisting of North America, Asia, and Western Europe, a global class hierarchy is formed on the basis of shared economic interests. Within this hierarchy, power is distinctly skewed in favor of triad member nations, and Saskia Sassen (2001) addresses disparities in the distribution of power within this global hierarchy. The transnational character of consumption has imposed a class divide between residents of postindustrial nations where goods are primarily consumed and developing nations where goods are produced (Klein 2000), yet this does not level the class identities that exist on a local level or within a nation. Ted Lewellen (2002: 89) goes further to note that an individual's social identity varies by whether that identity is self-applied, popularly imposed, or formulated by a social scientist. While I agree with Lewellen's conception of identity, I disagree with his

statement that social identity is solidifying on a global scale. In the ethnographic studies that are reviewed here, the link between consumption and social identity reinforces Harvey's (2005a) advocacy for studying class as a set of power relations specific to each nation.

By noting that "the tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices," de Certeau (1984: xvii) illustrates the individual agency of consumers in resisting the "Americanization," "Westernization," or even "indigenization" of their culture (Appadurai 2002: 50). Countering Néstor García Canclini (2001: 37), who rejects the efficacy of individual choice in favor of the dominant group's exercise of hegemony, de Certeau's research on practice suggests that the dominant order can be overturned by using a product differently than prescribed or by ascribing alternate meanings to products that may be considered "Western." Thus, the agency involved in the variable cross-cultural selection and use of commodities rejects the existence of a uniform global public.

The idea that mass produced goods are ascribed the same meaning by different individuals within the same class has also been rejected through fieldwork (Appadurai 2002; Canclini 2001; Hebdige 1983). With his example of the divergent meanings ascribed to the scooter and the motorcycle by members of Britain's youth subculture of the late 1970s, Dick Hebdige (1983) highlights the dynamic nature of consumption within a class. Both "mods" and "rockers," as Hebdige refers to members of the British youth subculture, adopt products as identifiers. While these products are in opposition to their parent culture, each group within the youth subculture is attracted to different products, and their internal struggles over geographic and symbolic space indicates that

the subculture was not unified (Hebdige 1983: 11). For the mods, the Vespa scooter represented an aestheticization of the market and an innovation in the future of transportation, which were favorable features from their urban, middle-class perspective. To the rockers, however, the scooter indicated that their way of life, as conservative, working class individuals, was being displaced by a new taste.

Hebdige's perspective is useful to contrast with that of Kalle Lasn (1999: 55), who calls consumers to action while building a cultural domain of U.S. middle-class consumption. In describing consumption as the dominant, hegemonic order in the United States, Lasn draws from the widespread influence of advertising to generalize that U.S. citizens are a *tabula rasa* for commodity consumption. Canclini's view of consumers' agency as insufficient against the dominant order is reinforced by Lasn's strategy that urges consumers to organize large-scale protests against corporations. Yet exercising agency through consumption practices and organizing large-scale protests requires significant economic and cultural capital. These resources are out of reach for low-income individuals who must focus on achieving the daily means of survival, so Lasn's call for consumer action is directed primarily to members of the middle-classes, who already constitute the normalized consumer group.

Klein (2000: 373) echoes Lasn in issuing a stark critique of early attempts to indoctrinate youth into the culture of consumption through promotion of consumption as a patriotic duty. However, Klein also addresses the means by which members of the working class may achieve visibility as consumers, despite their generally lower financial income and lack of cultural capital. While black and Hispanic low income, inner city youth achieved visibility in a contemporary sit-in staged at the New York City flagship

Niketown store as a "shoe-in," their agency was mediated by middle-class activists. Klein notes that these youth were sought out by middle-class anti-Nike activists, who, in order to convince the youth that they had been coerced into buying overpriced athletic shoes against the best interests of their working class families, linked the widespread unemployment among the youths' families to the increasing transnational production of commodities. Thus, the activists produced an anti-consumerist stance that merely veiled their own international activist agenda.

As the U.S. lower-class and the black middle-class struggle for recognition as a group with interests separate from those of the white middle class (Harris 2003; hooks 2000), members of middle-classes in developing nations struggle against implications of middle-class privilege that are normalized in Western Europe and North America. In Brazil, the association of the U.S. middle-class with conspicuous consumption has diverted attention from the declining purchasing power of Brazil's old middle-class. With extreme economic inflation characterizing the period of Maureen O'Dougherty's (2002) fieldwork in São Paulo, she documents the production of two distinct groups within the middle-class. Despite their questionable purchasing power, Brazil's old middle-class emphasizes their superiority as a lifestyle group in opposition to the new middle-class that is said to exercise "frivolous consumption and poor taste" (O'Dougherty 2002: 48). The seemingly clear division between the old and new Brazilian middle-classes counters the homogeneous façade of the U.S. middle-class.

While occupation serves as a key class identifier in the North America and Western Europe, class identity in Brazil is constructed around commodity consumption as a political statement. According to members of Brazil's old middle-class, conspicuous

consumption of luxury cars and goods is a serious problem that inhibits members of the new middle-class from focusing on the long-term maintenance of their class status, which, alternately, may be accomplished through the private education of children. While home ownership is an important middle-class marker for members of both the old and the new middle-classes, members of the old middle-class purchase smaller apartments as opposed to the new middle-class's purchase of large houses. As the generators of this discourse on intra-class differentiation, the old middle-class emphasizes their superiority through modest home ownership, private schooling, and traveling to expand their knowledge of the world (O'Dougherty 2002: 48).

Unlike O'Dougherty's focus on divisions within the middle-class, Liechty (2003) presents the emerging middle-class in Nepal as a lifestyle identity group that is characterized by overlapping consumption practices and similar levels of cultural capital. By emphasizing the role of consumption practices as a means of redefining the social hierarchy, Liechty suggests that Nepal's middle-class has the capacity to exert their agency "in the joint production of class practice" (Liechty 2003: 116). At the time of Liechty's fieldwork in Kathmandu, class identity was actively being negotiated through individuals' daily consumption practices and this accounts, in part, for his emphasis on individuals' practices in the public commercial realm. It must be noted that the ability of the rising middle-class to participate in consumption is not independent of the privileged status that they held in the previous social categorization system based on caste and kin-based group identity, yet Liechty presents a valuable perspective on the influence of consumer ideology on long-standing social categorization systems.

The link between conspicuous consumption and the middle-class in North America and Western Europe has not always been a defining factor in the construction of this hegemonic middle-class identity. In their historical critique of the Swedish middle-class, Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren (1987) note that individuals who seemed to lack consumer control were considered by the middle-class to be lower. While the middle-class demonstrated their consumer constraint while shopping other members of society, both those without and those with financial power, were looked down on for the way that they chose to spend their money. For analyses of the contemporary practice of conspicuous consumption as a middle-class attempt to align with the upper-class, it is significant that the Swedish middle-class claimed distinction by rejecting extreme materialism rather than by participating in its pursuit to the point of financial ruin as is common among the contemporary U.S. middle-class.

Whether conceptualizing social class as a lifestyle-based identity or as an exclusion mechanism, class is a concept that holds a variety of meanings both within a particular society and across the world. Anthropologists, as middle and upper-class individuals, have long allowed their social magic or their denial of how they reached their privileged social position to shape their scholarly attitude toward class (Bourdieu 1977). Yet continuing to deny the heterogeneity of class identity would be unjust both to the anthropological discipline and to society's diversity. Zukin (2004: 263) suggests that Marx would focus on contemporary shopping practices as a new class struggle if he were still alive though she reasons that it is nearly impossible to determine who is exploiting whom from a global class standpoint. This is only one example of how the concept of

class may be integrated into anthropological research as a critical element in the study of social relationships and spatial practice.

Framing Social Class Identity in the Urban Landscape of Consumption

Taking the lead from Liechty (2003: 11), who notes that "it is the middle-class's extraordinarily complex culture − with its myriad forms of competing cultural capital, its ambiguous and anxiety-inducing relationship with the capitalist market, its intricate systems of dissimulation (whereby it hides its class privilege in everyday practice) − along with its increasingly dominant role in cultural processes worldwide, that makes it an important and timely subject of anthropological inquiry," I set out to design my own study of U.S. middle-class identity in a city that has historically been characterized by racial division. When considered in its urban context, this focus on the middle-class contributes to a wider focus on the city that aims to situate the influence of capitalism, post-industrialism, and postmodernism on the distinctly human experience of city life (Lefebvre 1970 [2000]; Low 1996: 384). By considering a wide range of literature on varying approaches to class and the construction of a middle-class identity, the reported use of commercial spaces among the Atlanta shoppers who participated in this study are framed as performances of middle-classness, assertions of social awareness, and interpretations of the postmodern city.

Drawing from Harvey's (2005a) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* and Klein's (2000) *No Logo*, I examine Atlanta as an increasingly privatized city in which neoliberal forces strengthen residents' identity as consumers over their identity as citizens. Harvey explains that neoliberalism, with its emphasis on individuality and free enterprise, "has

the power to split off libertarianism, identity politics, multi-culturalism, and eventually narcissistic consumerism from the social forces ranged in pursuit of social justice through the conquest of state power" (Harvey 2005a: 41). With Klein's critique of the corporate appropriation of identity politics, the urban middle-class may be approached as a group that is subject to the cultural messages disseminated by Harvey's global capitalists. Further, the diverse array of shopping options available to middle-class urban shoppers lends a degree of choice in where they shop and in which stores and corporations benefit from their above average income level. For suburban residents, mass retailers offer are many products, yet shoppers have less choice in where they purchase those products or in the level of social responsibility employed in the production of those products. Despite the differences in their landscapes, however, both urban and suburban middle-class shoppers contribute to a respatialization of postindustrial space around commercial sites.

Toward an Ethnography of Spatial Practice and Class Consciousness

While corporations aim to attract shoppers who possess the financial means to generate a profit, upper and middle-class consumers have long reveled in the sense of exclusivity achieved by their dominant presence in the privately owned and policed spaces of consumption. The striking absence of lower-class people in these spaces has led to a normalization of the middle-class in urban life. Guy Debord (1995: 98) notes that "the generalized cleavage of the spectacle is inseparable from the modern *state*, namely from the general form of cleavage within society, the product of the division of social labor and the organ of class domination." The urban landscape of consumption operates as a spectacle through which the middle-class performs its distinction. As

neoliberal privatization policies extend the capitalist class's reach in Atlanta, the city's claims to diversity are visually impeded (Harvey 2006: 23). With this threat at the fore, I discuss my reasons for studying the intersections of social class and consumption practices within Atlanta's postmodern landscape in the next chapter.

From a postmodern perspective, the various, and even contradictory, articulations of middle-class identity that arise from the ethnographic data may be viewed as acts of distinction that align each shopper with a particular subgroup of the U.S. middle class. Rather than countering the ethnographic sample's diversity, the chapter, "The Performance of Middle-Classness through Consumption," illustrates the various ways in which consumption is practiced by individuals within and between each subgroup. Unified by their similar life situations, according to age, occupation, and marital status, shoppers of each subgroup consume a range of items. These shoppers also articulate a number of motivations for their consumption of select items and their use of particular stores. For some, a rejection of their family members' consumption practices demonstrates their own achievement of class mobility.

Though the concept of *flâneurisme* harkens to the modern European city, particularly Paris, it is useful for examining the spatial practices within Atlanta's landscape of consumption. While movement of elite men went unchecked in the modern city, the movement of women and minorities was restricted. Men were thus free to practice *flâneurisme* or to seek pleasure in viewing the city and participating in the public realm. Shifts in U.S. consumer capitalism since World War II opened the spaces of consumption as places for leisure and entertainment that were in opposition to the seemingly dangerous and much contested city streets, and this effectively opened

commercial spaces to middle-class women. A number of retail formats are distributed throughout the city depending on predominant demographic and spatial practices specific to each area. Partitioning Atlanta into urban, intown, and suburban spatial patterns, the chapter, "Commercialized Spaces: Representing the Urban," considers each of the metropolitan area's residential patterns in terms of common lifestyle choices that subsequently generate sets of distinct spatial practices.

