

What's Deviance Got to Do with It? Black Friday, Violence and Hyper-Conformity

“Oi, mate! If you aren't gonna grab anything then fuck off out the shop!” —*Comment from Black Friday shopper made toward the researcher*

On 28th November 2014 British shops, both online and real-world, offered a day of huge savings on a range of consumer products under the banner of Black Friday. Retailers and superstores across the country opened either at midnight or provided extended opening hours, offering 'door buster' deals and significant discounts on a range of consumer goods. The widespread importation of the US shopping phenomenon onto the UK high-street and, with it, the chaotic disorder and sporadic violence which has become a defining feature of Black Friday in the US, represents an intriguing conundrum for criminologists. The terms 'crime' and deviance suggest a *breaking* of rules and boundaries both formal and informal. However on Black Friday such behaviours occurred within the quintessentially normal leisure activity of post-modernity: going shopping. The challenge for criminologists is how to offer a social-scientific analysis and explanation of such a strange mix of normativity with what *appeared* to be a deviation from social norms and values.

While theories around the etymology of the term vary wildly, to us, the most likely explanation is that Black Friday refers to the first point in the financial year at which retailers begin to see a profit – in accounting terms moving from the red into the black (Thomas and Peters, 2011). While other explanations exist, this one appears to illustrate the import with which the sales are viewed by retailers whose very existence depends on enticing customers to part with their cash. Regardless of the origin of the term, the impact of this single day of trading was little short of staggering, with retail sales rates rising 6.4% compared to November 2013 and online spending hitting £810m, eclipsing the more modest prediction of £650m (BBC News, 2014b; Wood and Smithers, 2014). These figures alone distinguish Black Friday from the myriad other sales events throughout the calendar year, while the 24-hour 'opportunity' offered by retailers creates a desperate sense of 'event' that is largely absent from the January sales.

The chaotic scenes of pushing, shoving, trampling and fighting which have become a familiar, even defining, characteristic of Black Friday in the United States emerged across several cities in the UK (BBC News, 2014), providing a snapshot of the sharp end of contemporary consumerism. Police were called to stores in Manchester, Cardiff, Newcastle upon Tyne, London, Dundee and Glasgow, among others, to deal with reports of violence and disorder. While firm official statistics on arrests and injuries seem hard to come by, Greater Manchester police confirmed making three arrests, with one woman suffering a broken wrist and head injury from a falling television during a confrontation. These were not isolated incidences whipped into a moral panic by a hyperbolic media. We witnessed several exchanges of physical violence between customers in addition to abusive behaviour towards other shoppers and staff—none of which

were deemed serious enough (or perhaps abnormal enough) to constitute arrest. One notable incident involved a quite blatant display of common assault and attempted criminal damage, with the only punishment being that the perpetrator did not get the item he wanted:

Author's Fieldnotes

Two men, probably in their thirties are fighting over a television. They swing around and one man loses his grip slightly - it's clear who is going to come out on top. As he realises he's about to lose out, he starts to kick out at the other man's leg, swinging repeatedly at the back of the knee. When this doesn't work, he turns his attention to the television, frantically trying to rip at the cardboard packaging, and trying to yank it down toward the ground to stamp on it in an effort to sabotage his opponent's victory. Security finally intervenes, storming over and pulling the men apart, clumsily trying to move them to opposite ends of the store. As the loser is being pulled away, he swings his leg out and gets good contact, kicking the television and putting his foot through the cardboard. The television falls to the floor between them, claimed by nobody, before another shopper goes up to inspect the damage and considers a potential 'steal' of a purchase. As the original 'loser' is pushed toward the exit he refuses to leave, demanding that they provide another television despite the manager making it quite clear that they're now out of stock on that particular deal - but that he could purchase one for a slightly higher price if he wished. The man refuses, standing defiantly and demanding the original deal for several minutes. He swears to himself and, clearly irate, paces in front of the security guard who was trying to keep him from entering the shop, mirroring one another in their sideways movements. Finally after a few minutes he concedes defeat, waving his hand dismissively at the security guard and stomps off.

These tactics and forms of sabotage were not uncommon between competitive consumers, with the emergent theme being: 'If you can't win, make sure you don't lose'.

Along with designer outlet stores and eBay markets in imitation designer labels (see Treadwell, 2012), Black Friday shopping practices starkly illustrate the democratisation of indulgent consumerism. What for Veblen was the preserve of the leisure class (Veblen [1899], 1994) is now attainable for all through the paradox of affordable luxury. As we shall argue later, this process of democratisation reflects a political void which serves to bond all to the core logic of liberal capitalism, which of course demands the constant extension and expansion of markets, products and services to avoid crisis (Harvey, 2007).

These undignified scenes undoubtedly shaped the media and popular reaction to events, but we need to look beyond the obvious picture of borderline criminal, certainly deviant, behaviour that seems to present itself. In the following pages we attempt to contextualise the actions of these consumers beyond an explanatory framework that positions them as 'animals' or 'thugs', or alternatively as fiercely competing for a slice of what is often claimed to be an exclusionary consumer experience. Instead, we position these behaviours front and centre of a consumer culture that is thoroughly *inclusive*. As Slavoj Žižek has commented in reference to another form of violent consumerism—the 2011 UK riots (see Treadwell et al, 2013)—the events of Black Friday were not revealing humans as beasts, but instead represented the unveiling of the 'beast' of capitalist ideology (Žižek, 2011).

