

INTIMACIES, CRITICAL CONSUMPTION AND DIVERSE ECONOMIES

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Intimacies, Critical Consumption and Diverse Economies

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Sophie Woodward carries out research in the fields of material culture, consumption and feminist theory. Her research into material culture has been focused primarily upon clothing, through an ethnography of women's wardrobes and through research into denim as the co-founder of the Global Denim Project (with Daniel Miller); her current project into dormant things (<http://projects.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/dormant-things/>) focuses upon things that have accumulated in the home but are no longer used. She has a continuing interest in the methodological challenges of understanding material culture and has explored this through ethnographic and interdisciplinary approaches. She is the author of several books including *Why Women Wear What They Wear* (2007), *Blue Jeans: The Art of the Ordinary* (with Daniel Miller, 2012) and *Why Feminism Matters* (with Kath Woodward, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Also by Emma Casey and Yvette Taylor

Emma Casey

Casey, E. (2008) *Women, Pleasure and the Gambling Experience*. Hampshire: Ashgate.

Casey, E. and Martens, L. (eds) (2007) *Gender and Consumption: Material Culture and the Commercialisation of Everyday Life*. Hampshire: Ashgate.

Yvette Taylor

Book Series:

Critical Diversities: Policies, Practices and Perspectives, Routledge
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Taylor, Y. (2007) *Working-Class Lesbian Life: Classed Outsiders*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, Y. (2009) *Lesbian and Gay Parenting: Securing Social and Educational Capital*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, Y. (ed.) (2010) *Classed Intersections: Spaces, Selves, Knowledges*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Taylor, Y., Hines, S. and Casey, M. (eds) (2010) *Theorizing Intersectionality and Sexuality*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, Y. (2012) *Fitting into Place? Class and Gender Geographies and Temporalities*. Abingdon, Oxon: Ashgate.

Taylor, Y. (ed.) (2012) *Educational Diversity: The Subject of Difference and Different Subjects*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hines, S. and Taylor, Y. (eds) (2012) *Sexualities: Reflections and Future Directions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, Y. and Addison, M. (eds) (2013) *Queer Presences and Absences*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, Y. and Sanger, T. (eds) (2013) *Mapping Intimacies: Relations, Exchanges, Affects*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, Y. (ed.) (2014) *The Entrepreneurial University: Public Engagements, Intersecting Impacts*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, Y. and Snowdon, R. (eds) (2014) *Queering Religion, Religious Queers*. New York: Routledge.

Taylor, Y., Stella, F., Reynolds, T. and Rogers, A. (2015) *Sexual Citizenship and the New Europe*. London: Routledge.

Introduction

Emma Casey and Yvette Taylor

Our aims in producing this new collection are twofold. The first aim responds to a call to rebalance theoretical emphasis of large-scale global economies characterized by, for example, structural risk, crisis and recession (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 1990; Slater, 1997) alongside attention towards small scale, critically diverse and everyday 'intimate' consumer economies (Casey and Martens, 2007; Clarke, 2004; Jackson and Moores, 1995; Sanger and Taylor, 2013). Secondly the collection aims to offer detailed empirical accounts of diverse intimacies, domestic economies and family lives. It attempts to relocate forms of 'critical consumption' in and through a range of 'diverse economies' and 'diverse methods' across time and place. How do we understand underrepresented social realities within consumer culture, such as non-consumption, mundane consumer choices, the choice not to consume, and alternative forms of consumption?

Sensibilities of austerity and 'responsible' consumerism idealize middle-class forms of personhood based on deferred gratification, restraint and modesty (Armstrong, 2010; Atkinson et al., 2012; Allen and Taylor, 2013; Skeggs, 2004). In contrast, admonishing statements about 'inappropriate' material desires litter the statements of politicians who locate the poor as being resistant to work and too dependent on state 'hand-outs'. In the context of growing European inequality under austerity agendas – rising unemployment, benefit cuts, growing numbers of families dependent on food banks – these discourses work to mask the presence of severe cuts and injustices by holding the poor morally responsible for their plight. Such divisions also heighten a process of consumer distinction, in the deliberate selection and rejection of consumption choices by 'us' and 'them' (Bourdieu, 1985). Consumption might be reframed not only as a form of expression, pleasure and choice,

but also of vilification, inequality and social exclusion (see for example, Casey, 2013). Understandings of 'critical consumption' reflected in the chapters in this collection suggest that the proliferation of global consumer and neo-liberal economies has far reaching consequences for the everyday lives of individuals and their ability to actively participate in social life.