Throughout the United States, a racial model of social differentiation is perpetuated by linking white people to the upper-class and black people to the lower-class on the supposition that black people uniformly have lower financial incomes and less developed aesthetic dispositions than white people. In Atlanta, for example, class distinctions are spatially intertwined with race in a disparate distribution of commercial spaces. The majority white, northern reaches of the city house an array of upscale retail outlets, yet the southern, implicitly black areas of the city are populated by strip malls and discount retailers (Rutheiser 1996: 54). For some, the glaringly race-based character of these commercial distributions reinforces the historic conception of race as the sole source of social differentiation. I argue, however, that social class must be recognized as an identifier that both perpetuates and extends beyond race, ethnicity, gender, and the financial means of consumption to encompass the means by which some claim status and effectively exclude their social Other from the visual landscape. Thus, this study requires analysis of both the material and the social aspects of a shared class identity.

With the rise of middle-classness across the world in conjunction with the diffusion of a postindustrial model of consumption, hegemonic conceptions of North American and Western European middle-class identity have been challenged by members

of new middle-classes through daily practices. While this hegemonic middle-class identity is linked to the practice of conspicuous consumption, members of the middle-class across the world, and even those in the United States, do not universally identify with this extreme form of consumption. The Atlanta shoppers who participated in this study, likewise, engage in their local landscapes of consumption to different degrees; however, they share a discourse on class and articulate an awareness of social issues that positions them as members of a distinct middle-class identity grouping. Further exploration of this identity and its resulting practices may facilitate an understanding of a wider web of power relations through which some people are excluded and others are normalized in urban and transnational spaces.

Chapter II

A Qualitative Approach to the Study of Class

The overlap between social class identity and issues that have historically been the focus of anthropological research has led to the neglect of class identity as an independent concept, and class continues to daunt anthropologists due to its lack of universal, conclusive measures of membership. Ethnographic research on social class supplements early discourses implying that classes are neatly bounded, homogeneous units, yet "in today's multicultural society, classes tend to be more internally varied than they are unified in opposition to other classes" (Kottak and Kozaitis 2003: 213). This intra-class variation is expressed in emic terms as individuals articulate their class identity through perceived differences and similarities with other individuals. In order to contextualize the anthropological discipline's arrival at these approaches, this chapter considers the contemporary relevance of social class as an identifier in the postmodern city.

As the premier city of the southeastern United States, Atlanta's racially segregated past cannot be dismissed, and my decision to focus on the role of social class in shaping contemporary urban spatial practice is not meant to detract from the continuing significance of race. Yet the use of polemic black-white terminology among Atlanta's media outlets and government officials ignores the presence of multiple ethnic populations and the existence of extreme wealth disparities throughout the city. Harvey

(1989: 77) explains that the lack of urban planning to accommodate the needs of both the rich and the poor is problematic as "different 'taste cultures' and communities express their desires through differentiated political influence and market power." The rich may use their power to reject unfavorable developments from or to attract favorable developments to their part of the city, and the effects of these elite power performances on the poor, who typically live on the periphery of urban neighborhoods, are overlooked.

Without the benefit of social connections or college educations to guide them in negotiating government and corporate bureaucracies, the poor are institutionally invisible, and thus, they are particularly subject to the whims of the neoliberal market. When City of Atlanta officials contemplated strategies of improving the downtown area in preparation for the 1996 Olympic Games, one suggestion to "bring people back downtown" raised questions of who counted as a person of value. Urban anthropologist Charles Rutheiser (1996: 178) defends that "the 'people' they had in mind were not so much defined by race (indeed the 'R' word was never explicitly mentioned in the entirety of the ninety-minute session) as by consumption patterns." Yet, the suggestion carried strong racial implications as many of the homeless inhabitants of downtown, in addition to the largely low-income residents of areas neighboring downtown, are black. This mishap demonstrated Atlanta residents' lingering association of race and class.

Developing a Research Plan

Bourdieu's (1984) work on taste distinction among upwardly mobile and upper-class individuals provided valuable insight into the difficult nature of studying commodity consumption, and his view of class as relational was central to my review of

existing ethnographic studies. He warns that as "the apparent constancy of the products conceals the diversity of the social uses they are put to, many surveys of consumption impose on them taxonomies, which have sprung straight from the statisticians social unconscious, associating things out to be separated . . . and separating things that could be associated" (Bourdieu 1984: 21). With this note of caution, I prepared to carry out this research project by employing an unstructured interview technique in February 2005 for my first pilot study on Chamblee loft residents' objection to a Wal-Mart supercenter being built in their area. This technique expanded my own understanding of the retail distribution in Atlanta. For my second pilot study in March 2005, I integrated the insight gained from the loft residents into a semi-structured interview guide that was used when interviewing local shop people in Avondale Estates about their reaction to Wal-Mart's attempt to enter the area.

After conducting these pilot studies, I concluded that a number of factors, beyond Wal-Mart's attempt to enter the urban retail scene, are currently at work in Atlanta. As public hearings in Avondale Estates demonstrated, debate over Wal-Mart merely provides a forum for the middle-class to voice their fear of the lower-class and their distaste for lower-class shopping practices, which are popularly associated with Wal-Mart. Thus, I broadened my research topic to examine consumers' selective interaction with the urban retail scene. Drawing on Marc Augé's (1995: 58) claim that "identity and relations lie at the heart of all the spatial arrangements classically studied by anthropology," I conceptualized the urban retail scene as a spatial forum for the social relations through which shoppers construct a middle-class identity.

My own interest in consumption and urban spatial practices developed from the retail inundation that I first felt upon moving to the city from a rural Georgia town. By seeking guidance from friends who had already accustomed themselves to shopping in Atlanta, I began to contemplate how our relation to the city, as middle-class individuals, was mediated by our use of the spaces of consumption. The ability to traverse the city by car is a foremost consideration, particularly in Atlanta, as car owners are able to reach malls and mass retail stores with ease rather than endure delays on the city's public transit system, Marta (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority). Additionally, members of the middle-class feel entitled to return time and again to the spaces of consumption to indulge in both the search for needed items and the pleasure of inhabiting commercialized spaces. This is due, in part, to the welcome that is extended to these shoppers, as opposed to the social violence or the suspicion that is directed toward lower-class people regardless of the amount of money in their possession, to discourage them from lingering in stores (Bourdieu 1977; Zukin 2004).

Applying for Institutional Review Board Approval

Before applying for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval or collecting ethnographic data for this study, I considered the bias that I introduce to the study as a middle-class Atlanta shopper, albeit one on a graduate student budget, since I shop in many of the same stores as those who I interviewed. Janice Morse (1994: 226) advises against conducting participant observation in a familiar setting due to the difficulty of maintaining a high level of awareness. However, with the two pilot studies as an orientation to Atlanta shoppers' selective use of the metropolitan area's retail

establishments, I opted to continue with this research. According to Valerie Janesick (1994), a study's guiding questions can be contextualized by examining the researchers' biases. This was useful as I continually adapted the study to reflect the points emphasized by participating shoppers; however, the need to obtain IRB approval compromised my capacity, as a social science researcher, to learn from the people I interviewed or to fully engage with their experiential perspective (Fitzgerald 2005).

In March 2005, I began the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application process to obtain university approval for moving forward with this project. Many of the questions on the IRB application are pertinent to the conceptualization of a new research project as they address issues that I intended to explore but had only briefly considered at that point, such as how the study would benefit the participants and how potential risks for their contribution would be minimized. However, I felt uncomfortable with providing definite answers for other fields, such as the protocol title, as there was no way to confirm that any title I assigned would accurately express my final results. Maureen Fitzgerald (2005: 10) notes that this process should accommodate the "often emergent, life-long, experiential nature of anthropological research and the dynamic nature of its significant ethical moments." Instead, the IRB approval process is structured around the research orientation of medical researchers, and this could potentially alter the way that anthropological knowledge is presented.

The IRB process requires a protocol to be reevaluated upon each alteration to the research design, yet this is unrealistic when considering the length of time that it takes to obtain initial IRB approval and the limited time frame in which graduate students must conduct ethnographic research, assess the findings, and write a thesis. For example, two

months passed between my first submission to the IRB and my receipt of approval, which left a mere five months before the first draft of my thesis was to be completed. The IRB application process could better accommodate the needs of anthropologists by first approving the consent form and interview questions that a researcher will administer to their study participants. By allowing a researcher to conduct interviews before submitting a statement on how their findings will be presented, the amount of time spent reporting changes would theoretically be reduced while the accuracy of each researcher's protocol would increase.

Finding Socially Aware Shoppers

Upon receiving approval from the IRB in July 2005, I contemplated the best way to reach out to the type of shopper who would be socially aware, which operationally refers to an individual who is informed on the politics behind the products they consume and the stores where they shop yet may or may not practice this awareness by consuming responsibly produced goods. Rather than focusing solely on the purchase of individual products as a socially responsible act, this study considers how urban shoppers construct their social class identity around their consumption choices. By employing word-of-mouth and purposive sampling methods, I interviewed 15 individuals between July and November 2005. In addition to recruiting my personal contacts for interviews, I posted an ad under the volunteer heading of an internet classifieds website. Of the 15 interviews that I conducted, seven were arranged through personal contact and word-of-mouth, seven were recruited through the classifieds website, and one interview with a local anti-mass-retail activist was set up at my specific request for an interview. Though diverse in

their area of residence in Atlanta, the participating shoppers share a similar middle-class identity based on their professional employment or white-collar career aspirations, the class of their friends and family, and the ways that they spend their disposable income.

Through the interview process, each of the 15 Atlanta shoppers, all of whom identify as members of the U.S. middle-class, became overly speculative about the significance of the goods that they regularly purchase, the stores where they routinely shop, and their own social class identity. When initially asked to explain why they identify as members of the middle-class, financial income was among the status markers mentioned by each of the shoppers. For the young professionals, meager earnings are deemed insignificant to their maintenance of a middle-class identity, and they demonstrate this by selectively shopping in higher-end stores. These shoppers trace their middleness to their childhood socialization as members of middle-class nuclear families and to their current professional career aspirations. Alternately, more established professionals and family-oriented shoppers control higher salaries, and this allows them to avoid shopping at mass discount stores. When, in turn, one of these middle-class shoppers does shop at a mass discount store, they consider themselves savvy bargain shoppers rather than members of the urban poor who may be unable to afford goods elsewhere. Thus, this study is significant to understanding wider urban social relationships.

The Atlanta shoppers who participated in this study may be viewed as members of various lifestyle groups with overlapping spatial practices and common perspectives on how income should be allocated within the landscape of consumption. Examining the role of choice in the construction of a distinct urban lifestyle is not comprehensive

without understanding the degree to which income mediates consumption choices. By opting to respect social etiquette that deems direct questions regarding income to be inappropriate, I did not ask each shopper how much money they actually control and this aided in their maintenance of social magic, which according to Bourdieu (1977), is a process of normalizing one's class position by demonstrating ignorance of how that position was reached. As the participating shoppers overwhelmingly acknowledged that their current income or the income that they will collect upon reaching their professional goals is fundamental to their middle-class identity, they conveyed the overlap between their income and their lifestyle, yet with the information on each person's income, the intersection of class identity and consumption practices could be more firmly demonstrated.

Judgment or purposive sampling involves deciding "the purpose you want informants (or communities) to serve, and you go out to find some" (Bernard 2002: 182). This method was best suited for my purpose of locating shoppers in Atlanta who would identify as members of the middle-class and who would consume with social awareness. The advertisement that I posted on an internet classifieds website inviting volunteers to participate in an interview is written at a ninth grade reading level, so individuals with a high school or college education are able to read and understand the ad. Individuals who search under the volunteer heading are assumed to have the time and leisure to meet for coffee, and their access to an internet connection suggests that they have an income level that enables them to practice a certain degree of disposable spending. For the most part, this profile of the individuals who were interviewed held true with only one person living

in a rural area an hour outside of downtown Atlanta where Wal-Mart is the predominant shopping option.

Even after seeking volunteers for interviews, I received numerous inquiries about the amount of monetary compensation that would be provided to those participating in the project. To such requests I replied that I would pay for the coffee and desserts consumed during the interview, but as a student without grant funding, I am monetarily unable to compensate participants for their time. Russell Bernard (2002: 202) advises that study participants should be paid for their time, but he also notes that funded professionals are expected to offer higher compensation than are students. The overlap between my focus and that of market research may have contributed to the confusion about my request for volunteers and my expectation that volunteers would not expect to be paid. Unfortunately, these inquiries did not result in a single interview, so those who inquired about compensation were either uninterested in coffee or they could not afford to commit their time to talking with me.