Despite the abrasive juxtaposition of violence and antisocial behaviour against the ostensibly innocuous pastime of shopping, media coverage carefully avoided discussion that questioned the role of dominant consumer culture in engendering harmful subjectivities. Instead, mainstream news outlets retreated to safe ground and posed questions as to why the sales were not better controlled by retailers' security and police. The Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police, Sir Peter Fahy for example spoke critically of many retailers and supermarkets, arguing that the disorder was "totally predictable" and expressing disappointment that stores did not do more to ensure a more orderly shopping experience (BBC News, 2014).

The perpetrators of what was at worst undeniable criminality and at best highly anti-social behaviour were not the criminalised 'other' or a specific population resolutely rejecting the social norms and values of 'law-abiding' society. From the qualitative research conducted on high streets and shopping centres of Newcastle upon Tyne, the violent shopper came from a wide spectrum of ethnic, gender and age backgrounds. While it appeared that the majority were from what would traditionally have been termed working class backgrounds (before deindustrialisation robbed the term of any meaningful connotation), what they all held in common was a deep, unwavering commitment to the ethos of hyper-consumption. Using qualitative data gathered from interviews with Black Friday shoppers and first-hand observation, this article intends to provide neither a conservative account devoid of political, economic and social analytic context, which blames individuals as reckless irresponsible consumers; nor does it intend to be an account which negates the harm that is inherent in this behaviour or positions it as an expression of frustration toward an exclusionary consumer market.

Black Friday seems to offer an unparalleled opportunity to think critically about the nature of late modern consumerism. Fundamental changes in the nature of work, leisure and identity render symbolic interactionist explanations inadequate. In the deindustrialised North East and elsewhere, the offshoring of industry created a vacuum of meaningful employment that was only partially filled by the rise of a consumer and service-based economy (see Winlow, 2001, Amin, 1994). These new forms of employment tended to be temporary, precarious, poorly compensated, characterised by zero-hour contracts and the sort of affective labour that saps the soul without filling the pocket (Cederström and Fleming 2010, Lloyd, 2013). For the working populace, wages stagnate, but crisis is continually averted through the availability of cheap credit, and ever-cheaper consumer items (Harvey, 2007). Indeed, a 2% reduction in average retail prices—the lowest since August 2002 (BBC News, 2014b)—was arguably a significant contributing factor to the 6.4% increase in sales compared to November of 2013. What is left is perhaps best described as the *opposite* of modernist welfarism. Historically, trade unions would have demanded better wages and conditions for their members. Today, celebrity money saving experts tell eager audiences how to get the best deals or Pizza Express vouchers, while consumer interest groups lobby MPs to break up monopolies so that consumers can benefit from lower prices. There is no clearer indication of the death of collectivist leftist politics in favour of a doxic commitment to perpetually low prices. This results in a continuance of

wage-repression and, in turn, the empowerment of financiers and banking industries through the requirement to find ingenious and innovative ways to keep consumer-workers buying in the face of austerity (Harvey, 2014). Essentially, the constant push for low prices contributes to the reproduction of the capitalist order, intensifying rather than easing the material conditions of precariousness which plague increasing swathes of the consumer-worker population.

Therefore, our question becomes: how best to make sense of the periodic flurries of disorder that erupt on the promise of cheap consumer items? Our data reveals nothing in the mayhem of Black Friday shopping that could reasonably be interpreted as 'resistance'. Rather, the willingness of individuals to harm others in the quest for a cut-price coffee maker or TV reflects the total and unadulterated triumph of liberal capitalist consumer ideology. Here then, we must take a step back and consider the seemingly systemic violence of Black Friday within a much broader critical account of the contemporary context.

Methodology and Theoretical context

The authors hit the high streets and shopping malls in Newcastle out of an interest in the nexus between deviance and leisure and how it might play out in the feverish competitive consumerism of Black Friday. We spoke to 27 people inside and outside of major retailers of clothes, electrical goods and large department stores. These interviews are also supplemented by initial field observations taken by the researchers in the stores, high streets and malls on Black Friday, 2014.

Due to the transitory nature of many of the shoppers—and the chaotic atmosphere of the stores and high streets—consent forms could not be handed out and signed. Instead verbal consent and interviews were obtained through a handheld Dictaphone. These impromptu conversations varied in length and detail and the nature of the research site also contributed to some lack of reflective depth. Some shoppers wished only to give a few comments before moving on to the next store or to get out of the busy high streets; while most were happy to remain amid the carnivalesque atmosphere and discuss what was unfolding around them. Participants varied in age, race and gender¹; but due to the context of the research site we were opportunistic in the sense that we relied on whoever was willing to speak to us. Some were solo shoppers while others were couples or groups of friends.

Our assertions about the motivations and meanings around the behaviours of those involved with the events of Black Friday UK are based upon this ethnographic data in addition to a number of years researching the nexus between consumerism, leisure and deviance. We cannot deny that we began this article and the associated empirical research with a level of commitment to a certain theoretical perspective that has emerged from previous empirical research in the environs of consumer culture (see

¹ Discerning social class without the time to develop appropriate background knowledge made the certainty of establishing a broad social class demographic difficult under these circumstances. Moreover, as class-based industries and traditional signifiers of social class and location in the social structure disintegrate with the increase of low-wage, insecure employment in the service economy; even in-depth studies struggle with discerning class-status (see Winlow and Hall, 2006).

for example Smith, 2014). However, as others have argued elsewhere, commitment to theoretical ideas which have emerged from empirical research is fully aligned with the guidelines of a grounded theoretical approach (Winlow and Hall, 2006: 11).