In many ways, these aims draw from previous attempts to develop the dedicated study of gendered domestic consumption practices. Historically, sociological research has tended to overlook both the complexities and diversities inherent in intimate life and also the particular role of material cultural practices in providing sociological understandings of familial and household life. There have of course, been some notable exceptions to this and some innovative attempts to collate feminist accounts of domestic consumption practices. For example, Jackson and Moores's writing in the introduction to their 1995 collection of inter-disciplinary essays *The Politics of Domestic Consumption*, called for a dedicated study of the creative and active appropriation of domestic consumption (p. 1) which would simultaneously be attuned to the gendered, classed and ethnic cultures and structures of power and constraint underpinning domestic relations. Jackson and Moores describe this twofold approach to domestic consumption as a 'dialectic of creativity and constraint', which unpicks the interconnections between structure and agency. More recently, Casey and Martens' collection *Gender and Consumption*, published a decade after Jackson and Moores, argued for the need for gendered approaches to the study of consumption (2007).

The collection expanded on previous work by illuminating the commercialization of domestic space and also examining the everyday production and reproduction of socio-economic relations. It revealed consumption to be integral to the broader cultural practices interwoven into women's everyday, intimate lives. Here, this collection expands on these ideas some eight years later by moving on from discourses of market forces of consumption and instead, shifting its focus to incorporate an account of some of the effects that recent dramatic economic austerity measures have had on intimate consumer practices. Recently, researchers have questioned some of the consequences of the burgeoning inclusiveness of consumption as a concept, as well as the ideological effects of academic accounts in which more and more arenas of social life and action are analysed within a discourse of market shaped consumption (see e.g. Gabb, 2009; O'Hagan, 2014; Taylor, 2012; Reynolds, 2012; Edwards and Weller, Slater and Miller, 2007; Thompson, 2011; Williams, 2004).

Sociologists have increasingly explored the home as space for the display of goods which might signify value (Skeggs, 1997) yet relatively little has been made of ways in which emotions, relations and domestic intimacies, intersect with cultural and economic forms of exchange (Reay, 2008; Gillies, 2007). Drawing on earlier work unpicking the relationships between domestic life and consumption (e.g. Casey and Martens, 2007) and everyday spaces for the pursuit of intersections of class, gender and sexualities (e.g. Taylor, 2010), this collection provides a space for the dedicated study not only of at-home consumption, but also of other types of consumption which might connect to the domestic without actually taking place at home, a comprehensive study of which we argue necessitates an examination of the fluid and interconnected roles of emotions, feelings and in short the intimate practices of diverse forms of consumption.

Here, we seek to dwell on the relationships between feelings and things, between the emotional and the material, by presenting studies that engage with contemporary debates about, for example, meaningful material objects (Finch, 2007; Miller, 2008; Thrift, 1997; Taylor and Falconer, 2014) – or the lack thereof – and multiple constructions and constitutions of ‘the domestic’ (and when the ‘domestic’ is not owned or rented but still ‘held’ in, for example, accounts of young homeless people’s consumption, see Wilson, this collection). Chapters connect with and develop debates surrounding the emotional and material labour involved in producing and reproducing domestic, work and intimate spaces (Gregg, 2013), encouraging different ways of thinking about consumption patterns, including some of the perceived impacts on domestic life within the context of the ‘work-life’ balance.

The chapters demonstrate the particular pertinence of this especially for women in late modernity as they experience specific pressures to manage the work-life balance as part of a broader project of neo-liberal selfhood and subject making. Empirical chapters illustrate varied domestic inferences and the affective and symbolic materiality of a variety of domestic environments. New understandings of critical diversities are offered in presenting new and diverse accounts of the ways in which bodies and objects move in and out of domestic spaces. The focus is not always on adult consumers and residents. As chapters on spaces of home demonstrate, children and young people occupy and move within domestic spaces of consumption in very particular ways. The chapters also pinpoint the transgressive potential of intimate consumption and debates surrounding the delicate borders between diverse tastes and ‘disgust’ and the relationship between these debates

and wider contemporary issues to do with inclusion and exclusion, which is central to our understanding of critical consumption (Gorman-Murray, 2013). Within this collection, shifting geographies of intimate consumption are presented alongside broader genres of material culture and diverse methods including visual web-based narratives.