With their corporate backing, market researchers are well-known for generously compensating study participants with money or shopping gift cards, and my focus on shoppers' use of stores as purposeful, commercialized spaces is opposite the goal of market researchers. Rather than seeking to supplement and reinforce corporate ideology, I approached the study with the intention of exploring factors that restrict entry to commercial spaces. In turn, my inability to offer study participants funding resulted in a sample population of middle and upper-middle class individuals who display a heightened consciousness, in comparison to the mainstream U.S. middle-class, of the significance of their consumption practices.

Coffee Anyone? Conducting Interviews

When arranging to meet one of the Atlanta shoppers for an interview, I would suggest a coffee shop located in close proximity to each of us. Java Monkey, a coffee shop in Decatur, was the most commonly suggested coffee shop as it has a mix of tables and couches, and the majority of the shoppers who volunteered to be interviewed reside in East Atlanta. I routinely arrived early to select a table away from louder patrons and to position my audio-recording device on the table. By having this device in the open, participating shoppers could identify me as the researcher they were meeting. Also, by casually reminding them that they agreed to participate in an audio-recorded interview, any surprise upon reviewing the interview procedures listed on the Informed Consent form were theoretically reduced.

With my semi-structured interview guide of 27 questions that were to be posed to each participating shopper in an uniform manner (Bernard 2002: 205), I facilitated each participant's consideration of their consumption practices and social class identity. This resulted in an informal interview in which topics introduced by participants could be pursued in further depth before I progressed to the next question on the guide. Many of these participants noted that these open-ended questions seemed vague, yet they observed that this encouraged them to describe their practices with more detail than they would otherwise have considered necessary. Once all of the questions on the interview guide had been covered, I asked each shopper to list any questions that they would have asked as the researcher. This garnered valuable suggestions from many of the shoppers though some felt that they were incapable of coming up with possible questions due to their lack of technical knowledge on the subject.

While meeting with participants in coffee shops, I was conscious of the distinctly middle-classness of the interview setting. The visual diversity displayed by coffee shop patrons lends cosmopolitanism to the experience, and this is desirable among the urban middle-class. The social relations displayed within coffee shops may be likened to Zygmunt Bauman's (1994) commodification of the *flâneur*, since coffee shops, as spaces where middle and upper-class individuals display their leisure and cosmopolitanism, provide a forum for middle-class individuals to claim postmodern urban space (Harvey 2006: 20). Alternately, coffee shops profit from patrons' continual consumption of coffee in exchange for legitimate occupancy of the commercialized space. Java Monkey, for example, prominently displays the coffee "Fair Trade Agreement" throughout the shop and its patrons flock from across the metropolitan area to consume coffee, to display their consciousness of the beverage's transnationality, and to consume the socially responsible identity offered by the coffee shop's adherence to a higher trade standard. In turn, Java Monkey is known as a meeting place for the urban middle-class.

Demographic Profile of Study Participants

In order to understand the middle-class perspective introduced by my ethnographic findings, it is necessary to examine the demographic profile of the 15 individuals who volunteered to participate in an hour-long, audio-recorded interview. As socially aware middle-class shoppers are the focus of this study, the purchasing power of these individuals theoretically lends them a choice in which stores they patronize. Whether they shop at higher-end stores over discount stores or local specialty stores over corporate-owned stores is a variable of significant interest due to its indication of a larger

divide between bargain hunters and "fair trade, cruelty-free" activists (Klein 2000: 428). Additionally, while this study was not conceptualized with a gender-specific approach, the gendered profile of the participating shoppers necessitates further consideration of the historic gender divide in consumption practices and the myth that this divide has been bridged since the second wave feminist movement.

With only two male volunteers opposite thirteen female volunteers, even the idea of talking about shopping reveals differences in the popular consciousness's perception of gender practices. The contemporary prevalence of *flâneurisme* among male and female middle-class shoppers led me to expect an equal number of volunteers from male and female shoppers. Yet this purposive sample is dominated, for the most part, by professional, middle-class, single women, who are educated and exercise exclusive control over their financial resources. Men's hegemony in society and in the advertising industry leads them to experience subjectification to mass consumerism differently from women (Scanlon 2000a), yet the notable lack of male volunteers for this study suggests that while both middle-class men and women practice *flâneurisme*, men are not socialized to discuss their consumption practices while women are encouraged to talk about shopping (Rappaport 2000: 39). In the next chapter, I address the variable means by which the participating shoppers perform their middle-classness by age, professional standing, and marital status or family responsibilities.

Chapter III

The Performance of Middle-Classness through Consumption

Middle-class identity in the United States is normalized to the extent that many people, when asked to place themselves in a class, unhesitatingly claim middle-class membership. Yet, when asked to qualify their middleness, a moment of confused silence typically passes before they list common status markers, such as financial income, educational achievement, career, leisure activities, property ownership, childhood socialization, and similarities with other members of the middle-class to justify their middle-classness. The Atlanta shoppers who were interviewed for this project named variations of these status markers, in part, to align themselves with the normalized identity of the U.S. middle-class, yet they also attempted to express individuality through their exercise of consumer agency in commercial spaces. In this chapter, the role of educational background, financial income, racial and ethnic identity on the performance of middle-classness is framed within three lifestyle groups, young professionals, unmarried professional women, and family-oriented shoppers.

When discussing the global rise of middle-classness, the U.S. middle-class constitutes a hegemonic lifestyle identity group that generally calls to mind images of a heterosocial nuclear family with a single-family suburban home enclosed by a white picket fence. However, this image does not reflect the heterogeneous reality of the contemporary U.S. middle-class. A contemporary member of the middle-class is likely

to be mired in debt, and this state of indebtedness has become a normalized feature of daily life in a capitalist society where a seemingly endless array of material items leads individuals to perceive their "just share" of this abundance to stretch as wide as their credit will allow, and oftentimes, beyond their credit limit (Rapley 2004: 29). With their professional employment and their white collar career aspirations, members of the middle-class can secure loans and credit with ease, and their capacity to interact with the capitalist system is more important to their middle-classness than their actual monetary income. While the shoppers whom I interviewed are at varying stages in their careers and earning potential, they are unified by their shared identification with the U.S. middle-class. Consciousness of their middle-classness, however, is constructed through interaction with other people at similar financial and professional life stages.

Beyond their middle-class identity, each shopper's status as a single, married, or family-oriented shopper has a significant influence on their consumer identity. Single or unmarried shoppers are considered distinct from the national norm of family-oriented shoppers, since single shoppers are able to make consumer decisions independent of an adult partner or dependents. Opposite these seemingly carefree shoppers, female family-oriented shoppers' consumption practices are, according to Miller (1998b: 18), "primarily an act of love, that in its daily conscientiousness becomes one of the primary means by which relationships of love and care are constituted by practice." With the dichotomous perspectives on consumer motivations in commercial spaces − some shoppers with their own consumer desires and others with the consumer desires of their loved ones at the forefront, it is little wonder that conspicuous consumption remains a dominant consumer practice.

Paired with this consideration of shoppers' marital status is consideration of their education and career level. These achievements are significant to this study as two of the fifteen shoppers graduated from college in the last year and three others are currently in graduate school. While these recent graduates and college students do not control a financial income on par with the U.S. middle-class standard, their identification with the middle-class emphasizes the lifestyle aspects of class identity. As each of these shoppers were raised in middle-class families, their class identity remains linked to their early socialization.

Young Professionals: Consuming with Consciousness

Marianne Conroy (1998: 78) worries that "to be middle-class in the United States at the end of the twentieth century is by definition to aspire to a consumption lifestyle that cannot be supported by a middle-class occupation, given the narrowed economic opportunities associated with the transition to a post-Fordist service and information economy." This struggle to maintain a middle-class lifestyle is further complicated for individuals who were raised in the middle-class and find themselves at a point of transition between receiving financial support from their family of origin and earning a professional-level salary. Despite their comparatively low incomes, graduate students and young professionals reported practicing social awareness as an expression of their progressive college educations, and, among some, an affirmation of the family values and life experiences where they first learned how to assess value and to act while occupying commercial spaces.

Though these young professionals credited their current consumption practices to influences from their early socialization, the majority did not feel strongly about these practices until they reached college. This is true for Carmen,* a white post-baccalaureate student in her early twenties who attributes her social awareness to her environmentally conscious father. Garry, a white industrial designer in his early twenties, first critiqued his consumption practices when he moved to Atlanta for college and encountered the political views of other students in his program. Without this experience, Garry speculates that he would not have questioned the practices of others in his rural hometown. Only Peggy, a white public health official and part-time graduate student in her late twenties, became concerned over environmental issues at the age of 12, and her early awareness was sparked by her family's move from Atlanta to the mountains of north Georgia where she was struck by the picturesque natural landscape. Through their rejection of activities and spaces that are associated with the mainstream middle-class, these young professionals display their identity as self-proclaimed socially aware shoppers.

By articulating their stance on transnational trading networks and corporate identity marketing schemes, these shoppers display their college educations and demonstrate their cosmopolitanism. On her decision to stop shopping at the Gap because of the retail chain's use of third world labor, Carmen comments, "maybe it was being abroad and being exposed to different cultures and developing awareness on how the United States creates empire. I think I did buy something from there, but I felt bad because of my values." While Nathan adeptly deconstructs the identity marketing

---

* The names of those who participated in the study have been changed for their protection. See Appendix for background on each Atlanta shopper.

campaigns that target self-proclaimed socially aware individuals, he, unlike Carmen, does not position himself as a possible target. He likens the trendy, independent stores in Little Five Points to mass retailers since,

> they're still doing the same things. It's still a corporate kind of scam. They're building up an image as being the antithesis of Wal-Mart to tap into that market. They see that there are the socially pretentious people who want to shop in a place like Sevananda [*an organic grocery store in Little Five Points*] instead of Kroger, who want to go to Twisted Sister [*a clothing boutique in Little Five Points*] instead of the Gap, who want to have a local coffee shop instead of Starbucks. There are smart people out there who know that these socially pretentious people exist, so they open up a shop and make money out of it. These small businesses could expand and take over more of the market, but they won't admit it.

In the process of deconstructing the corporate machinations behind marketing campaigns, these socially aware shoppers position themselves as superior to individuals who do not shop responsibly in spite of their own lapses in consumer control.

A shopper may demonstrate their distinction by issuing a direct critique of other shoppers' proficiency in commercial spaces, whether this is in a store where they regularly shop or a store that they avoid. Peggy's claims to have "heard people say, 'oh, I can't afford that,' and they make twice what I make. They can afford it, but maybe they don't need to go to Target every week and get all of this stuff. . . I don't think most people think about their role in shaping what people sell to them," demonstrate her rejection both of mass retailers and of conspicuous consumption as a more basic approach to the consumer experience. Through her ability to resist shopping at mass retailers altogether, Peggy aims to convey the extent of her own consumer control. While Garry is against shopping at Wal-Mart, where he says he "wouldn't find anything fashionable," he frequently browses in Target. However, by walking through the store without a particular product in mind, Garry is more likely to purchase an item that he did

not originally intend to buy, so his claims to be a superior shopper are made in comparing his consumption practices to those of mainstream shoppers, not to socially conscientious shoppers like Peggy.

Despite their identification with the U.S. middle-class, these young shoppers emphasize the differences between their motivations and the motivations of mainstream shoppers. By Kim's speculation that she is "not a big shopper," she notes that she is not like other middle-class shoppers, who she perceives to enjoy shopping. Yet with two Wal-Mart supercenters in close proximity to her residence, in addition to the relatively low price of goods that Wal-Mart offers for consumption, Kim shops primarily at Wal-Mart, which is marketed as the quintessential American mass retailer. For Kim, however, Wal-Mart's appeal derives from the presence of other people with whom she can identify. The Wal-Mart supercenter in her area is supported by a largely Hispanic demographic, as opposed to the local high-end stores, which are used primarily by a white, upper middle-class demographic. Though she identifies, for the most part, with the store where her ethnic identity is welcomed rather than considered suspect, Kim maintains a sense of distinction by noting her surprise upon seeing pajama-clad shoppers. Her consciousness of public appearance is, thus, juxtaposed with the lack of consciousness among other shoppers, who share her ethnicity yet are implicitly lower in terms of social standing.