Newcastle-upon-Tyne is arguably the archetypal post-industrial city, eviscerated through the departure of traditional forms of industrial employment throughout the 1980s. It is widely accepted that the traditional sites of industrial employment offered a great deal of stability and comprehensibility of reproductive working-class structures and cultures (Hobsbawm, 1996, Willis, 1977). Moreover, without romanticising these industries, there is evidence to suggest that individuals derived solidarity, mutual understanding, political and class identity from them (Willis, 1979). Today, Newcastle relies heavily on its consumer economy, drawing night-time revellers from local areas and far-flung regions of the UK and beyond. This shift from an economy based on production to one based on consumption ensures that much employment in Newcastle and the North-East in general is dominated by low-wages, precarity, ontological insecurity and a palpable sense of indignity (Winlow and Hall, 2006, Lloyd, 2014).

This article does not claim to be the last word on the complexities of contemporary subjectivities and deviance. The theoretical arguments made in this article are based on an extremely limited sample in only one city. However, read in the context of other theoretical and empirical accounts surrounding contemporary subjectivities, deviance and leisure (Banks, 2013; Hayward, 2004; Smith, 2014; Treadwell et al, 2013; Winlow and Hall, 2006), this article does suggest that the time has come for criminologists to begin to examine the deviance-leisure nexus more seriously and undertake more comprehensive theorisation of deviant motivation that is firmly and realistically situated within the broader political, socio-economic and cultural context of neoliberal consumer capitalism (see Hall et al., 2008). To this end, we employ an understanding of deviant leisure that discards the Manichean binary of 'criminals' and 'moral citizens' in order to attempt to address the forces that can drive ostensibly law-abiding individuals towards harmful social practices. Throughout the period of data collection we did not witness criminals displaying pathologically violent behaviour. Rather, individuals were jostling and pushing to *pay* for items. An understanding of deviant leisure in this context then, must appreciate the criminogenic potential of the need to garner envy in others through conspicuous consumption.

Black Friday as 'Deviant Leisure'?

With a number of academic disciplines seemingly converging on the notion of 'Deviant Leisure', it is tempting to claim this label as neatly encapsulating the behaviours associated with Black Friday shopping. However, closer inspection reveals that this categorisation is perhaps one of convenience rather than suitability. We would claim that for a form of leisure to be recognised as deviant, it must contravene the norms and values of the dominant society. While some of the activities and behaviours outlined and captured within this article display deviant characteristics, (such as a lack of behaviours likely to be identified as 'civilised' by the majority of consumers, practiced through turn-taking, queuing, and other

forms of politeness and civility), the cultural norms of their actions are entirely in keeping with the demands of neoliberal, consumer society. Indeed, the possession and conspicuous display of consumer goods and identity markers is supposed to position the individual as a winner compared to the losers without the items. The creation of envy in others serves to elevate the self at the same time, in the process of displaying cultural knowhow and affirming to the watching world that you are successful, entrepreneurial and to be admired.

This perspective on the idiosyncrasies of consumer culture resolves in a paradox. Whilst we appear to live in a world of endless rules, traditions and protocols; there is no governing Symbolic Order which provides a coherent set of prohibitions, customs and approvals through which our individual subjectivities can come into being and act in reference to the collective (Winlow and Hall, 2012). The liberal-postmodern renunciation of any governing ideology, codes, rules or traditions, has led to a deep cynicism and scepticism to any forms of collective identity. Such rules, codes, traditions and identities are viewed as burdensome and oppressive weights upon the unique individuality inside us all. However, with the evisceration of the political left and the individual having been set 'free' from the constraints of governing ideology, we have also been untethered from any sense of fixity, stability or a means of making coherent sense of our world. The effect of this has been to create a void into which the polysemic possibilities of consumer capitalism has moved. Consequently, this has intensified the desire and urgency for a comprehensible set of symbols, and the consumer market offers an infinite assortment of artefacts that promise to provide a level of coherence, allowing us to make symbolic sense of our lives (Miles, 1998; 2000). All that is left is what Zizek (1999) describes as the 'cultural injunction to enjoy', where life is about the pursuit of pleasure, a pursuit to which almost all other rules, codes, ethics or morality is secondary. This is not to make a moralistic comment but to sketch out how changes in the political, economic and ideological landscape have influenced the postmodern subject.

As the Symbolic Order disintegrates and the compensatory comforts of commodities take centre-stage, the civility and manners of shopping, which have been apparent stalwarts in our collective sense of sociability (Mann, 1969) become dispensable in the face of consumerism's imaginary substitute order. This is exemplified in the words of Simon, a 32 year-old office manager, who discusses the decline in the supposedly quintessentially 'British' tradition of queuing:

***Simon:** Queuing went out the window today. People half-queued at first, but as soon as the doors opened it all fell apart. That whole thing of British sensibility...you know...that we queue properly and that. That's bollocks. It's imaginary, mate. Day-to-day, yeah people queue. But as soon as you get something like today, or rush-hour on the Metro or something...goes out the window. So fuck queuing, nobody else is.*

The queue is important. It represents deferred gratification, as well as a form of collective efficacy that underpins at least a basic level of sociability. The discarding of queuing, an intrinsic element of the social

order, evidences in a small way the dissolution of something more fundamental. In Hall's (2012) terminology, the rejection of even such a minor ethical code as queuing exemplifies the assertion of *Special Liberty*. By rejecting the prosocial, individuals are acting in the belief that within a Randian context of wealth creation, individual drives and desires are prioritised, while the need to acknowledge the harms inflicted upon others is diminished. While Hall is predominantly using the term to describe the sense of privilege enjoyed by self-proclaimed 'wealth creators', it seems reasonable to suggest that it is equally pervasive throughout society among consumers who experience a 'right' to have what they desire. This is reflected in the experiences of Susanna, a 43 year old mother who was quite befuddled by the events of Black Friday:

Susanna: It's quite disgusting really. People are going around like they deserve these things. I saw a grown man having a tantrum because the shop had ran out of stock of whatever it was he was after. He was saying 'I demand you bring me one. Or ship some in from another store', screaming at this poor girl who was just trying to do the best she could. Even my own kids. They want the latest phone or video game box thing and they'll say, 'Everyone else has one. I should have one too'. I always tell them that nice things are a privilege, they're not a birth-right.

