

Queuing as a Changing Shopper Experience: The Case of Grocery Shopping in Britain 1945-1975

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Queues are part of everyday routine and experienced by most shoppers, yet little attention has been given to providing historical accounts of queuing as a consumer task or as a shopper experience. This paper examines grocery shop queues and the changing experience of shoppers in historical perspective, specifically focusing upon the shift from counter service to self-service grocery formats in Britain from 1945-1975. The paper draws upon a wide range of material utilising evidence from oral histories and witness groups, which are supported by contemporary sources from Mass Observation, newspapers, shopper surveys, trade publications and reports. The conceptual framework developed in the paper explores the public and private dimensions of queues to consider the experiences and perceptions of shoppers during a period of rapid change in the retail grocery system. More generally the paper contributes to our understanding of how management innovations are connected to untraded public values.

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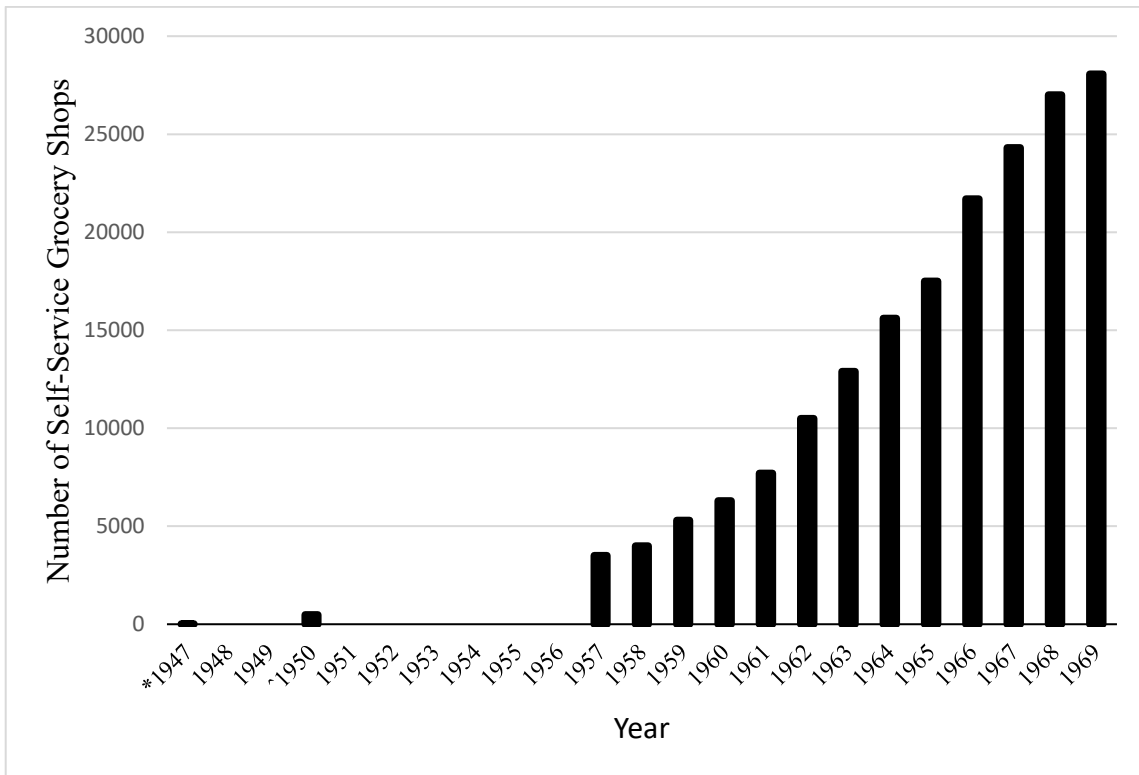
Introduction

This paper aims to present the first comprehensive account of shoppers' experiences of grocery shop queuing during the pioneering phase of self-service retail format development in Britain between 1945 and 1975.¹ The introduction of self-service methods during this period revolutionised grocery retailing in Britain, and consequently had a very significant impact on consumers.² The effects of self-service extended beyond household provisioning. Du Gay, for example, argues that the introduction of self-service involved new forms of personhood attendant upon consumers' new found freedoms to review and select products.³ The diffusion of self-service methods in grocery retailing could liberate consumers from counter-service, holding the potential to reduce time spent in queues and thus transform shoppers' expectations and perceptions of time related to the activity of shopping.