By placing emphasis on everyday life and mundane forms of leisure and consumption such as fashion, second-hand shopping, storing objects and appropriation of everyday spaces for the display of objects, the chapters propose an alternative to mainstream accounts of spectacular, public consumption (see also Casey, 2013). The chapters in this collection are written at a very particular point in history – one defined by dramatic economic uncertainties and against the backdrop of a post-welfare, austerity climate. As others have argued, consumption offers an avenue into exploring the impact that these wider social and political shifts might have as individuals live out their everyday lives within an increasingly intensified consumer economy. We hope to get closer to specific scene spaces, providing an analysis of intimate, sensual and affective encounters with the tangible materiality of place and space, including *things* within those spaces such as food drink, décor, furniture and so on (taste), along with *sensual and affective* articulations of light, dark, dirt, and *atmospheric* environment (smell) (see Taylor and Falconer, 2014). The chapters interrogate the various ways in which types of consumption might hold value and capital, and explore the potential risks underpinning ‘at home’ consumption (including the role of new digital technologies). They provide methodological insights into researching diverse intimacies of everyday life by looking at how the home facilitates pleasure, value and status. The collection offers new advances in terms of how different domesticities, enable, restrain and control consumption, impacting on the subjective and material wellbeing of families, residents, individual within – and beyond – the ‘domestic’. It examines geographies and spaces of consumption in international and local-global spheres, asking what might constitute forms of ‘critical consumption’ in and through ‘diverse economies’.

Chapters are from a diverse range of empirical and theoretical locations brought together initially as a joint venture between the British Sociological Association Families and Relationships and Leisure study groups, convened by the editors. Chapters variously offer historical reflection, critical examination of intersectionalities of class, gender and ethnicities and explore the social and intimate lives of objects. Chapters engage with contemporary debates surrounding austerity and thrift (Allen et al., 2013; Jensen, 2012; Taylor, 2012) by pointing to new ways

of exploring socio-spatial inequalities within the context of consumption and its relationship to value. Authors offer novel perspectives on consumption and studies of intimacy by focusing on studies of everyday routine and practice of consumption and particularly the taken-for-granted-ness of everyday life. They examine some of the everyday, intimate cultural implications of financial crisis, austerity and concerns around production and consumption, by demonstrating through a range of novel empirical case studies how consumption experiences connect with a variety of lived experiences of. The collection also draws on contemporary theoretical accounts of intersectionalities (e.g. Berger, M.T and Guidroz, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989; Taylor, 2012; Skeggs, 1997) by insisting on the importance of embedding consumption within broader identity formations of for example class, gender and race. To this end, the chapters in the collection are international in focus, drawing on research from the UK, US, Ecuador and East Asia and contribute to current understandings of a diverse range of consumer practices as they connect to everyday practices of e.g. mothering, caring and pleasure seeking.

The collection is divided into three key sections, each intended to further advance the concept of critical consumption. In Part I *Expanding the Field: Conceptualising Intimate Consumption* we present papers that demonstrate the historical context of intimate consumption practices and demonstrate recent advances in sociological accounts of intimate consumption. Colin Creighton's chapter *Collective Action and Domestic Practices: England in the 1830s and 1840s* for example, offers a historical perspective on domestic consumption and intimacies. Focusing on shifts in the nineteenth century to employment laws restricting working hours Creighton examines the impact of these changes on the development of the 'nuclear' family. Importantly, these legislative and philosophical shifts are framed in the paper as being part of a wider, often religious, political and moral concern for the sanctity of domestic and familial care and bonds. Interestingly, this perspective shifts from more conventional explorations of transformations to the workplace which have tended to focus on legislative changes as influenced by a growing empathy for the plight of the working classes. Emma-Jayne Abbots' chapter, *Buying the Ties that Bind: Consumption, Care and Intimate Investment Among Transnational Households in Highland Ecuador* offers novel empirical research into inter-generational mobility and its relationship to consumption. Focusing on households in a rural community of Jima in Highland Ecuador, Abbots explores the ways in which consumption reproduces inter-personal relationships and reshape family

life and enact affective relationships. Specifically, it examines how the wives of migrants invest in the long-term reproduction of their household and maintain intimate relations with their geographically distant husbands through their everyday material engagements with commodities. C. Laura Lovin's chapter offers an account of Zhu Tianwen's volume of short stories *Fin-de-Siècle Splendour*. Lovin considers the contemporary feminist contribution to consumerism and materialism that emerges within the volume and examines the 'sensorial-affective' processes of consumption.