Such attitudes drive an aggressive form of consumer culture to which consumer markets are central; and individuals increasingly understand and locate their social status in relation to the downfall of others. In this sense then, the seemingly innocuous pastime of shopping becomes an instrument of harm.

Shopping

Shopping is an integral part of consumerism, intrinsically linked to aspects of identity and lifestyle. As a leisure activity, it promises to offer freedom of choice and an opportunity to exercise self-gratification. Zukin recognises that its seduction lies in its ability to make an individual feel that they are uniquely creative. Indeed, shopping can be viewed as a cultural practice that addresses a yearning to 'feel part of public life' (Zukin, 2005: 7). Some research has suggested that being seen to have shopped in an expensive store is a more potent status symbol than actual ownership of the goods themselves (Hall et al., 2008). In this way it differs from the act of simply 'buying'. Further, the pleasure in the seeking of novelty (Hirschman, 1984) and the hedonic stimulation encountered when the consumer feels they have got a bargain, perhaps beating the competition to gain ownership of a particularly coveted item all contributes to the idea of shopping as a form of leisure. Some 'leisure' shoppers may well enjoy the broader pursuits associated with a leisurely stroll around the shops, meeting a friend for coffee or simply people-watching (Tauber, 1972; Roberts, 1987). However, for others, the 'leisure' lies in the competitive aspect; either at the point of purchase or later in the ostentatious display of bought items. These customers are most likely to be those that purchase on impulse (Iyer, 1989), indicating that the desire to purchase anything is integral to the overall shopping experience. This is carried through to an extreme in the well-documented

case during the UK 2014 Black Friday sales of a woman who, being unable to buy a television, opted instead to put a Dyson vacuum cleaner in her trolley, rather than leave empty-handed (Neate, 2014).

In accepting that shopping is a form of leisure, it appears that it could best be described as a form of 'casual leisure' (Stebbins, 2007) requiring little in the way of practise, expertise or specialty knowledge. The ready availability of credit would suggest it to be a fairly inclusive activity, especially once we consider that many consumers express pleasure at the notion of 'window shopping', and the proliferation of 'designer outlet' shopping precincts which significantly broaden the demographic reach of branded consumer goods. Other forms of shopping however, may be better described as 'serious leisure', requiring practice and dedication, incorporating clearly definable and visible signs of progress or success. Relevant examples of shopping as serious leisure would be online auctions, antiques markets or shopping in the seasonal sales. Similarly, Black Friday shopping appears to incorporate a number of elements which distinguish it as a form of 'serious leisure', including the apparent use of planning and tactics that would be more usually associated with hyper-masculine sporting activities, and the recurrent desire to improve performance for next time (Thomas and Peters, 2011). This tactical element that can be learned, improved upon and used to gain advantage is outlined here by Emily, a 26 year old woman working in admin for a construction firm:

[I] Was one of the first in, like. Propa shot in there quick when the doors opened, overtook about 4 people within the first few seconds. [She turns into commentator mode, using her hands to portray her movements and tactics] I spotted a little room on the outside of 'em and I snuck past dead canny like. I could see where they had these TVs stacked up. They had wrapping over them, but I knew by the shape and size it were them. I wasn't right at the front, but I figured it out. Other people further ahead for the first few seconds you could see they were trying to figure out where was what. Idiots. So I got in there. Those people I snuck past, as I had mine and I was trying to get out the way, I saw them get caught in a crowd. Ha! Swooped in!

Gotta use yer head. Luckily I'm a big lass so I can push people around a bit, but you gotta use yer head otherwise you just get lost in the crowd! It's a bit like wild kingdom in there. Survival of the fittest! Like I said, those people in front of me. Didn't think it through. They weren't ready. Also, right, a few of my friends are over at John Lewis. They went as a team. So like they're going as a team and they're gonna like block people off and cause chaos while one of 'em races ahead and grabs everything they're looking for! Dead smart!

Elsewhere, Stefan, a 28-year old bouncer; James a 23-year old local student; and Keith a 32-year old colleague of Stefan, discuss their tactics:

Stefan: *Took it quite seriously as well didn't we?*

James & Keith: *Yeah, we didn't mess about.*

Researcher: *What do you mean, 'took it seriously'?*

Stefan: *Well, we had planned. We had strategy. So James was the one who wanted to really go buy things. And Keith and I are big men. So we choose to go to James' shop first. And James would pick out what he wanted and we would—*

[Keith, frustrated by Stefan's broken English and too excited to wait for him to tell the story]

Keith: *So basically James would pick stuff out and we'd basically go over there and just bowl people out of the way, like corner it off and that and then little'un here would sneak in like a whippet and grab what he needs. He cleaned up! Worked a treat!*

A number of commentators have rightly acknowledged the changing landscape of the shopping experience, pointing toward the increasingly homogenised high streets, the ubiquity of online shopping and perpetual rationalisation (Ritzer, 1993; 2001). Online shopping in particular appears to have had a cultural and financial impact upon how purchases are made. However, not every element of the holistic shopping experience is reducible to a click of a mouse or readily mediated through a touch-screen phone. There is something about the process of entering a shop and purchasing consumer goods that fleetingly connects at the heart of the postmodern subject. Evidence for this comes in the form of the young working class males that form the basis of Hall et al's research (2008), and again in the actions of individuals interviewed by Treadwell et al in the wake of the 2011 riots. Here, individuals would sell stolen or looted goods in order to then legitimately access consumer markets, buying designer clothes, electronic items and accoutrements, finding meanings and cultural identity within the *legitimate* purchase of branded items. In this way they were able to elevate themselves above those who are unable to afford the genuine article and so buy knock-offs, inspiring envy among those who recognise the difference.