These young shoppers articulate consumer values that are in line with their high levels of educational and cultural capital, yet their consumer values are at odds with their financial situations. With the confidence that they will soon obtain professional employment, these shoppers maintain a middle-class lifestyle that is, as Garry claims, characteristic of other "people like me who live in the city or in more urban areas with

more options, more stores, more trendy stuff." Further, their active choice in which stores they patronize lends these young shoppers a sense of control that other middle-class individuals may lack, despite their higher incomes, due to the strains of shopping for a family. As Peggy says,

> since I live alone, it's easier to do because I can make stuff last longer. It's just me. I know when I'm going to need more. I can stop by this place on the way home. I would say that's important, and I will occasionally go in a big store if I need something. Cost is somewhat of a factor, but I'm willing to pay more for products that are made more with a sensitivity to their impact.

Even the graduate students, who are under the most financial strain, noted their consideration of socio-political factors and their consciousness of middle-class distinction in their consumption practices. While these five Atlanta shoppers were the most analytical in their articulations of consumer and class identity, their immersion in the university tradition of self-development through courses and continual interaction with school peers heightens awareness of their aesthetic dispositions (Bourdieu 1984: 28).

Unmarried Professional Women: Perfecting Distinction

Six of the thirteen women who participated in this study may be characterized as unmarried professionals. While three of these women, one of whom has an adult son, are divorced, the other three have never been married. With their knowledge of how consumption practices vary over an individual's lifetime, a number of these unmarried professional women unfavorably compare their upbringing in nuclear, working or middle-class families to their current upper middle-class existence. Further, by their admission that they chose their dependent-free lifestyle as a rejection of mainstream lifestyles, including those of their families of origin and of the lower-class, four of these

women note that they have achieved social mobility and now claim middle-class status (Bourdieu 1984: 56).

Rather than basing their distinct identities on concepts gained from a college education, which is central to the young professionals' social awareness, the professional women alternately construct an identity around their desire for a cosmopolitan lifestyle. While each of the young professionals holds a Bachelors degree, two of the six professional women have a college degree; thus, the differences in shoppers' life experiences play a role in each sub-group's construction of a distinct identity. Among the professional women who did attend college, the consumer lessons that they learned in this stage of life are mentioned as merely another layer in their identity. For example, Julie, a black researcher in her thirties, is the one of the professional women who did earn a college degree, and she claims to be a "pretty savvy shopper, but I like good stuff too. I'm not just going to buy it because it's there. I had that problem when I was in college." Through this statement Julie suggests that she has matured as a person and by establishing control over her consumption practices, her class status has been elevated over the ten years since she finished college.

Unlike the young professionals, who sought to purchase responsibly produced goods for the sake of contributing to a sense of transnational well-being, the professional women emphasize their consumer savvy in commercial spaces. Nancy, a white professor, learned thrifty values very early while growing up in a working class family, and she became even thriftier while earning her Ph.D. With the adage, "the more you pay for it, the earlier it breaks down and the more you've lost," she demonstrates her consumer savvy by comparing prices. She also advises, "you can be fooled if you're not

familiar to find that you're paying twice as much. Something on the shelf is really cheap, so you know that's a good deal and then you pick up something else too. You've ended up paying twice as much for the second thing as you would have at another store." However, in her quest for the best deals, Nancy frequently drives across the Atlanta metropolitan area to purchase items at favorable prices, and this suggests that even with her consciousness of retail strategies, the amount of money spent on gas may level the savings that Nancy accrues by purchasing bargain items.

With their array of life experiences, the professional women are able to reflect on cultural messages that they received in their youth from a more critical perspective, at least more critical in comparison to their young counterparts who are still actively negotiating those messages. In their construction of a distinct identity, some of the professional women came to look down on their family members rather than praising their thrift. By criticizing their mothers' lack of consumer control, Amanda, April, and Julie comment on their own consumer control and upward social mobility. When justifying her preference for brand name products, Amanda immediately brings up her mother and the distaste that she felt for her mother's consumption practices very early in life. She begins,

> I have a mother who is a bargain hunter, a coupon clipper, and a generic person. Part of me kind of rebelled against her. I was born in the early 1960s, and my mother was not a very good cook. We had instant mashed potatoes, and a lot of other really yucky stuff. For her generation, as a full time housewife, it was very new, and it was a way of saving time . . . I tend to be more of a brand shopper.

Amanda's rejection of what she considers normative female consumption practices questions whether the class and consumer consciousness cultivated by the contemporary professional women represents a wider rejection of the norms that have historically

shaped middle-class women's lives. Though they could not alter their family's consumption practices, these women aspired to a responsible set of consumption practices in their adulthood.

These women's social mobility is mediated by their professional employment and their ability to exercise choice in how they live and allocate their income. While Emily estimates that her salary positions her in the upper-middle class, her choice to selectively shop for items produced by non-sweatshop labor was sparked by watching a documentary film on the working conditions of third world laborers in the export processing zones (EPZs), which Klein (2000: 204) starkly describes. Though it is becoming increasingly difficult for Emily to find responsibly produced goods, she is willing and able to pay higher prices for these items. On the opposite end of the social mobility spectrum, Eve, a Chinese-American pilot and designer in her forties, laments that she can no longer afford to purchase items that she feels are produced responsibly. Here Eve's conflict over her consumption practices originates not only from her perceived failure to achieve the American dream of social mobility, but by declining in status, she feels that she must pinpoint "where she went wrong" on a moral and a professional level.

For someone who does achieve social mobility, this experience may be perceived as normative rather than as the exception. This normalization of one's social mobility becomes problematic when the factors contributing to social mobility, such as obtaining a professional job, saving surplus income, and building social networks are overlooked. In the case of an individual's achievement of social mobility, the lack of mobility among others is used to reinforce negative social stereotypes that suggest a person has not moved up due to a lack of motivation. April presents her social mobility as evidence that other

people choose their circumstances with, "your priorities differ depending on how you choose to live. Some people don't choose anything; they just let life happen to them." This perspective reinforces the view, on an extreme level, that people who are raised in the projects and who continue to reside there choose the accompanying lifestyle of poverty and social marginalization.

Each of these shoppers engages in "cultural consumption" by directing their income to consumption of luxury items and participation in leisure activities that are beyond the limited finances of the young professionals (Bourdieu 1984: 176). Cultural consumption, as opposed to the vulgar consumption practiced by members of the lower-class, entails a degree of rarity or exclusivity. While shopping for luxury items is enabled by their higher discretionary income, these shoppers claim a sense of distinction by choosing to direct their income toward the purchase of luxury or non-generic items. Despite their general affinity for bargains, these women distinguish their personal consumption practices from popular consumption practices, such as shopping at Wal-Mart, which is common among the married family-oriented shoppers who were interviewed. The element of choice in these women's lifestyle sets them apart from their families of origin, members of the lower-class, and other members of the middle-class.

Family-Oriented Shoppers: Normalizing Middle-class Consumption

In comparing the middle-class identities of the young professionals and the single professional women with the class identities of the married women, who I refer to as family-oriented shoppers, the family-oriented shoppers serve as the normalized group against which the young professionals claim a trendy identity and the unmarried women

frame their superior lifestyle choices. Yet with two of these women having earned technical degrees and the other two holding college degrees, they display considerable cultural capital, particularly when compared to the newly married women of the 1950s who Betty Friedan (1963 [2000]: 35) notes were targeted by advertisers upon the discovery that their lack of education made them more likely to accept the idea that they could become middle-class by purchasing the "right things." In articulating their middle-classness, these women align their practices with those of the U.S. mainstream society, which is bargain-focused or unwilling to pay more for an item if a cheaper version exists.

Among the family-oriented shoppers, the goal of locating bargains and extracting the maximum value from purchases is considered a virtuous act rather than an act of consciousness. April, a single event planner, makes an intra-middle-class lifestyle distinction when comparing her consumer consciousness to what she perceives is the normalized practice of suburban married women, who

> don't have the time. They don't have the money. They don't have the social consciousness. If you're busy trying to work two jobs and feed your kids, you don't have time to go all over the perimeter to shop. You don't have time to go to town hall meetings so that you can find out what is going on. You're a captive audience. When you're captive, you do the one thing that you can do, which is shop at Wal-Mart. I have a choice. I have a car. I have a conscience.

Yet the mass consumption practices toward which April expresses her distaste are used by Diane, a black mother and real estate agent in Lithonia, to articulate another form of consumer consciousness. Asserting her consumer superiority and virtuosity, Diane notes, "a lot of times, people who don't like to shop prefer smaller places where they can just go in, get what they need, and come out. They lack the patience to go down a lot of aisles, get a lot of things, look for things, fish for things, and spend a lot of time getting what they need to get." This assessment of others' practices positions Diane's commitment to

combing the store for the items that she needs, or that she may need in the near future, as superior to the consumption practices of people, such as her husband who disapproves of the amount of time that she spends shopping.

Family-oriented shoppers claim moral distinction through conservative spending as they are responsible for filling the material needs of their families. Kristin, a white mother and pharmacist in her fifties, grew up in Buckhead. While raising her three children in Lilburn, Kristin's consumption practices centered on shopping at Wal-Mart. Though her children have now established independent residences, Kristin continues to shop at Wal-Mart at least once a week since she explains, "if I was in the upper-class I would want little boutiques and yachts, and that sort of thing. Wal-Mart has my shopping as a middle-class person, because I buy the everyday stuff, the normal stuff, not anything that's real expensive." Diane echoes that Wal-Mart's affordability and its stores' familiar format makes it her main shopping choice; although, she later mentions offhandedly that Wal-Mart is the only shopping option in her area.

Each of the family-oriented shoppers normalizes their consumption practices by stating that all of their friends and family members regularly shop at Wal-Mart. They also demonstrate their internalization of the retailer's populist approach to commercial space by denying that they have a right to expect higher quality products or a distinctive shopping experience. By stating that she loses control every time she enters Wal-Mart, Kathy, a white mother and massage therapist in Dallas, explains, "I've had to pull away from shopping as much as I usually do, but when we have the money, to Wal-Mart we go." As she ends her explanation with laughter, and encourages me to do the same, it seems that talking about shopping at Wal-Mart, in addition to finding humor with the

lack of control experienced while in the supercenter, is a common social practice among Kathy's acquaintances. Kristin's view of purchasing the "normal stuff" likewise reflects the degree to which the act of shopping at Wal-Mart has become an accepted part of her weekly routine. Only near the end of the interview does Kristin admit that she has felt increasingly alienated while shopping in Wal-Mart lately as she has not seen anyone she knows, which she further clarifies to mean that she did not see anyone like her, a white middle-class individual in the massive store.

While the majority of the young professionals and unmarried shoppers noted that they refrain from shopping at mass retailers like Wal-Mart to signify their commitment to practicing responsible consumption practices, this refusal to shop at Wal-Mart was perceived as heterodoxic among the family-oriented shoppers. Heterodoxic ideas, according to Bourdieu (1977), reject society's naturalized ideology or doxa. When doxic ideas are challenged by the heterodoxy, the doxa's power is diminished, and the orthodoxy responds by attempting to shut down the source of the heterodoxy. With this interaction between heterodoxic and doxic perspectives, Amanda's statement that she would pay $400 for a responsibly produced item over paying $95 for an item produced by sweatshop labor would be heterodoxic or foolish to the family-oriented shoppers whose goal of extracting the maximum value for the minimum price structures their consumption practices.

Acknowledging Middle-class Heterogeneity

Though the Atlanta shoppers whose perspectives are presented in this chapter voice common consumption goals, such as finding bargain goods or consuming socially

responsible products, they have various and even divergent motivations. For some, a sense of achievement is gained from comparing and purchasing items at the lowest possible price, while others claim a moral virtuosity by consuming items that are produced with awareness of transnational trade networks or by shopping with their family's interests at the forefront. For O'Dougherty (2002: 12), "the question is not whether middle-classes engage in formal politics, but in what ways their activities are political." Echoing this advice, de Certeau (1984: 56) interprets Bourdieu's concept of relational taste distinction to state that despite subjects' lack of recognition for their actions' significance, their practices are meaningful.

O'Dougherty and de Certeau's emphasis on the means by which class is practiced is useful for examining these 15 shoppers' class consciousness, whether they dismiss or claim awareness of their practices' significance. In his explanation of the, at times, imperceptibility of social class distinctions, Smith (1996: 106) argues that class consciousness does not determine the makeup of a particular class since class boundaries are based on a range of social, economic, political, and ideological factors. Rather than clearly bounded classes, a person's class identity places them on a continuum of identity. Along this continuum social status may be claimed through various practices. While a person's income enables them to consume goods and to legitimately occupy commercial spaces, their choice to practice a distinct form of consumption indicates their consciousness of class on a social level.