Perhaps because of their quotidian character, however, the historical significance of grocery shop queues and queuing has yet to be adequately explored, despite contemporary accounts that highlight the importance of eradicating queues.⁴ During its introduction to Britain in the 1940s, self-service retailing was presented in the popular press as a 'no queue' format.⁵ It was welcomed by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW), which found that 'customers were less irritable because they did not have to wait in queues'.⁶ Some retailers promoted the time-saving nature of the self-service approach to shoppers.⁷ However, later reports suggest that queuing was a routine experience in self-service formats and that queues continued to shape shopper experiences across all retail formats throughout the study period.⁸

One indication of the importance of understanding the experience of shoppers in self-service format shops is provided by the growing number of such outlets and the increasing share of the grocery trade for which they accounted (see Figure 1). By 1950, there were only around 500 self-service shops in Britain,⁹ yet by the second half of the 1950s new self-service shops, including conversions, were reported to be averaging 65-70 per month.¹⁰ By 1960 there were 6,300 shops operating self-service. The number of self-service shops was estimated to be 28,000, including 3,400 supermarkets, by 1969.¹¹ The share of grocery turnover accounted for by self-service shops increased from 15% in 1959¹² to 64% by 1969.¹³

Figure 1: Number of Self-Service Grocery Shops in Britain 1947-1969



Sources¹⁴

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we explore the academic literature in relation to queuing within shops. Whilst acknowledging the wide range of social science literature on queuing more generally, the review helps to focus the conceptual scope of this research on grocery shopping. Second, we introduce the methods used in this study and describe the key data sources. Third, shopper experiences and perceptions of queuing are explored in two fundamentally different grocery shop environments; namely counter-service and self-service. The final section provides a concluding discussion based upon our findings and identifies areas for future research.

Consumer Queues and Retail Distribution

Queues and queuing are part of everyday routines and experienced by most consumers at some point in their daily lives. By definition a queue is a means by which access to a service is ordered in time and space. Within this broad definition, consumer experiences of queues are amenable to wide ranging disciplinary interpretations.¹⁵ In relation to marketing and consumer behaviour research, for example, Pàmies et al. observe that there has been over ‘three decades’ of research on aspects of consumers’ waiting to obtain services, including queuing at retail checkouts.¹⁶ However, whilst there has been a range of different disciplinary perspectives on queues and queuing, we are not aware of any detailed historical research that examines changes in grocery shop queues. Moran, one of the few historians to explore shoppers’ queuing for groceries, explains that queuing is part of ‘the unremarkable and unremarked upon aspects of our lives’.¹⁷ It is what Percec terms the ‘infra-ordinary’, those mundane aspects of life that people take very much for granted.¹⁸ The aim in the remainder of this section is twofold: first to

present the historical research on grocery shop queues in the study period; second to introduce perspectives from the wider social science literature on queues to provide a conceptual framework to explore the data that is subsequently presented.

The majority of research on British grocery shop queues in the period 1945-1975 relates to the period of austerity from 1945 into the mid-1950s, when shortages created queues that became politicised as a sign and symbol of a variety of social problems. The politicisation of the queue in this period is perhaps epitomised by the interventions of Winston Churchill, who interpreted shopper queues ‘as the essence of Socialism and the restrictive system’,¹⁹ coining the pejorative term ‘Queuetopia’ to describe conditions in early post-war Britain under Labour rule.²⁰ Exploring grass-roots organising, Hinton reveals how dissatisfaction with queues led to the formation of the British Housewives’ League in 1945.²¹ Primary diary and observation sources, reported in Kynaston²² and Garfield,²³ also reveal widespread and intense dissatisfaction with queues in the 1940s. Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues that the grocery shop queues of the 1940s contributed to a deepening consumer consciousness, as shoppers’ unequal access to food revealed the presence of wider social inequalities.²⁴ The burden of grocery shopping mostly fell upon women, with women in paid employment typically experiencing less time to queue relative to those not in paid employment.²⁵ Citing contemporary surveys, Zweiniger-Bargielowska sums up the 1940s shopper experience:

According to a Gallop poll of April 1947, 46 per cent had queued during the previous week, primarily for food. Of the queuers, most had spent between one and two and a half hours queuing, with some spending over three hours, and only one in five queuing for less than one hour.²⁶

The evidence, framed within a wider discussion of austerity in Britain, suggests that there were variable experiences in counter-service shops, but beyond this there is little evidence to suggest how the practice of queuing was perceived by shoppers; apart from being a source of intense irritation.²⁷

It was into this context that self-service shops were adopted for the first time, with co-operative societies among the early adopters. Co-operative Wholesale Society data from 1949 suggested that self-service offered the prospect of reduced wage costs relative to sales at a time of rising labour costs.²⁸ Moreover, it could reduce the problems of queuing faced by the shoppers in some societies' shops.²⁹ There is very little literature that explores what queues and queuing was like within self-service formats.

Nonetheless, it is clear, from what literature there is, that shoppers' reactions revealed the media portrayal of self-service as a 'no queue' format to be very much an overstatement. Commenting on self-service in co-operative shops, for example, Black argues that '[f]or all the time it gave shoppers, they complained of checkout queues (complicated in the Co-op by the dividend issue)'.³⁰

Retail formats were changing, and so were shoppers. Moran argues that consumer reactions to self-service formats were conditioned by wider social changes.³¹ Cary Cooper is cited by Moran as representative of scholars who argue that the culture of queuing changed in post-war Britain, as people became more time-poor and consequently became 'more like the Americans – more intolerant, more impatient'.³² However, Moran argues that in 'the absence of longitudinal studies this claim is largely unverifiable'.³³ Whilst this paper does not seek to settle debates about any changes in the psychology of the nation's consumers, it does demonstrate the effects of retail innovation

on shopper experiences and draws conclusions about how grocery shoppers perceived the impact of these change within the broader context of their lives. More widely, as the study period progressed so the domestic infrastructure and logistics connected to grocery shopping altered; for example, the increasing household penetration of refrigerators and freezers, combined with rising car ownership, meant that some shoppers could buy greater quantities of goods on a shopping trip, thereby potentially lengthening the time each shopper took to checkout.³⁴

Drawing upon theoretically informed research from across the social sciences, it is possible to develop the limited historical research on post-war British grocery shop queues in two directions. First, research has explored the micro social organisation of queues as cultures, which focuses attention on the role of public rules and authority in sustaining the temporal order that characterises queues.³⁵ According to Gray, positions in queues are perceived to carry proprietary rights, given that time can be considered as a commodity.³⁶ Queues in western cultures are typically negotiated upon the assumption of first come, first served (hereafter FCFS) or ‘sequential priority’ and Gray argues that this norm ‘is an expression of a more general value structure historically associated with Western society’.³⁷

The literature that views queues through the lens of proprietary rights help us to conceive of situations in which queue positions can be traded or gifted. For example, Yang et. al. argue that queuers may justifiably trade positions in the queue between themselves without violating the broader FCFS principle; i.e. those trading places do not disadvantage others in the queue.³⁸ Whilst Yang et. al. suggest benefits of establishing queue auctions, they conclude that the effects of speculative ‘squatters’ and

‘placeholders’ requires further research.³⁹ Sandel argues on political and moral grounds that the commercialisation of the FCFS principle, associated with the creation of markets in public goods, fundamentally changes the character of those goods and degrades them.⁴⁰ In commercial settings, service providers and queuers may practice a range of anti-social (e.g. queue jumping) and pro-social behaviours (e.g. place keeping or the advancement of those with a lesser capacity to queue).⁴¹ As Gray argues, the ‘proprietary subtext of the waiting line is counterbalanced by mutuality and reciprocity’.⁴² In other words, in practice individual rights are negotiated and interpreted within the scope of public social norms.