There is a suggestion that the societal impact of western culture's unswerving emphasis on and commitment to consumerism has had broad reaching effects on dominant socio-ethical norms, redefining:

“what is regarded as acceptable and unacceptable, proper and improper, legitimate and illegitimate, or praiseworthy and blameworthy behaviour in the light of the moral principles (e.g. justice... fairness, decency... authenticity, reliability)... changing the criteria by which people evaluate their own and each other's actions” (Weigertz, 2010: 124).

In this way, we can view the apparently destructive, antisocial behaviours associated with Black Friday shopping as *extimate* (see Hall, 2012), or an *intrinsic externality* of the dominant structural and subjective driving forces behind the political-economic landscape of neoliberal society, and in this way entirely in keeping with or aligned to the everyday, law abiding forms of consumption, credit and legitimised/sanitised incarnations of the consumer-finance economy (see Horsley, 2015). This view is espoused by one Black Friday shopper, Darren, a 34-year old IT engineer, who saw the aggressive consumption in an extremely utilitarian way: as an essential service to the economy:

Darren: The way I see it, it's a good thing [...] Black Friday, it's a massive boost to the economy. Which is the key to everything these days. We need to keep the economy going and going well and I think Black Friday moving over here is key to that. I'm quite logical and rational though. I don't get caught up in the 'oh isn't this disgraceful' stuff. The amount of money this pumps into the economy, I think it's worth the sacrifice of people acting like this.

Darren epitomises the capitalist realist, for whom capitalism 'seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable' (Fisher, 2008: 8). In this sense, global capitalism has created a consumerist ontology, which is able to assert an unquestioned dominance within a post-political landscape which has seemingly given up the effort of looking beyond a liberal-capitalist society.

Key to understanding the motivations and describing the actions of the 'deviant shoppers' is an appreciation and incorporation of the hostile political and economic landscape against which the lives of many of the respondents are set. Perhaps most strikingly, the absence of political collectivism has been consumerism's most effective ally in capturing the socially atomised and economically marginalised subject. The threat of cultural irrelevance looms large over many of the respondents here and in similar cohorts studied elsewhere (Smith 2014, Hall et al, 2008, Miles, 2000; Treadwell et al, 2013). In the absence of clear, meaningful political alternatives to the dominant neoliberal consensus, consumer markets offer the only real option, promising identity, meaning and pleasure (Moxon, 2011). Objects within this cultural sphere take on almost mystical qualities. Marx refers to this process as reification, but this concept does not quite convey the extent to which consumer objects have the ability to act as reflective mirrors of identity and distinction, temporarily staving off the anxiety of cultural obsolescence and for the individual providing a precious sliver of relational security, if only fleetingly. The consumer, stranded as the social dissolves, can imagine herself as a member of a substitute group, a community of consumers. What we are witnessing is the attachment of 'social value' (the defining traits by which we comparatively measure the worth of individual lives in relation to others) to the acquisition and ostentatious display of consumer goods and commodified experiences. Bauman's notion of the consumer society (2007) demands that 'social identity' is attainable only through accepting the market as the source of self-determination which insists that those at the bottom of the pile should be vilified, an ideological standpoint with which a number of our respondents concur.

For some consumers, such as Keith, a 32 year old doorman at a number of local night-clubs, Black Friday offered an opportunity to dip into new markets, purchase the indicators of social capital synonymous with formal modes of dress rather than jeans and T-Shirts.

I'm a scruffy bastard. But I like to think that maybe I'd be the kind of bloke that'd wear a suit. Kind of change my style and that. Wear nice clothes and that, smart like. Not just jeans and a t-shirt like I usually do. I was in that mode when I was in there y'know? I wasn't getting the stuff I usually get. I mean I got some of that. Sensible. Get some new clothes that you going to wear. But I was more

imagining meself in these other clothes. Thinking like 'Oh that's propa smart'. Y'know? That's what I was thinking about so I picked it up ... Just like you wanna change it up and be a different person you know. If there's ever a day to do that it's when the deals are on y'know? I've been thinking about it for a while like, but stuff always gets in the way you know. And you can't buy the lot because it's too expensive.