Visual or phenotypic features coinciding with race and ethnic differences are significant to class identity, and an individual may share interests with other members of their race or ethnic group while also sharing interests with a broader class identity within

their nation. Identification with one group on an economic level and another on the basis of lifestyle choices does not preclude one's membership in both, which April emphasizes with,

> I could sit here and say that me and Bill Cosby are practically the same because we're black. But we're not. We have a similar childhood living on the wrong side of the tracks, but his concerns and how he would use money is quite different from my concerns and how I would use money simply because he's on a completely different plane. That's what I was talking about with the only thing bigger than racism is economic-ism. We may both be black; we may both have grown up as inner city kids, but he's got a whole different set of economic concerns than me. I have a much different set of economic concerns from a mother of three in the projects. That makes a huge difference.

Despite her racial identification with black members of the lower and upper-classes, April differentiates herself from them by the financial income that has allowed her to construct an urban middle-class lifestyle. When considering the makeup of classes on a national or global scale, shared economic interests deemphasize the multiple ways in which class is practiced.

The populist goals of social mobility and conformity produce a hesitancy to identify with either the lower or the upper-classes in the U.S. Yet with further research on the role of choice in allocating income to responsibly produced goods or the use of certain retail formats among those claiming social middleness, a better understanding of social exclusion and inclusion mechanisms may be reached. This will be increasingly important as a postindustrial model of consumption continues to diffuse and shape the transnational relationship between consumers and producers. Even within postindustrial societies, commercialization of the urban visual landscape leads to the exclusion of people who do not appear to be members of the middle or upper-class, or who do not conform to the doxic image of white middle-classness. The next chapter delves into the

various ways in which members of the middle-class claim the city through their occupation of its commercial spaces.

Chapter IV

Commercialized Spaces: Representing the Urban

The middle-class constitutes the hegemonic or the normalized demographic within the city's public and commercialized spaces, yet these members' varying articulations of their middleness reflect differing degrees of access to the urban landscape (Harvey 2006). By either rejecting or appropriating certain spaces, members of the middle-class aspire to a higher social status and position themselves opposite the lower-class, regardless of their financial income or current living situation. Exploring the use of urban commercialized spaces as sites for the performance of distinction, this chapter examines shoppers' spatial practices and their reflection of tastes across a heterogeneous middle-class. With the 15 participating shoppers' perceptions and reported use of stores, this chapter contributes to an anthropological understanding of spatial practice in the urban landscape of consumption.

According to Lefebvre's (1991) concept of spatial production, the urban landscape is designed by architects and other elites, yet city residents appropriate these spaces through their daily practices. As contemporary space is slowly closed to the interests of all besides financial capitalists, social relationships existing within the city are overlooked (Smith 2000: xiii). Yet the normalization of the middle-class in the urban landscape effectively rejects the lower-class's presence as exemplified by Charles Baudelaire's well-known rendition of a Parisian bourgeois's words: "those people are

insufferable with their great saucer eyes. Can't you tell the proprietor to send them away" (Harvey 2006: 19). This binary rejection is also relevant to an analysis of Atlanta's enclaves of consumption, as Conroy (1998: 68) demonstrates by applying the concept of spatial production to spaces of consumption where, despite developers' efforts to promote the sale of goods to the exclusion of other activities, people persist in congregating for participation in a social spectacle.

Low (1996) follows Rutheiser (1996) in categorizing Atlanta as a postmodern city on the basis of its architectural features despite Atlanta imagineers' attempts to portray the city as a global, international city. As historian Tim Crimmins writes, "Atlanta is the product of innumerable collaborators, who construct a text that is read by an even greater number of readers, none of whom necessarily share a common language or a way of looking at the world. Such a city is better described as a collage, a palimpsest, a text full of erasures, ink smudges and indecipherable marginalia, with some pages torn out and others pasted in so carefully as to pass for the original" (Crimmins 1991 in Rutheiser 1996: 11). As the 15 shoppers who were interviewed for this study live in different areas of the metropolitan area, their overlapping spatial practices lend credibility to Crimmins's description of Atlanta as a postmodern city.

Moving and Consuming within the City

The movement of non-white, lower-class people, in addition to females of each class, race, and ethnicity, within modern western cities has historically been restricted. White, upper-class men could roam the streets of the modern city at their leisure while avoiding interaction with other city inhabitants, yet women of the same standing were

bound to the domestic sphere due to the danger and impropriety associated with being in public. In his description of upper-class men as *flâneurs* of the modern city, Bauman (1994: 146) notes that the "pleasurable views" they sought became valuable as merchants invested in public spaces and marketed the view to customers. With this commercialization of the *flâneurs'* view, the public sphere both narrowed and widened depending on an individual's status. By excluding lower-class and homeless urban inhabitants, the commercialized public spaces were deemed open and acceptable for use by white, upper-class women (Cohen 2000: 250). Unlike the male *flâneur*, however, the female *flâneuse's* public identity was constrained by her duty to flaunt the wealth of her male counterpart.

The practice of *flâneurisme* extends beyond the quest for consuming pleasurable views to encompass the experience of pleasure sought while in the public, albeit increasingly commercialized realm. Unlike modern *flâneurs*, "post-modern *flâneurs* make daily or weekly visits to shopping malls, the local churches of the *flâneurisme* creed, avoiding as much as they can all contact with the streets in between, the hunting grounds of their ancestors" (Bauman 1994: 155). The contemporary practitioners of postmodern *flâneurisme* must legitimize their presence in commercialized spaces. Zukin (2004: 7) explains that "because it is usually what we do when we 'go out,' shopping is how we satisfy our need to socialize - to feel we are part of public life . . . in fact, whether we shop at the Super Stop 'n Shop or the farmers' market, shopping is both our most creative and our most controlled behavior." As with the modern female *flâneuse,* the postmodern shopper is unable to maintain a clear boundary between themselves and the landscape of consumption, and this leads me to approach the Atlanta shoppers' spatial

practices from Bourdieu's perspective on taste distinction, which applies across a social grouping.

For Bourdieu, (1984: 178) "necessity can only be fulfilled, most of the time, because the agents are inclined to fulfill it, because they have a taste for what they are anyway condemned to." This conditioning is likewise reflected in the consumption practices of city residents whose choice in residence reflects both their financial capacity to either rent or buy a home, and for many, it reflects the lifestyle to which they aspire. Of the 15 shoppers who participated in the study, only one has a distinctly urban residence, and both her upper middle-class identity and her lack of a personal car differentiates her consumption practices from those of the other 14 participating shoppers. With their intown or suburban residences and personal cars, the other 14 participating shoppers are able to reach the local stores, mass discounters, and chain stores that dot the postmodern urban landscape with relative ease. Six of these shoppers live within Atlanta's I-285 perimeter, which operationally constitutes an intown residence, and eight of the participating shoppers live in suburbs outside of the I-285 perimeter. These individuals' identification with other people in their area of residence and in their area of predominant use is a major determining factor in where they shop in the metropolitan area.

Distinctly Urban: Living and Working in Downtown Atlanta

The Atlanta metropolitan area claims a population of nearly five million people, yet, according to the United States Census Bureau's estimate for 2003, the City of Atlanta houses only 423,019 of these individuals (United States Census Bureau 2000). This

population estimate positions the City of Atlanta as the second most populous city in Georgia behind neighboring DeKalb County, which boasts a population of 675,725 with its unincorporated layout. Despite a 26% population increase from 1990 to 2000 in Fulton County, which is the central county in the ten county metropolitan area, the 2004 census estimates indicate a slight population drop (United States Census Bureau 2000). Yet a slight population increase for the City of Atlanta between 2000 and the estimates for 2003 suggests that, perhaps, as more people choose urban and intown residences, others choose more suburban locations.

Though more people are moving into the city, there is a lag between the influx of gentrifying pioneers and the influx of businesses to accommodate the material needs of these pioneers. The shopping options in downtown Atlanta are oriented more toward professionals who commute to work daily rather than toward professionals who live downtown. For someone who does not own a personal car, this lack of shopping options within walking distance can be problematic. Emily has lived in a number of cities throughout her life, and she chose her current downtown residence based on her ability to walk from her home to her workplace. She does not shop strictly in her area of residence, however, since its stores are geared toward tourists, such as those located in Underground Atlanta, or toward a narrowly black racial demographic, such as those adjacent to the Five Points Marta station (Rutheiser 1996: 158). Instead, she depends on public transit and friends to drive her to the malls and mass retailers along Atlanta's northern perimeter.

In his analysis of the spaces of supermodernity as non-places, Augé (1995: 106) states that people occupying spaces reminiscent of historic spaces, "find themselves

caught among the echoes and images of a sort of cosmology which, unlike the ones traditionally studied by ethnologists, is objectively universal, and at the same time familiar and prestigious." Emily claims this prestige with her comment, "we can't live in a vacuum, but you can do what you can in your own space," in which she emphasizes her active choice to live in Atlanta's historic downtown and to support local businesses to the extent possible through her consumption practices. Through her distinctive use of urban space, Emily claims a cosmopolitan identity that is linked to her urban residence even as this cosmopolitanism remains separate from the city where she currently resides. Rather than a celebration of private space, as her co-workers espouse, Emily considers her ability to wander through the downtown area a privilege that other Atlanta residents are not trained to appreciate.

Intown Atlanta: Diversity on Display

Low (2004: 21) traces the contemporary neoliberal character of urban spaces in the United States to economic restructuring efforts of the 1970s, which created racial ghettoes, expanded suburbs, and encouraged the construction of exclusive luxury housing in the city center. Urban fear led to an abandonment of the city as soon as the means to commute between the suburb and the city were developed (Low 2004: 114), yet over the last decade, select middle-class individuals have taken a more favorable approach to intown spaces. Atlanta's demographic shifts have been heralded as a reversal of 1950s white flight to the suburban periphery (Rutheiser 1996), and even *The New York Times* recently observed that Atlanta "is now attracting the affluent, who are mostly white, in part because they want to avoid gear-grinding commutes that are among the nation's

longest" (Dewan 2006: A1). The six participating shoppers with intown residences articulate a range of spatial practices, and these reflect the varied social origins and lifestyles that mold their experience of life in Atlanta.

In some intown neighborhoods, gentrification, an urban residential trend, is actively reshaping space around class distinctions. As rising property values push lower income black residents out and usher higher income residents of diverse backgrounds into an area, gentrification also introduces businesses that cater to the tastes of the area's incoming residents. Some have presented gentrification as a means of reintegrating rundown areas of the city into the urban fabric while Smith states that this is based on the misconception that the area was previously uninhabited or that the area's previous residents had stolen the neighborhood from members of the white upper-class decades earlier (N. Smith 1996: xviii). For gentrifying pioneers, such as Garry, who describes his local area as a "classic urban slum in the past, but now it's transitioning," an intown residence demonstrates his desire to experience an urban lifestyle that was inconceivable during his childhood in rural Alabama. The social capital that Garry gains from his intown residence aligns him with a young, trendy subculture that is politically active and starkly opposite his conservative, rural upbringing.

On a micro-scale within intown neighborhoods, middle-class claims to public spaces that are reminiscent of a historic community feel are commercialized when specialty stores seek to accommodate and to profit from area residents' rejection of mass retail establishments or non-places lacking identity (Augé 1995: 77). However, the act of making a purchase in these stores remains secondary to occupying their commercial space and observing their consumer spectacle. The opportunity to leisurely stroll through

Decatur's recently redeveloped downtown is enjoyable for Peggy, who observes that the local shops are places for "seeing and being seen." Further, shopping in local non-chain stores allows Amanda, who was raised in the suburbs of Texas, to display her non-generic identity. Beyond the products that she buys in these local stores, Amanda values her interaction with local business owners, who she considers to be on her social level, as opposed to Wal-Mart associates or Target employees. This signals her preference for a more authentic consumer experience characteristic to a nostalgic conception of the recent past.

Rather than projecting distinction through their use of stores in a narrowly defined area of the city, some shoppers' use of stores across the metropolitan area reflects their geographic mobility. Despite her ability to walk to the local shops in Decatur, Carmen's newfound mobility, which is facilitated by her personal car, allows her to reach a wider range of stores and thus to participate in a broader city-wide consumption of space. Nancy also dismisses the ability to experience Atlanta on foot as, "there really isn't a good place that you can walk around Atlanta to take in the sights. You can go to one mall and walk around that mall, but that's not the same as having a whole city that had a mall plus all kinds of other interesting places." By likening the experience of shopping in Wal-Mart to that of traversing Philadelphia, her childhood hometown, and to shopping in its many department stores, such as Woolworth's, Nancy presents herself as a savvy yet curious shopper who views shopping as an experience and an opportunity to learn about new products and their uses while also buying needed items. With this motivation, Nancy rejects the idea that shopping is a routine practice.