A second body of literature is identified with alternative notions of property in the queue, in which the ‘public wait is to a degree privatized’.⁴³ Here queues and queuing are located at the intersection of public norms of time in relation to property (our first literature), with individual consumer experiences of, and behaviours within, the queue⁴⁴ and the service design decisions made by retailers. More specifically, research has explored the relationships that exist between waiting in a queue and customers’ evaluations of service quality, with the *perceived* length of a wait shown to be strongly related to negative affect among customers, which in turn has a negative impact on their evaluation of service quality.⁴⁵ In contrast to this perspective, alternative research shows that there is a possible positive side to queuing, with the presence of others behind them in the queue signalling to the consumer that the queuing goal - attaining the product or service – is more valuable.⁴⁶ Clearly, whilst retail shop managers need to ensure appropriate operational efficiency to control actual queuing times, achieving consumer

satisfaction at checkouts is also dependent upon the management of shoppers' perceptions of the queue and of queuing.

Retailers' decisions on matters of service design have become more salient since public markets were enclosed within the private premises of markets and shops. Altering ambient elements (for example, using lighting and music), social elements (for example, controlling customer to customer interactions), as well as physical design elements (for example, through altered spatial layout) may influence shoppers' perceptions of the queue, and of the time spent queuing and their affective response to this.⁴⁷ The retailer's organisational capacity, and notably its ability to deploy resources, helps to explain variations in management practice in this regard, but such design decisions are not unfettered of course (for example, below we highlight the relevance of shop opening hours regulation to matters of queues and queuing).⁴⁸

Methods and Sources

The data collection and analysis underpinning this paper revolves around three main types of source. The first source is a collection of oral histories and witness groups that were undertaken by the authors to support this research.⁴⁹ The literature provides discussion on the potential and the challenges of using oral history and the narratives produced by such methods.⁵⁰ In analogous work, for example, Davies and Elliott have used oral histories to investigate shopper behaviour in terms of retail change and brand consciousness.⁵¹ Similar to Davies and Elliott, we utilised extended life story interviews among our approaches, aided by physical records of the respondents' experiences in the form of diaries, old shopping lists and photographs.⁵² Throughout the research we used

all available resources and cross referenced with memorable events and biographical data to help us to situate shoppers' recollections as accurately as possible.

In total 78 oral history interviews and 11 witness groups were conducted, involving 122 interview respondents. Female respondents outnumbered male respondents 96:26. The oral histories, on average 90 minutes in duration, covered a wide range of topics concerned with grocery shopping over a 30 year period (1945-1975) and especially shoppers' reactions to self-service grocery retailing and the supermarket. In the course of these discussions many respondents recounted their experiences of shopping practices, including queuing. Thematic coding was conducted on the transcripts using NVivo v.10, using text search queries and close reading of the transcripts. The data was coded under the principal theme of 'Queues and Waiting'. This resulted in 177 coding references, which were drawn from 7 witness groups and 61 interviews, comprising 91 of the 122 participants.

The second source used is Mass Observation (MO) materials from reports produced on food shopping and on queuing from 1941 and 1948 respectively, and an additional report concerned with research on shopping from 1963.⁵³ Whilst the Mass Observation Archive is undoubtedly a rich source of material for the study of everyday life, contemporaries criticised MO in its first phase for openly valuing subjectivity, which was regarded as a source of bias.⁵⁴ These critiques have persisted, with Pickering and Chaney criticising Mass Observation's 'indiscriminate interest in all and sundry, its lack of evaluative criteria and conceptual equipment'.⁵⁵ Moreover, Gurney has revealed how MO reflects middle-class assumptions about working class social mores and values.⁵⁶ Notwithstanding the critique that MO diaries are simply used as illustrations by

researchers who have reached conclusions on the basis of other sources, Hinton argues that the dairies provide invaluable source material to explore the construction of the self.⁵⁷ The perspective adopted here with regard to utilising the MO archive is that it provides a rich ethnographic source, but one that must be supported with additional data.

The third and final set of sources relates to a range of contemporary published trade journals and reports, including shopper surveys, supported by relevant articles on shopper queues and queuing from various national and regional newspaper titles. The trade journals typically focus on the impact of new technologies on efficiency in shop retailing and shopper queues. As with the case of articles from the newspaper titles, we are careful to observe that the trade journals and reports are themselves not neutral and hence require careful interpretation.⁵⁸ Across these sources we observe that queuing was frequently used as a surrogate measure of shopper satisfaction with self-service shops, which to some extent makes this quotidian phenomenon visible.