While some commentators (Hall 1988; McRobbie 1994; Featherstone 1987; Fiske 1991) may offer a rather celebratory interpretation of Keith's desire to transform himself through participation in the market, a feat only achievable thanks to the sheer variety of consumer choice, others rightly highlight the trivial, transitory and superficial nature of these circuits of consumption:

The idea that 'you can be anything you want' ... has come to mean that identities can be adopted and discarded ... But if choice no longer implies commitments and consequences ... the freedom to choose amounts in practice to an abstention from choice (Lasch, 1985: 38)

The very fact that we have no choice but to choose (see Giddens, 1991) suggests that making choices has become mandatory – which is, to say the least, a peculiar form of freedom. Therefore, to ally consumer choice so closely to freedom is a gross misrepresentation. The choice is simply to choose from one of a set array of options, rather than the unfettered freedom that is implied through much of the literature and rhetoric. As Bauman points out:

Individual choices are in all circumstances confined by two sets of constraints ... One set is determined by the agenda of choice: the range of alternatives which are actually on offer. All choice means 'choosing among', and seldom is the set of items to be chosen from a matter for the chooser to decide ... [the second set of constraints] is determined by the code of choosing: the rules that tell the individual on what ground the preferences should be given to some items rather than others and when to consider the choice as proper and when as inappropriate. (1999: 72– 73)

Other interviewees, such as Connor and Jake who are both in their mid-twenties and old school friends, situated the excitement around Black Friday within the context of the mundane repetitiveness of tedious work in the service economy, offering an opportunity for pleasure and excitement. Several of our participants also discussed combining a day out of shopping with drinking alcohol, one of the more consistent areas of indulgence for young people in post-industrial cities:

Connor: *I'm not surprised.*

Researcher: *No?*

Connor: *No, mate. Not at all. Especially around here.*

Researcher: *What do you mean by that?*

Connor: *Just life is bleak sometimes, especially up here. People got nothing to live for. Where I work, I work in a call centre. And people are just miserable. People have been propa looking forward to this. It's just like, something to talk about that isn't fucking X Factor.*

Researcher: *So you think people get into this just to spice things up?*

Connor: *Yeah a bit! [Laughs]. I know it sounds ridiculous but it's true. Especially the charvas [chavs]. You look at the people who get propa into it. That's who it is. It's kind of exciting I guess for them. Just like all the mayhem and that. Everyone just gets carried away by it.*

Jake: *You've got a point there, y'know. Everyone I know from school and that—[turns to Connor] no offence mate—but loads of people I know from school are so bored and pissed off and that...Yeah I reckon you have a point.*

Connor: *No but it's true though. People at work have been talking about this for ages.*

Researcher: *What did you plan?*

Keith: *The day! So me and me mate Stef work evenings right and James is a student so he doesn't work. So we all got together down Spoons nice and early for a breakfast and that. Then had a few beers to get a bit merry before coming in. And like we planned out where we wanted to go.*

Researcher: *You had a few beers in the morning? Why?*

Keith: *Well like, just a day out isn't it? Like when you go to watch the football, you get down the pub early, get a few in like before you go to the ground. Have a few beers with mates, get a bit merry and that, makes the whole thing better.*

Under these conditions, shopping sheds the last vestiges of its former association with the feminine consumer. Keith, Jake and Connor are all able to contextualise their shopping expedition in the more comfortable vernacular of 'going to the match' and 'having a few beers'. By offering an alternative to a skinny cappuccino and a gossip while shopping, capitalism circumvents an apparent barrier and creates a new niche market around an overtly masculine form of shopping.

The following section will explore in more detail the processes that have been instrumental in embedding the individual within consumer markets. This inevitably must include a discussion around processes of cultural infantilisation, which engenders a level of puerility and childishness in human interactions and behaviours, but also appears to drive a wedge between more traditional forms of symbolic identity, as the market instils variety and mutability into a range of off-the-peg lifestyles.

Infantilisation

A number of commentators have posited the close relationship between the dominance of consumer capitalism and a concomitant process of cultural infantilisation (see Barber, 2007; Heath and Potter, Hayward, Smith, Hall et al, 2008). Children are being progressively deprived of the potential to identify with their parents, because their primary identifications are being distracted and redirected toward industrial temporal objects (Stiegler, 2013: 82). Furthermore, their secondary identifications are oriented in the same way, as are the secondary identifications of their parents. The effect of this, Stiegler suggests, is to adopt behaviour and identify closely with behaviours that are intrinsically entwined with forms of consumer culture. The vast and unremitting consumer mediascape, permeated by a political consensus that constantly espouses stimulating consumption as a route out of financial crisis, effectively creates a barrier between the child and their parents. This has the paradoxical effect described succinctly by Hayward (2012) as 'life-stage dissolution' whereby children are dragged toward adolescence and adulthood at a rate dictated by consumer culture, while at the same time adults are drawn perpetually back toward adolescence through consumer markets which offer a range of cultural artefacts that are interpreted as youthful. All of these various markets demand one thing – immediate consumption, and offer multiple ways of making that goal an achievable target.

We can see evidence of this occurring from Black Friday research in the US context, where the chaotic disorder and potential violence is becoming romanticised as a family holiday ritual in the United States. Thomas and Peters' (2011) illustrate how families discuss the disorder and 'survival' of Black Friday in sentimental terms; as an annual ritual and opportunity for familial bonding in the build-up to Christmas. Here we see how consumer culture displays a remarkable alacrity when it comes to its ability to incorporate its own contradictions into new, niche markets which has the effect of perpetuating its own form. This results in a continuous circulation of signs and symbols in a totalising process that leaves nothing external to it. The clearest example of how this works is by looking at the way in which even its own dissent is incorporated into the model. All apparent alternatives display an uncanny ability to be absorbed into the dominant system. Anti-capitalist movements based on notions such as 'downshifting' (Schor, 1998) or 'decluttering' do nothing to counter the prevailing dominance of consumerism, (instead forming the backbone of the hugely successful IKEA advert which demanded viewers 'chuck out their Chintz'), while moves toward ethical consumption, organic foodstuffs or the like, simply become additional signifiers of middle-class distinction. In short, everything becomes commodified, even anti-capitalism itself. As Baudrillard asserts, such 'alternatives' to processes of growth and consumption are merely the inverted and complementary image of those processes' (Baudrillard, 1998 –consumer society-; 180).