Part II of the collection *'Sticky' and Shifting Sites of Intimate Consumption* considers how families facilitate, control, (re)configure and (re)produce spaces for the pursuit of consumption. The chapters in this section explore a range of domestic settings for consumption, including young people's bedrooms, family life in 'commercial homes', mother and daughter relationships and consumption in difficult family scenarios. Sian Lincoln's chapter *'My Bedroom is Me': Young People, Private Space, Consumption and the Family Home* presents original empirical research into young people, space and bedrooms. Exploring the bedroom as a significant youth cultural domain, Lincoln describes the 'layers' of regulation from both inside and outside the home that interrogate the boundaries of public and private space. The chapter demonstrates how a young person's bedroom can be shaped by a series of complex negotiations and intersections both with public and private domains, and how bedrooms operate as space for carving out and reproducing identities. Julie Seymour's chapter *The Transgressive Potential of Families in Commercial Homes* presents research into families who work in the hospitality industry, specifically in family-run hotels, pubs and boarding houses, collectively known as 'commercial homes'. Seymour focuses on the emotional labour provided by such family members, particularly children, as part of the economic imperative of the business. As such, there is considerable clarity about the intersection of emotions and economic forms of exchange although the production of such labour is best performed invisibly. Drawing on recent conceptual developments in family sociology, it considers the ways in which the host family is 'displayed' as an economic process and the curious mix of 'hypervisibility' and 'displayed reticence' which constitutes the labour of servicing other families' leisure in such establishments. The chapter highlights the role that host families play in facilitating the leisure and consumption of other families 'at play' and contributes to the interrogation of the diversity of domestic spaces of consumption by showing how these can include spaces of public consumption.

In *Belonging in Difficult Family Circumstances: Emotions, Intimacies and Consumption* Sarah Wilson draws on research findings exploring practices of consumption and belonging among looked after children. Wilson's chapter considers how material consumer goods are often used by young people as tools to provide a temporal escape from troubled thoughts or as a means of exploring difficult past experiences and associated current or past emotions, as well as troubling issues of identity and possibilities for the future. At the same time, the young people's access to such resources was often contingent, as a result of their limited financial and fragile relational resources. The chapter is situated in relation to wider literature on children and young people's 'ordinary' and 'conspicuous' practices of consumption including in less affluent circumstances such as Pugh (2009), Lareau (2011) and Buckingham (2011). Katherine Appleford's chapter '*You're Not Going out Dressed Like That!*' *Lessons in Fashion Consumption, Taste and Class* continues the theme of familial and inter-personal relationships in facilitating space for the pursuit of consumption. Appleford explores in her chapter the significance of the mother-daughter relationship in academic discourse on fashion consumption. She notes that the ways in which mothers shape their daughters' fashion tastes differs significantly with social class and the chapter focuses in particular on the various ways in which middle class and working class mothers influence their daughters fashion tastes.

The third and final part to the collection is entitled *The Intimate Social Life of Commodities*. Here we present chapters that address sociological research examining the relational qualities of commodities within domestic, intimate settings. Chapters address for example the appropriation of material objects in domestic settings and provide novel accounts of everyday objects in the enactment of intimacies and everyday life. In this section, Rachel Hurdley's chapter *Pretty Pants and Office Pants: Making Home, Identity and Belonging in a Workplace* draws on ethnographic research conducted on a British university campus in order to examine patterns of making home, identity and intimacy at work. Hurdley develops themes of homely/personal spaces and intimacies and considers the processual, contingent character of relations between people and things. Emma Waight's chapter explores the emotional contexts of second-hand consumption practices amongst mothers, and echoing earlier studies examining parenthood as dual site for celebration and anxiety (for example Martens, 2010), points to the classed and gendered context of second-hand consumption. Focusing on discourses of thrift, safety and 'nurture' at NCT nearly-new sales, Waight points to the risky construction of motherhood which is always

assessed against a wider duty of care. In *The Hidden Lives of Domestic Things: Accumulations in Cupboards, Lofts and Shelves* Sophie Woodward draws on previous research that has highlighted the ways in which relationships are enshrined and constituted through everyday practices (Morgan, 1996) by examining the enactment of everyday life, culture and relationships within unused and rarely used or 'dormant' objects'. The chapter considers the possibilities and potentials for extending this approach to wider genres of material culture that are in stored within the home to explore this in relation to Gregson's notion of 'accommodating' (2007) relationships to others.