A number of intown stores have capitalized on local residents' desire for a diverse shopping experience, and in doing so they have cultivated a customer base of lower, middle, and upper-class shoppers. The DeKalb Farmers Market, for example, serves as a pilgrimage site for Atlanta's socially aware shoppers. Though the DeKalb Farmers Market is not an actual farmers market, its patrons consume the centrally-owned grocery store's multicultural atmosphere and its produce's freshness with zeal (Rutheiser 1996). For Peggy, this experience is doubly distinctive as she notes,

> Things feel a little nicer if you get them from there. It's more of a factor for me to consider when I'm making a shopping decision. I don't feel like it is so much for other people. I think most people look just at price and quality and make a trade off around that. I feel like I do that, but then I also have these other factors that I throw in.

Here Peggy highlights the value that she places on the consumer experience. Beyond its offering of exotic, fresh foods, the DeKalb Farmers Market facilitates its patrons' consumption of a historic conception of communal space with signs welcoming them to "Your DeKalb Farmers Market." Elizabeth Blackmar (2006: 49) explains that communal space, in the historic sense, was "neither public nor private space," yet the label's contemporary "proliferation suggests the popularity of an imagined 'third way' for ordering the landscape." This shift in the conception of communal space mirrors a wider class power shift as wealthy elites attempt to regulate the lower-class's access to spaces that were previously held in common (Low 2006). Despite the value and variety offered by the DeKalb Farmers Market, it is difficult to reach, even by public transit, so those who can participate in its experience are limited.

Though intown residential patterns such as gentrification have played a major role in persuading middle-class individuals to occupy urban spaces, some researchers critique

this spatial practice as an exclusion mechanism (Ley 1996; N. Smith 1996). Alternately, Berman (1986) bemoans the suburbanization that has taken place in the United States over the last century for its role in depriving Americans of the pleasures of urban life. While the suburbs along Atlanta's periphery continue to expand in terms of population and political power, intown and urban residential patterns are increasingly coming to signify a middle-class lifestyle choice among a diverse range of people who may have been unsatisfied with their experiences in rural or suburban spaces. For others, the occupation of intown and urban spaces affirms their identity as socially aware individuals. While they may not perceive their practices in terms of class as Nancy emphasizes, "I don't wake up in the morning and think: gee, I'm middle class," the six intown shoppers' access to commercial spaces ranging from discount stores to upscale boutiques is mediated by their unconscious performance of middle-classness.

Beyond the Perimeter: Mass Consumption in the Suburbs

Unlike the intown residents who protested Wal-Mart's attempt to enter their area out of fear, in part, that property values would plummet, suburban shoppers welcome the mass retailer and even note that it often contributes to rising property values. In addition to this economic benefit for property owners, mass retailers are often welcomed as they provide convenience to suburban shoppers who may otherwise travel considerable distances to find a comparable variety of consumer goods. By citing varying motivations for their practices within mass retailers, the suburban shoppers simultaneously align their practices with the mainstream middle-class and attempt to localize the generic presence embodied by these stores. Thus, the welcome extended to these stores does not indicate

shoppers' satisfaction with the experience offered by these stores; instead, it demonstrates their view that there are no other viable options for their consumption needs along the city's periphery.

While a number of the suburban shoppers note their dissatisfaction with the generic, aesthetically-lacking atmosphere of mass retailers, they return to these stores week after week. Eve complains that "at Wal-Mart, you're always having to search. There is no real method to where anything seems to be placed. You go to an area where you think, logically, an item would be, but no, you have to track someone to direct you to where that item might be." Despite the inconvenience posed to shoppers as they struggle to navigate the massive commercial space, Wal-Mart is considered a convenient shopping option because it brings millions of consumer items under one roof. While Diane notes that Wal-Mart is "big and it's always crowded," she continues to fill all of her material needs in this store because "it's a one-stop shop . . . you can get almost everything you need at Wal-Mart." Thus, the convenience of these retailers refers to the shoppers' ability to fill all of their consumer needs in one location rather than an ease of locating needed items.

For some, a racial or ethnic identification with other shoppers in these commercial spaces promotes use of chain stores over smaller local stores, yet this encouragement of ethnic consumption may be considered threatening to other consumers. Julie observes that in her northwest Atlanta suburb, "Wal-Mart caters to Hispanics, and the other stores – not that they don't − but you're not going to walk down the aisle and see something in Spanish." While she claims to have stopped shopping at Wal-Mart for other reasons, Julie's retreat to more exclusive commercial spaces is a symbolic attempt to ignore the

demographic changes that are reshaping her area. Kristin also observes that, "there's a different group coming in. When I used to go to Wal-Mart, I would always see a neighbor or somebody I knew from church, and now it's so big and there are just different people coming in there. It's different, but I guess it's because it's so big." With the settlement of ethnic sub-groups around Atlanta's periphery, these middle-class shoppers sense that their status as normalized consumers is in flux.

With the lack of public gathering spaces in suburban areas, some shoppers use mass retailers for leisure. In her area, which is located an hour's drive northwest of downtown Atlanta, Kathy's shopping options are limited to mass retailers, and she articulates the centrality of this retail format to suburban life with, "sometimes, if I want a leisure day on a Saturday and I don't have anywhere to go, I'll go in there [to Wal-Mart] and just read over the books or movies or just sit and have a heyday." By using the commercial spaces available in her area for leisure activities, Kathy consumes an idea of public space similar to the cosmopolitan identity that Emily claims through her participation in the urban streetscape. Despite the centrality of commercial spaces in shaping Atlanta shoppers' identities, popular debate has recently pinpointed the rise of internet shopping as a replacement for shoppers' engagement with their local landscape of consumption. However, time and again, the ethnographic data emphasizes the significance of the internet as a new commercial space that is used in addition to, rather than to the exclusion of local stores.

Shopping Online: The Internet and Virtual Commercialized Space

With the rise of online shopping, the individual consumer's ability to inform their consumption choices has been enhanced. This virtual space is perhaps even more distinctly middle and upper-class as access to the internet is restricted to those who own a computer and who have access to a phone line with internet service. On the internet, shoppers can practice digital *flâneurisme* by comparing prices and learning about products while remaining in a setting that the urban lower-class cannot penetrate, and as Klein (2000: 22) observes, "it is on-line that the purest brands are being built: liberated from the real-world burdens of stores and product manufacturing, these brands are free to soar, less as the disseminators of goods or services than as collective hallucinations." Even as these shoppers avoid the physical gaze of salespeople while virtually interacting with a range of products, they are subject to another form of surveillance that tracks which websites are visited from a particular computer.

It is doubtful that shopping online can provide the sense of pleasure achieved by some from their occupation of public urban spaces, yet other shoppers are relieved that they no longer have to enter a store to fill their material needs. Nathan explains that he prefers shopping online "because I really don't like being around people. I don't like going out of the house. I don't want to spend money really." By shopping online, Nathan can constrain his consumption practices by determining whether he is purchasing an item for immediate or deferred gratification. As items that he buys over the internet offer deferred gratification, he is able to remain focused on purchasing the item that he originally intended to purchase rather than picking out other, unneeded items. When he does enter a physical commercial space, such as the grocery store, Nathan finds himself

putting "as much stuff into my basket as I want, and then I spend about half an hour putting it all back. I can't afford all that, and I end up leaving with just a couple of things." Thus, Nathan saves time and, usually, money by shopping online when possible.

Within the city, the relationship between socially aware shoppers and commercial spaces is altered as individuals compare prices of goods at stores in their area with prices of those goods on the Internet. In some cases, local stores do not offer items in a preferred brand, and shoppers feel empowered by their ability to find these items on the internet. For example, a number of retail websites promote responsibly produced, fair labor clothing and fair trade coffee as rare and trendy products. The opportunity to purchase these items online broadens the potential for building a socially aware movement as socially aware individuals in suburban and rural areas may also be able to purchase responsibly produced items. Carmen notes that the last time she shopped at the Gap, a mall-based chain clothing store, her awareness of sweatshop-based labor indiscretions led her to carefully examine clothing labels to determine where items were produced. She remembers,

> calling my sister and saying, 'oh no, I feel so bad,' because I had just bought her and her boyfriend two t-shirts from nosweat.com, so they were not sweatshop made. There I was probably buying stuff that's made in sweatshops. I felt really bad, but the world is scarred in a way. I feel bad about it but I'll probably do it again.

In this statement, Carmen questions her ability to continue practicing socially aware consumption, and though the use of online stores has enabled her to successfully avoid stores with unacceptable practices thus far, the pleasure that she experiences while occupying real commercial spaces will eventually lead her back into the mall.

As yet, it is unclear how online stores' proliferation will affect the spatial experience of shopping, or how they already have altered shoppers' use of commercial spaces. Of Atlanta's competitive landscape of consumption, Julie remarks that "you can't even have a landmark in Atlanta as far as a store location, because I guarantee you that it won't be there in the next five years." Despite Julie's suggestion that local stores are undependable, Amanda's use of a variety of stores both in her local area and online indicates a blending of spatial practices. Amanda admits that she did not shop online five years ago, but she now buys business and personal items over eBay. Even with her increasing use of online stores, Amanda's use of local stores continues to ground her identity as a socially aware shopper. Among the shoppers who do shop online, the internet is viewed as an extension of commercial space that will supplement rather than supplant the stores in their local area. Further, the Internet empowers smaller stores to take a more active role in ensuring their survival through outreach to shoppers who live beyond their local area, city, or nation.

Generating an Urban Spatial Text

Dolores Hayden (2006: 46) accounts for the United States's lack of significant public spaces by explaining that since World War II, the real estate industry has directed the allocation and development of space. As urban spaces in the United States have been transformed through capitalist development measures into mixed-use commercial districts reminiscent of historic, small town Main Streets, spatial boundaries have increasingly been questioned (Blackmar 2006: 73). Social identities are challenged by these altered approaches to urban space, and as people move away from identities as

citizens to assume identities as consumers through, for example, the mass media's influence in Mexico City (Canclini 2001) and in the construction of mass retail stores on park sites in Buenos Aires (Guano 2002), their relationship to their city of residence and to their national government shifts. Zukin (2004: 29) validates this identity shift by explaining that people situate their social identity through shopping. With their diverse life experiences, the 15 participating shoppers' spatial practices reflect their active renegotiation of practices specific to the places where they have lived and the social groups with whom they have interacted at different points in their life.

It is overly simplistic and reductionist to say that the suburban middle-class prefers dependability and homogeneity in commercial spaces while the spatial practices of the urban and intown middle-class are uniformly created in opposition to the suburbs. With the Atlanta shoppers' varied residences and roles over the course of their lives, an inter-textual approach to their practices would highlight the role of early socialization and life experiences on local claims to distinct identities. As April notes of her own experiences, "I've lived in six or seven cities and a couple of different countries by now. If I say that I live in South DeKalb, it looks like that's the only place that I've been, so it doesn't encompass the whole range of places that I've been." The spatial practices employed by each Atlanta shopper in urban commercial spaces are subject to their experience of class, race, ethnicity, and gender and for this reason, urban commercial spaces provide an ideal forum for studying class in contemporary postindustrial society where multiple identity groups claim space and actively produce cultural meanings.

Chapter V

Conclusion

With anthropologists increasingly engaging in studies of class as an identity that is produced through interaction with other social groups and spaces, the power forces that structure these interactions may, as Nader (1969) suggests, be critiqued with the goal of presenting a more holistic view of society. In focusing on the middle-class as the normalized identity group in the postindustrial urban landscape of consumption, diverse perceptions of class identity and varying motivations in commercial spaces have been highlighted. My hope is that by examining who does and who does not have legitimate access to the landscape of consumption in the United States, the social disparities brought on by the introduction of a capitalist, postindustrial model of consumption in other postindustrial nations and in developing nations may be competently articulated by anthropologists to policy makers with the goal of amending these social disparities and producing a diverse urban landscape. To demonstrate the applicability of this research to such large-scale goals, I briefly consider points from my study of the anthropological intersection of consumption and class identity.