Shopping, the act of purchasing and taking ownership of a new item, is a form of intoxication. A bold claim, but one that appears to be supported by recent research from the neurosciences providing an embodied

correlation between pleasure and loss depending on a combination of product and price (Knutson et al, 2007). Put simply, purchasing 'bargains' is felt as an adrenaline rush, an addictive and perhaps ultimately damaging process, destined to repeat in perpetuity. Furthermore, the instrumental use of consumer markets to sooth anxieties and problems in more material areas of life such as employment and relationships is represented in the account of Kelly, 32 salon owner, who discussed her and her friend's decision to go shopping on Black Friday:

Researcher: *You mentioned that you knew this shopping experience would be unpleasant. I have to ask: Why did you come? Why not shop online?*

Kelly: *Well...Me and me mate, John, we've been friends for 20-year and we were chatting the other day about shit in our lives. His girlfriend—bitch—just left him for a job down South and I was moaning about how I'm gonna have to close me shop [hairdressers] because business is slow. We just decided fuck it. Don't let the other bastards stop us. We're gonna go and do some shopping and have fun together and tonight we're gonna go out and get pissed. Because life is shite. Shopping online isn't the same as going around the shops with your mates. I should be saving for Christmas really, but I'm just here buying stuff for meself. But why shouldn't I? Life is shite. Got no husband or kids to save money for. Shop's closing. I could save and save and save [money]. But for what? Everybody else is having fun, always with a new wardrobe, going out having fun or whatever. What do I have to show for saving?*

Kelly discusses her intent to indulge in the intoxicating pleasures of multiple consumer markets within the context of an absence of more substantial and stable life structures from which identity can be derived; comforts and pleasures such as family, committed relationships, stable employment and collective politics. These are traditional markers of adulthood (Blatterer) which have been dismantled and discarded in the wake of neo-liberalism's post-industrial disciplining and flexibilisation of labour, all of which serve the demands of capital accumulation. In the absence of any symbolic order or life-path that can offer cultural and material stability, the need of a set of symbols that can provide some kind of coherence intensifies rather than dissipates. In a society and culture in which meaning and value is assigned to symbolic displays of consumer commodities, there is a deepening of commitment to the very political-economic system which has cast the postmodern subject adrift. The sense that something is missing, the nagging feeling that something isn't quite right, can be assuaged by the right purchase. Kelly's dismay of 'what do I have to show for saving' displays the lingering anxiety that, in the words of Winlow and Hall (2012: 7), "life was being lived by others somewhere out there".

Of course, the sense of satisfaction is never fully realised, and the desire for an object is almost immediately replaced by further desires for other replacement objects in an endless parade of consumer artefacts and experiences that divert desires from other the more edifying realms of love, art, science or politics. In this way, the traditional maturation process is in effect hijacked by consumerism; an event that,

contrary to Matza's (1968) dated notion of drift, shows little signs of dissipating as individuals mature. In the relative absence of distinguishable life stages, stable relationships, work and politics to mature into, it seems all that is left are the shops and the self as a lone competitor in the struggle for symbols that paradoxically represent both social distinction and conformity (see Miles, 2000).

Some amongst the older generation who can still draw upon stable social networks of family, friends and the more critical perspectives of industrial modernism are perhaps less likely to be affected by the seductions of the consumer market. While the grey pound is perhaps one of the most sought after potential markets for a range of industries, there can be a discernible generational difference in attitudes to consumer society, at least for as long as viewpoints such those held by Geoff and Brenda persist:

Geoff: *People are getting hurt. Nobody takes it seriously. It's more of a 'that's just the way it is'. I watched an elderly lady, similar age to us, she got pushed over and fell to the floor. Now if that were to happen on any other day, that person would be considered disgusting. It would probably make the papers or something. But because it's Black Friday, it's OK.*

Brenda: *Because it happens on a day where everyone is being told to spend their money, nobody is bothered are they? Well...we're bothered, but we're a different generation. I just think in general we live in a less caring society now. Everyone just cares about themselves. Just look at what's happening with this Tory government. They don't care do they? Just like the Thatcher government. Just don't care. And I think it's infectious. It spreads to other people and eventually everyone just starts looking out for themselves!*

Geoff: *It's so frustrating because whenever I open my mouth about this stuff, our sons always tell us we're just living in the past. They say that 'things are different now' and you've just got to 'move with the times'. But what if the times aren't good? Just because things are different doesn't mean they're better.*

Geoff and Brenda, an elderly retired married couple, experienced a vastly different process of socialisation than many young people growing up since the 1980s. Theirs was an age where spending habits were largely constrained by the notion of deferred gratification, and the most common emotion associated with giving in to desire would most likely be experienced as shame. In Freud's terminology, the superego was able to induce a crippling guilt associated with the wanton pursuit of pleasure, of giving in to the Id. Today however, it is possible to discern what Zizek suggests is a re-orientation of the cultural superego: a shift in the balance between the commands of restraint and hedonism. Put simply, this means that individuals are more likely to feel guilty at their failure to avail themselves of opportunities – *missing out* is likely to provoke the feelings of guilt and shame that we would more traditionally associate with *giving in* to the desires of the Id. Nowhere is this more clearly vocalised than in the following response from Emily:

Emily: *Me and my friends, we're gonna meet up 'neet for a few bevvy's and that and talk about what we got. What deals we got and that at the shops. And show each other our stuff and the prices and that. Like, we haven't said that's gonna happen. But that's what we're gonna do. I know I'm gonna do that! So if I didn't come, yeah—like for instance my other friend she's married and she like never comes out or does any of this, she's coming to these drinks and she's gonna be left out so much of the conversation. She's not gonna be able to talk about the deals she got, the stuff she got, she won't even be able to tell like funny stories and that about crazy stuff she saw. It's gonna be propa awkward.*