In short, the chapters in this collection offer novel perspectives on consumption and studies of intimacy by focusing on studies of everyday routines and practices of consumption within family life and as part of the reproduction of inter-personal relationships. Chapters differently illuminate some of the intimate, everyday, cultural implications of for example, austerity measures, welfare, and related neo-liberal discourses of production and consumption by demonstrating through a variety of novel case studies how intimate, familial consumption patterns intersect with, reflect and sometimes reproduce structural inequalities and intersectionalities (see also Taylor, 2012; Skeggs, 1997). They demonstrate some of the ways in which families restrain and control consumption practices and how particular forms of consumption affect the wellbeing of families and other inter-personal relationships. Excitingly, authors offer new insights into the ways in which we can understand how the home facilitates – or indeed impedes – pleasure, value and status.

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Part I

Expanding the Field: Conceptualising Intimate Consumption

1

Collective Action and Domestic Practices: England in the 1830s and 1840s

Colin Creighton

In recent years our understanding of domestic practices and relations of intimacy have made enormous advances (Giddens, 1992; Jamieson, 1998; Gillies, 2003; Gabb, 2008; Morgan, 2011). However, our grasp of the broader social and economic processes within which intimate relations are constructed, and the interplay between the two, has not kept pace. In this chapter I argue, through an historical case study, that in exploring this interaction we need to pay more attention to social movements because of the important part they play in mediating between macro socio-economic change and the practices of individual families. To date, studies of family practices have paid little attention to the role of social movements (Staggenborg, 1998) while scholarship on social movements has, with a few notable exceptions, paid scant attention to movements directed towards family change (Della Porta and Diani, 2006; Snow et al., 2004).¹

Through this case study I seek to explore two major ways in which collective struggles influence the formation of domestic practices.² The first is by acting to change the structural conditions which shape domestic practices. The second is through the meaning-making processes (Snow and Benford, 1992) of articulating a persuasive alternative to existing practices and convincing relevant audiences that this cannot be realised through individual efforts but only through a modification of situational constraints.

Under examination are the decades of the 1830s and 1840s, when social conflict over the dramatic economic and social changes brought about by the industrial revolution reached a peak of intensity. Population increase, technological advances, the spread of factory production with

its associated discipline, large-scale migration into the overcrowded and insanitary manufacturing towns, the decline of many domestic industries and the abandonment of older legislative controls over economic activity had a profound impact upon people's lives, the nature and extent of which is still debated today (Berg, 1980, part 5; Brown, 1991; Hilton, 2006, chap. 9; Humphries, 2007). Moreover, the industrial revolution involved cultural as well as economic transformation (Gray, 1996, pp. 1–3) and was accompanied by a clash of contrasting philosophies and social ideals, with criticism of the direction and effects of economic change becoming more acute from the late 1820s (Perkin, 1969, pp. 218–339; Hilton, 2006, chaps. 5 and 7).

This provides the context for the emergence of the Ten Hours Movement (THM) for the 1830s and 1840s were the years in which industrial workers in the northern factory towns first started to grapple, collectively, with the issue of what kind of domestic practices they wanted to create, and how they could do so, in their new and harsh environment. The challenge was not only one of adjusting to new conditions; it was more profound than this, for workers were confronting what they saw as threats to the very possibility of meaningful family life. The combination of downward pressure on wages, high rates of unemployment, the insecurity associated with the fluctuations of the trade cycle, long (and in some trades lengthening) hours of work, and excessive reliance upon the labour of young children, together with grossly overcrowded housing conditions, all seemed to threaten the ability of the working-class family to reproduce itself, let alone enjoy emotionally satisfying family relationships. These problems gave rise to sustained collective action and ambitious political demands. In this period, workers in a wide range of trades and industries voiced dissatisfaction with the material and emotional pressures on the family. It was the textile towns of the north of England, however, that generated the most vocal protests and the most sustained campaign to ameliorate conditions.

The Ten Hours Movement, which provides the main focus of this chapter, struggled for reduced hours of work across two and a half decades, from 1830–1855, and compelled generally unwilling governments to make concession after concession until the tenhour day was finally conceded. This campaign marked an important historical turning-point in the formation of domestic practices among the working-class in England, for it constituted the first collective effort of modern times to confront the impact of the factory system and the unregulated market upon family life and to modify the balance between work and home by clawing back time from the rapacious demands of the workplace.