In breaking from anthropology's traditional focus on an exotic, implicitly lower social status group to focus on middle-class shoppers in Atlanta, I aimed to further the goals of the postmodern critique of anthropology, which urges anthropologists to understand their position in the world system in order to conceptualize issues on a

transnational scale (Marcus 1994). While critiquing the scholarly and popular discourses on consumption and class consciousness, I came to understand consumption as a practice of class identity, and I became further convinced that we, as anthropologists, must be well-versed in the role of consumption in our own society before approaching its relevance in producing new cultural meanings and, alternately, in triggering a rejection of corporate meanings throughout the world. As a postindustrial model of consumption rapidly diffuses, anthropologists must conceptualize consumption not as a global homogenizer, but as a forum for the display of local identities and as an outlet for claiming social and economic distinction against those who do not possess the economic means or the cultural capital necessary to legitimately participate in this display.

The neoliberal regime has promoted the privatization of urban space, and as a result of this narrowing of the public sphere, the urban landscape is closed to segments of the population. Though the middle and upper-classes perceive these spaces to be open due to their own leisurely occupation and cultivation of economic benefits and social distinction within these urban spaces, this is not the case for lower-class members of society whose exclusion from these spaces is significant on a level beyond their inability to participate in the mainstream middle-class practice of conspicuous consumption. Without a place in public and commercial spaces, the lower-class is hidden from the view of the middle and upper-classes, and their material needs are subsequently shielded from public attention. As the power of the middle and upper-classes extends beyond the commercial spaces and into the political realm, their misperception that all of society's members hold equal access to public services and urban spaces is dangerous for those who are invisible within the urban landscape.

While the spatial shifts brought on by the neoliberal regime currently play a major role in the development and marketing of North American cities (Ley 1996; Mitchell and Staeheli 2006; Sassen 2001; N. Smith 1996), they are also key to the redefinition of urban spaces in developing nations (Caldeira 1999; Canclini 2001; Guano 2002; Low 2000). By imposing its postindustrial model of class identity onto societies where social categorization systems based on caste and kin-based associations have long dominated, this regime has facilitated the rise of new middle-classes. Despite the ideological efforts of the neoliberal global capitalists to create a global public, however, local identities have not been leveled or eliminated. Instead, with the resurgence and promotion of local cultural meanings among middle-classes in a number of societies, an overarching rejection of the hegemonic western identity based on conspicuous consumption has been issued. Yet as with the sense of exclusion experienced by lower-classes in western postindustrial cities, the rising middle-classes' lack of access to the hegemonic privilege held by the North American and Western European middle-classes suggests that the privileged must assume responsibility for those who lack access.

National governments have historically been responsible for handling or working to amend social disparities, yet with the blurred functions of governmental institutions and corporations, this is no longer the case (Scott 1998). Despite the declining role of national governments in ensuring that citizens have access to public services and to urban spaces, corporations have not stepped up to fill this role. In fact, corporations shift social responsibility to individual consumers who are now expected to ensure their own welfare, even at the cost of others if necessary. Among the middle-class consumers who are disturbed by this socially regressive approach to societal issues, the landscape of

consumption offers a forum for inverting the neoliberal regime's power by embracing their consumer status to protest the lack of social responsibility demonstrated by corporations. This strategy is powerful and has resulted in some grassroots political activism, yet the sporadic character of this activism neglects the power of routine consumption practices in disciplining and potentially reforming the practices of the neoliberal regime. To construct a broader consciousness of this consumer power, individuals who are aware of their agency must employ a sense of conscientiousness in their consumption practices, and they must take an active interest in decisions regarding spatial practices within their area of residence. For example, socially aware individuals may advocate for more mixed-use development in their area of the city with the goal of integrating individuals of various classes, races, and ethnicities into the urban fabric.

With the application of social awareness as a distinct middle-class consumption practice centered in U.S. cities, select middle-class consumers have begun to conceptualize their practices on a broader level. Some have taken up the cause of fair trade and fair labor movements that promote social justice for indigenous farmers and underpaid laborers in developing nations while others have opted to avoid stores with offensive corporate practices and instead, they shop at local specialty stores. By refusing to shop at certain stores and by noting that their consumer savvy derives from their consumer control in buying products of a certain quality rather than of a certain quantity, these middle-class individuals claim a sense of distinction that members of the mainstream middle-class consider heterodoxic. Rather than connecting to a wider class consciousness, these consumption practices produce a narrow identity that is not necessarily associated with a larger political activist movement nor recognized as an

economic interest group. Further, the practice of social awareness may contribute to the socially regressive influence of neoliberalism by blaming the lower-class for choosing not to consume with conscientiousness despite their limited access to the economic means and cultural capital necessary to cultivate a socially awareness and to put this awareness into practice.

Constructing their identity in opposition to the lower-class, the U.S. middle-class as a whole fails to apply a sense of social responsibility to their consumption practices. With the rise of socially aware consumption practices, an urban middle-class identity has arisen not only in opposition to the lower-class, but it also claims a sense of superiority over the mainstream middle-class. At each stage of a middle-class individual's life, such as when entering college, starting a new career, establishing a joint household with an adult partner, raising children, or scaling back consumption practices after children have moved out to establish independent households, their consumption practices are expected to vary. The normalization of this sequence of consumption and the idea that consuming is a patriotic duty has perpetuated a spiraling practice of conspicuous consumption through which the average middle-class shopper consumes beyond their economic means.

By considering my ethnographic findings according to each participating shoppers' position in the normalized consumption life sequence, I determined that there are a number of interests shared within each middle-class identity sub-group. Among those who are establishing careers, a more politically conscious approach to consumption is evident, yet these individuals also claim a degree of social capital through consumption practices that are, in some cases, opposite to the practices of their families of origin.

Similarly, for unmarried women, who have maximized their professional potential by remaining single, a consciously distinctive approach to consumption is taken as the women acknowledge choosing a lifestyle that is dependent-free and thus opposite the societal norm of family-oriented shoppers. Lastly, family-oriented shoppers' consumption practices, against which the young professionals and unmarried women claim a sense of distinction, center on the interests of their own family. With their diverse motivations in commercial spaces, it is easy to overlook the privilege maintained by the middle-class through their normalization in the urban landscape of consumption, whether they actively apply a sense of social awareness in commercial spaces or whether they are a non-practicing socially aware individual.

As the City of Atlanta heightens its efforts to attract corporate headquarters and international businesses to the city with the purported goal of leveling existing disparities through economic development, its distinctly black and ethnic lower-classes are further alienated from the middle-class by their inability to engage with a newly commercialized urban landscape or to advocate for their rights as city residents. This commercialization of urban space is not a positive outlook for integrating Atlanta's multiple classes and identity groups. Yet with some members of the middle-class effectively welcoming neoliberal forces to redefine their urban spaces by praising the city current development path as "up-and-coming," they demonstrate a lack of understanding for the dynamics of global capitalism. To counter such misconceptions on how to best mediate social disparities, each shopper must develop an awareness of their relationship to transnational consumption processes and they must recognize their potential for exercising agency within a local postindustrial landscape of consumption. Though it is unlikely that class

distinctions will be eliminated by amending social disparities on a local level, continuing to isolate people of differing social backgrounds is threatening to the character of cities, to postindustrial societies, and to societies that are coming into contact with social categorization systems originating in postindustrial societies.

References Cited

Abelson, Elaine S.
2000 Shoplifting Ladies. *In* The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader. J. Scanlon, ed. Pp. 309-329. New York: New York University Press.

Appadurai, Arjun
2002 Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *In* The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader. J.X. Inda and R. Rosaldo, eds. Pp. 46-64. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Augé, Marc
1995 Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity. J. Howe, transl. London: Verso.

Baudrillard, Jean
1969 [2000] The Ideological Genesis of Needs. *In* The Consumer Society Reader. J.B. Schor and D.B. Holt, eds. Pp. 57-80. New York: The New Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt
1994 Desert Spectacular. *In* The Flaneur. K. Tester, ed. Pp. 138-157. London: Routledge.

Berman, Marshall
1986 Take it to the Streets: Conflict and Community in Public Space. Dissent (Winter):476-85.

Bernard, H. Russell
2002 Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Blackmar, Elizabeth
2006 Appropriating the "Commons": The Tragedy of Property Rights Discourse. *In* The Politics of Public Space. S. Low and N. Smith, eds. Pp. 49-80. New York: Routledge.

Bourdieu, Pierre
1977 Outline of a Theory of Practice. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

—
1984 Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste. R. Nice, transl. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourgois, Philippe
2003 In Search of Respect. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Buck, Pem D.
2005 Keeping the Collaborators on Board as the Ship Sinks: Toward a Theory of Fascism and the U.S. Middle Class. Bringing the Past into the Present, Washington, DC, 2005. American Anthropological Association.

Caldeira, Teresa P. R.
1999 Fortified Enclaves: The New Urban Segregation. *In* Theorizing the City: The New Anthropology Reader. S. Low, ed. Pp. 83-107. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Canclini, Néstor García
2001 Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts. G. Yúdice, transl. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Cohen, Lizabeth
2000 From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America. *In* The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader. J. Scanlon, ed. Pp. 245-266. New York: New York University.

Conroy, Marianne
1998 Discount Dreams: Factory Outlet Malls, Consumption, and the Performance of Middle Class Identity. Social Text 54:63-83.

de Certeau, Michel
1984 The Practice of Everyday Life. S. Rendall, transl. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Debord, Guy
1995 The Society of Spectacle. New York: Zone Books.

Descartes, Lara J.
2005 Creating and Maintaining Middle Class Family Life in a Small Town. Bringing the Past into the Present, Washington, DC, 2005. American Anthropological Association.

Dewan, Shaila
2006 Gentrification Changing Face of New Atlanta. *In* The New York Times. Pp. A1. New York.

Dunk, Thomas
2002 Remaking the Working Class: Experience, Class Consciousness, and the Industrial Adjustment Process. American Ethnologist 29(4):878-900.

Ehrenreich, Barbara
1989 Fear of Falling. New York: Pantheon Books.

Faderman, Lillian
2000 Lesbian Chic: Experimentation and Repression in the 1920s. *In* The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader. J. Scanlon, ed. Pp. 153-165. New York: New York University Press.

Falk, Pasi, and Colin Campbell
1997 The Shopping Experience. London: Sage Publications.

Fiske, John
2002 Videotech. *In* The Visual Culture Reader. N. Mirzoeff, ed. Pp. 383-391. London: Routledge.

Fitzgerald, Maureen H.
2005 The Ethics-Review Process. Anthropology News 46(6):10-12.

Freeman, Carla
2000 High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work, and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean. Durham: Duke University Press.

—
2005 Exporting America? Out-Sourcing, Entrepreneurism, and the Crisis over the Middle Class. Bringing the Past into the Present, Washington, DC, 2005. American Anthropological Association.

Friedan, Betty
1963 [2000] The Sexual Sell. *In* The Consumer Society Reader. J.B. Schor and D.B. Holt, eds. Pp. 26-46. New York: The New Press.

Frykman, Jonas, and Orvar Löfgren
1987 Culture Builders: A Historical Anthropology of Middle-Class Life. A. Crozier, transl. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Goss, Jon
1992 Modernity and Post-Modernity in the Retail Landscape. *In* Inventing Places: Studies in Cultural Geography. K. Anderson and F. Gale, eds. Pp. 159-177. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

Gregory, Steven
1999 The Changing Significance of Race and Class in an African American Community. *In* Theorizing the City: The New Anthropology Reader. S. Low, ed. Pp. 37-66. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Guano, Emanuela
2002 Spectacles of Modernity: Transnational Imagination and Local Hegemonies in Neoliberal Buenos Aires. Cultural Anthropology 17(2):181-209.

—
2006 Fair Ladies: The Place of Women Antique Dealers in a Postindustrial Italian City. Gender, Place, and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography 13.

Hall, Stuart
1986 Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. Journal of Communication Inquiry 10(2):5-27.

Harris, Cheryl I.
2003 Whiteness as Property. *In* Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality. L.M. Alcoff and E. Mendieta, eds. Pp. 75-89. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Harvey, David
1989 The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

—
2005a A Brief History of Neoliberalism. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

—
2005b Neo-Liberalism, Imperialism and Accumulation by Dispossession. Bringing the Past into the Present, Washington, DC, 2005b. American Anthropological Association.