Researcher: *OK. So it's as much for bonding with friends than it is about yourself?*

Emily: *Aye. Like, you get it for yourself obviously. It's nice to get these things and to know that you can have them and that. Half the reason I go to work is so I can get money and do the things I wanna do and have the things that make me happy. But you also do it to fit in, because everybody has this stuff. You don't wanna be the only one wi' out something pure belta.*

The social pressure to conspicuously display the symbols of consumer items, along with the cultural reorientation of the superego has displaced the maturation process of 'drift' (Matza, 1968), that might once have prevented the extreme form of competitive individualistic consumption that dominated Black Friday lingering on into adulthood. However in a fiercely acquisitive consumer society, many 'young people'² find that there is little to mature into outside of the latest set of identifying symbols attached to carefully selected seductive consumable commodities. As the words of Simon suggested above, the theme that emerges from many of our participants' justifications or 'techniques of neutralisation' (Sykes and Matza, 1959) is the notion that 'everyone else was doing it' and that if they did not join in, they would lose out because of the unfair behaviour of others. Here, competitive individualism and the lure of consumer items triumphs over any noble ideas of civility and solidarity:

Emily: *Oh yeah! There's just no respect. Everyone is just acting like a wanker.*

Researcher: *But, to be fair, you did just shove a lady over there and elbow a fair few people in the face.*

Emily: *Hahaha! Oh my God! You saw that?! [More laughing] Yeah...Yeah I suppose I did. But like I say, everyone is doing it. I shoved people in the shop as well, had to.*

(Emily, 26 years old)

Kelly: *What did you really expect, mate? Goodwill to all men? If you choose to come out on a day like this, you know what you're getting into and you better be ready for it because it'll be a waste of your time if you don't get stuck in.*

² See Hayward (2013) on 'life-stage dissolution' and the changing parameters of what constitutes 'youth', 'adolescence' and 'adulthood'.

(Kelly, 32 years old)

Jack: I see it like this, right: This is what people want. Any other day of the year if you told people that if you shove someone else over and get there first and you can get a cheap Kindle, people would do it. Other days of the year it's not acceptable. Black Friday it is. I think people want to do this. If they didn't they wouldn't come.

(Jack, mid-30's)

Conclusion

This article has attempted to provide an explanatory framework for the behaviours and motivations of those involved in the outbreaks of disorder, incivility and violence associated with the enthusiastic importation to the UK of Black Friday sales. The unquestioning adoption by UK retailers emphasises the primacy of consumer culture as ideology. The concept is surgically detached from its traditional connotation with the US national holiday of Thanksgiving and is boldly grafted onto the UK calendar as a natural development in the ceaseless quest to extract profit.

While popular media accounts seemed to suggest that the scenes of mayhem in stores across the country were easily pathologised, attributable to a violent minority behaving 'like animals'; our intention has been to locate the Black Friday experience within a critical analysis of consumer culture. It is our contention that the violence and disorder that is now synonymous with Black Friday is symptomatic of a broader culture of narcissism which remains unchecked in a post-political landscape in which all mainstream political thought has converged on the notion that liberal capitalist democracy is the least-worst of all possible systems (see Lasch, 1978; Smith, 2014; Winlow, 2012).

This is a conclusion that appears to be gaining some traction in left-wing criminology. Reiner (2007) for example, locates egoism, the Randian doctrine that individuals should unflinchingly do whatever is in their own self-interest, at the centre of neoliberal consumer culture. He cites Thatcher's edict that people should 'look to themselves first', as the driving force of an individualistic society. Hall et al (2008) develop this notion, suggesting that the form of egoism that drives the kind of behaviours outlined in this article should be understood specifically in terms of Rousseau's *amour-propre*, a particular form of egoism which entails contextualising the success of the self in terms of the relative downfall of others.

The individuals described here then are not emblematic of a poor and socially excluded class demanding access to the consumer items enjoyed by a wealthy elite. Such an explanation would suggest a political motivation for which we found no evidence. Nor can we consider these individuals as 'flawed consumers' (Bauman, 2009). As shopping has become serious leisure, linked with specialised knowledge, the often harmful tactics and strategies employed by those looking for a bargain depict extremely successful consumers acting out commonly accepted competitive strategies, often succeeding at getting what they want. Readily available credit in the shape of payday loans, credit cards and store card ensure that they

can access even if only temporarily, the 'resources that socially approved consumer activity required' to ensure that theirs is not an 'unlived life' (Bauman, 2007: 25). Rather, those willing to fight, bite and claw their way to the checkout ahead of all others are merely conforming to the central tenets of competitive individualism, envy and aggressive social and cultural life in the neoliberal West.

We have framed the behaviours outlined here within the context of 'deviant' leisure, a broad term that we have used in a fairly specific way. Undoubtedly, as the data shows, many of our respondents were engaging in leisure behaviour, perhaps best described as 'extreme shopping'. The behaviours exhibited were linked to feelings of excitement and having 'won', and clear losers were also defined as such. We found no evidence whatsoever to support the now dated notion of 'resistance at the point of consumption', but a surfeit of evidence to demonstrate aggressive conformity. We feel that the application of the concept of deviant leisure allows us to forego the predictable binary of 'criminals' and 'moral consumers' and prompt criminologists to ask more searching questions which focus on the underlying heart of the social and cultural conditions that can cultivate subjectivities which drive seemingly 'normal' people toward harmful social practices.

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