—
2006 The Political Economy of Public Space. *In* The Politics of Public Space. S. Low and N. Smith, eds. Pp. 17-34. New York: Routledge.

Hayden, Dolores
2006 Building the American Way: Public Subsidy, Private Space. *In* The Politics of Public Space. S. Low and N. Smith, eds. Pp. 35-48. New York: Routledge.

Hebdige, Dick
1983 Travelling Light: One Route into Material Culture. RAIN 59:11-13.

Hoey, Brian
2005 New Frontiers of Work and Family: Making Meaningful Work in the 'Flexible' New Economy. Bringing the Past into the Present, Washington, DC, 2005. American Anthropological Association.

Holt, Douglas B.
2000 Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption? *In* The Consumer Society Reader. J.B. Schor and D.B. Holt, eds. Pp. 212-252. New York: The New Press.

hooks, bell
2000 Where We Stand: Class Matters. New York: Routledge.

Janesick, Valerie J.
1994 The Dance of Qualitative Research Design: Metaphor, Methodolatry, and Meaning. *In* Handbook of Qualitative Research. N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, eds. Pp. 209-19. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Klein, Naomi
2000 No Logo. New York: Picador.

Kottak, Conrad Phillip, and Kathryn A. Kozaitis
2003 On Being Different: Diversity and Multiculturalism in the North American Mainstream. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Lasn, Kalle
1999 Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge: And Why We Must. New York: Quill.

Lefebvre, Henri
1970 [2000] The Urban Revolution. R. Bononno, transl. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

—
1991 The Production of Space. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lewellen, Ted C.
2002 The Anthropology of Globalization: Cultural Anthropology Enters the 21st Century. Westport, CN: Bergin & Garvey.

Ley, David
1996 The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Liechty, Mark
2003 Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class Culture in a New Consumer Society. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Low, Setha
1996 The Anthropology of Cities: Imagining and Theorizing the City. Annual Review of Anthropology 25:383-409.

—

2000 On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture. Austin: University of Texas Press.

—

2004 Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America. New York: Routledge.

—

2006 How Private Interests take over Public Space: Zoning, Taxes, and Incorporation of Gated Communities. *In* The Politics of Public Space. S. Low and N. Smith, eds. Pp. 81-103. New York: Routledge.

Marcus, George E.
1994 After the Critique of Ethnography. *In* Assessing Cultural Anthropology. R. Borofsky, ed. Pp. 40-52. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels
1846 [2004] Feuerbach: Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook (1845-1846). *In* Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History. R.J. McGee and R.L. Warms, eds. Pp. 67-81. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Micheletti, Michele
2003 Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism, and Collective Action. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Miller, Daniel, ed.
1998a Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

—

1998b A Theory of Shopping. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Mitchell, Don, and Lynn A. Staeheli
2006 Clean and Safe? Property Redevelopment, Public Space, and Homelessness in Downtown San Diego. *In* The Politics of Public Space. S. Low and N. Smith, eds. Pp. 143-175. New York: Routledge.

Morse, Janice M.
1994 Designing Funded Qualitative Research. *In* Handbook of Qualitative Research. N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, eds. Pp. 220-35. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Nader, Laura
1969 Up the Anthropologist-Perspectives Gained from Studying Up. *In* Reinventing Anthropology. D. Hymes, ed. Pp. 285-311. New York: Random House.

O'Dougherty, Maureen
2002 Consumption Intensified: The Politics of Middle-Class Daily Life in Brazil. Durham: Duke University Press.

Rapley, John
2004 Globalization and Inequality: Neoliberalism's Downward Spiral. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Rappaport, Erika D.
2000 'A New Era of Shopping:' The Promotion of Women's Pleasure in London's West End, 1909-1914. *In* The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader. J. Scanlon, ed. Pp. 30-47. New York: New York University Press.

Reno, Josh
2005 Working as Kinwork: The Conflicted Presents and Hopeful Futures of Middle Class Americans in a Dirty Profession. Bringing the Past into the Present, Washington, DC, 2005. American Anthropological Association.

Rutheiser, Charles
1996 Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams. London: Verso.

Sassen, Saskia
2001 The Global City. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Scanlon, Jennifer
2000a Advertising Women: The J. Walter Thompson Company Women's Editorial Department. *In* The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader. J. Scanlon, ed. Pp. 201-225. New York: New York University Press.

—, ed.
2000b The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader. New York: New York University Press.

Scott, James C.
1998 Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Shore, Cris
2002 Towards an Anthropology of Elite Cultures. *In* Elite Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives. C. Shore and S. Nugent, eds. Pp. 1-21. London: Routledge.

Smith, Jessica
2005 "I work so my kids won't have to:" Mining Families Re-imagine the American Dream. Bringing the Past into the Present, Washington, DC, 2005. American Anthropological Association.

Smith, Neil
1996 The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City. London: Routledge.

—
2000 Introduction. *In* The Urban Revolution.

Smith, Raymond T.
1984 Anthropology and the Concept of Social Class. Annual Review of Anthropology 13:467-94.

Tamayo-Flores, R.
2001 Mexico in the Context of the North American Integration: Major Regional Trends and Performance of Backward Regions. Journal of Latin American Studies 33:377-407.

Tea, Michelle, ed.
2003 Without a Net: The Female Experience of Growing Up Working Class. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.

Thompson, Edward P.
1964 The Making of the English Working Class. New York: Pantheon Books.

Trigg, Andrew B.
2001 Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption. Journal of Economic Issues 35(1):99-115.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph
2001 The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization. Current Anthropology 42(1):125-138.

United States Census Bureau
2000 Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics. Pp. Census Data, Vol. 2005.

Veblen, Thorstein
1899 [1994] The Theory of the Leisure Class. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Weber, Max
1922 [2004] Class, Status, Party. *In* Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History. R.J. McGee and R.L. Warms, eds. Pp. 115-27. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Weems, Robert, Jr.
2000 Consumerism and the Construction of Black Female Identity in Twentieth-Century America. *In* The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader. J. Scanlon, ed. Pp. 166-178. New York: New York University Press.

Willis, Paul
1977 Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs. New York: Columbia University Press.

Zibbell, John
2005 Toward an Anthropology of the Contemporary Liberal State: A Conceptual Inquiry. Bringing the Past into the Present, Washington, DC, 2005. American Anthropological Association.

Zukin, Sharon
1995 The Cultures of Cities. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

—
2004 Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture. New York: Routledge.

Appendix

Background Information on Study Participants

- **Amanda** is a single white Texas-raised massage therapist in her forties who now lives in the Toco Hills area of northeast Atlanta. Through her rejection of the consumption practices of her family of origin and her emphasis on the urban lifestyle that she has chosen, Amanda claims a sense of distinction. The luxury of choice that Amanda employs in her consumption practices suggests that she is not merely a socially aware shopper, but she is conscientious about the production process of the goods that she buys. To some, the amount of money that Amanda is willing to spend on responsibly produced goods would be considered heterodoxic. She is categorized as an unmarried professional and intown shopper.
- **April** is a single Chinese Jamaican woman in her fifties who is now an upscale event planner and property owner in East Atlanta. With her experience of growing up in a low-income housing project in New York City, April normalizes her experience of upward social mobility as she emphasizes the role of personal choice in shaping one's life course. Yet by acknowledging that she chose not to have children, April sets herself apart from the normative life course of the middle-class. She is categorized as an unmarried professional and intown shopper.

- **Carmen** is a single white post-baccalaureate college student in her twenties. Though she was raised in Washington, DC, Carmen moved to Atlanta for college and she has recently attempted to initiate a grassroots movement against Wal-Mart for its anti-labor policies. As yet, this campaign has been unsuccessful, and Carmen suggests that she must completely reform her own consumption practices before others will follow her lead. Carmen is categorized as a young professional and intown shopper.
- **Diane** is a black real estate agent from New York who is in her thirties and now lives with her husband and children in East Atlanta. Though she notes that her husband complains about the amount of time and money that she spends shopping, Diane claims a middle-class identity based on her ability to find bargain goods in addition to her identification with the African American middle-class that constitutes the majority in her area of residence. Diane is categorized as a suburban family-oriented shopper.
- **Emily** is a single white upper-middle class professional in her sixties who now lives in downtown Atlanta after living in a number of global cities, including New York and London, over her lifetime. With one adult son, Emily now lives a dependent-free, cosmopolitan urban lifestyle that is based on her use of public urban spaces and upscale commercial spaces. She is categorized as an unmarried professional and urban shopper.
- **Eve** is a Chinese American pilot, artist, and data entry student who is single, in her forties, and native to North Atlanta. With an upper-middle-class aesthetic disposition and a significantly lower earning potential than that of her parents,

Eve now struggles with her consumption practices. By avoiding Wal-Mart in response to the retailers' mistreatment of private property rights and of underpaid employees in domestic stores, however, Eve demonstrates her social awareness and her refusal to participate in what she perceives as lower-class consumption practices. Eve is categorized as an unmarried professional and suburban shopper.

- **Garry** is a single white industrial designer in his twenties who was raised in Alabama but opted to stay in Atlanta upon his graduation from college. With his middle-class identity based both on early socialization and on the distinct form of consumption that he now practices as a gentrifying pioneer, Garry claims a sense of distinction by his rejection of the mainstream landscape. He is categorized as a young professional and intown shopper.
- **Julie** is a single black environmental researcher in her thirties who is from Milwaukee but now lives in a North Atlanta suburb. By shopping at a variety of stores in her area, both mass retail and local stores, Julie emphasizes the opposition between her consumer control and the conspicuous consumption practices of her family of origin. Despite her awareness of mass retailers' negative influence on a macro scale, Julie shops at the more upscale mass retailers to secure her own economic investment in private property by ensuring that these stores remain in her area. She is categorized as an unmarried professional and suburban shopper.
- **Kathy** is a white massage therapist in her forties who was raised in a North Atlanta suburb and now lives even further north of the city with her husband and children. While she depends entirely on mass retailers for filling her material needs, Kathy

notes that she also uses these commercial spaces for leisure and entertainment activities. Kathy is categorized as a suburban family-oriented shopper.

- **Kim** is a single Hispanic graduate student in her twenties who lives in a North Atlanta suburb with her parents. In claiming a lower-middle-class status, Kim notes that mass retailers are stores where she can afford to shop and where her ethnicity is not considered suspect, yet she continues to feel guilty for shopping at mass retailers. With her social and economic struggles as an immigrant and a graduate student, Kim is a socially aware young professional and suburban shopper who attempts to practice her consumer principles within a limited income and a narrow landscape of consumption.
- **Kristin** is a married white pharmacist in her fifties who was raised in Buckhead yet raised her own three children in an East Atlanta suburb. With her children now living independently, Kristin spends less money while shopping, but she continues to make weekly shopping trips to mass retailers. To Kristin, membership in the middle-class is indicative of her social normalization, even as she is increasingly the minority in her area's commercial spaces. Kristin is categorized as a suburban family-oriented shopper.
- **Nancy** is a single white professor who was raised in Philadelphia and now lives in northeast Atlanta. By traversing the Atlanta metropolitan area in search of bargain goods, Nancy demonstrates her consumer savvy as consumes a wide conception of urban space. She is categorized as an unmarried professional and intown shopper.

- **Nathan** is a single white graduate student in his twenties who currently lives in a North Atlanta suburb. In deconstructing the postindustrial model of consumption, Nathan notes that the middle-class is associated with conspicuous consumption, and by articulating his awareness of transnational corporate marketing campaigns, he distinguishes himself from the mainstream middle-class. Nathan is categorized as a young professional and suburban shopper.
- **Peggy** is a single white public health official and graduate student in her twenties who lives in East Atlanta. Upon her family's move from Atlanta to the North Georgia mountains when she was 12 years old, Peggy was disturbed by the devastating influence imposed by humans on the natural landscape. With this early social awareness, Peggy has long practiced a responsible form of consumption. She is categorized as a young professional and intown shopper.
- **Rachel** is a married Hispanic woman in her fifties who was trained as a designer yet now claims a middle-class identity through her status as a homeowner. In her North Atlanta suburb, Rachel shops primarily at mass retail stores, yet she notes that she is not satisfied with her experience in these stores. Mass retail stores do not provide the experience of shopping in an open market that she frequently enjoyed in her native Venezuela. With the responsibilities of shopping for her family, however, Rachel continues to shop at the mass retail stores in her suburb, and she is considered a suburban family-oriented shopper.