Counter-Service Queues 1945-1975

Counter-service underpinned almost all grocery shop formats in Britain in 1945. Purchases were requested of shopkeepers or shop assistants by shoppers, either verbally or using a written list. The goods on display behind the counter or out of view in a storeroom would be selected by the shop assistant and, if necessary, measured into the correct quantity and wrapped before being passed over the counter to the waiting shopper. Alternatively, many shops would deliver goods to customers and some would take orders by telephone. Payment would typically be by cash or otherwise quite frequently on an account that was settled on a weekly or monthly basis. Queues in shops were a common experience for grocery shoppers, being most pronounced during the

period under food rationing (1939-1954) due to a combination of factors: the administration of the rationing system; food shortages; and consumer surges associated with pent up demand for de-rationed goods.⁵⁹ The Mass Observation data also reveals that during the period of food rationing joining queues could be a 'reflex action of the passer-by', because queues indicated the availability of goods.⁶⁰ Throughout our time period, queues could be compounded by daily lunch hour closures, statutory weekly half-day closures from one o'clock, and additional restrictions on late night opening.⁶¹ The type of shop also had an effect on shopper queues. In department store food halls and larger shops like those being opened by some grocery multiples, shoppers could be required to visit several counters to acquire different items, thus potentially requiring them to queue several times within one shop. However, this was not always the case, as Heather (OH/809/F/1944), a working class housewife,⁶² recalled of shopping in a multiple in Southfields, London:

if you were really fortunate ... the woman behind the counter would say, say you were buying a tin of peas at one counter and you wanted some cheese, she'd call over for- you know "Quarter of Cheddar for a Mrs Smith", you know and then it would be passed round so it would save you queuing up again.

Shoppers using smaller, often independent local grocers in contrast typically needed to shop around to make up their orders and could encounter queues in each shop that they visited.

For many housewives queuing was perceived in broadly negative terms, as described by one 30 year old female responding to a Mass Observation survey about

queuing in 1948: 'Queuing is a necessary evil, and the only fair method to ensure equal distribution of scarce commodities. At its [most] nauseating in butchers' shops; at its most depressing in fish shops'.⁶³ Male respondents to the Mass Observation survey typically expressed a desire to avoid queues. One 25 year old male student stated 'I would not queue for a hundred pound notes'; whilst another claimed, 'I loathe queuing and will go to a great deal of inconvenience to avoid it' (salesman, aged 44).⁶⁴

However, not all shopper experiences were negative. Some participants and observers of queues described them as part of a social experience. Tim (OH/TC/M/--) whose father ran a counter-service shop, and later became a shopkeeper himself, recalled a typical counter-service shop during the late 1940s: 'There was a little bit of a social gathering, you know, they [i.e. the shoppers] would come in and happily natter with their neighbours while they were waiting to be served.' This was a familiar experience recounted by many of the respondents in our oral history data collection. Cynthia (OH/18/F/1927), a resident in London during the Second World War, recalled that 'you got all your news in the queue. You heard about somebody's son that was missing or somebody that was getting married [...] I just loved the queues because I got all the local scandal!' Thus, whilst grocery shopping was a type of work it also offered the possibility of a social experience centring around the queue.

The sociability of the queue, however, depended to a large extent upon the familiarity of the shoppers with each other. Recalling shopping in Cardiff city centre, Wendy (OH/90/F/1929) remembered 'short queues' that were simply 'a way of life' and continued: 'We weren't in Cardiff very long, I didn't get to know that many people and I didn't tend to talk to strangers.' Similarly, Joan (OH/14/F/1938) rarely met neighbours

to talk to in shops, given that her selection of city centre shops was dictated by work patterns varying bus routes and just eighteen months living in Cardiff. For Wendy and Joan the efficiency of shopping was more important than the potential for sociability provided by the queue in their description of shopping in earlier periods. Likewise, Doris (OH/573/F/1935) experienced queues in South London during the early 1950s. She remembered grocery shopping with her mother:

You had to queue up then and then you always met somebody in the queue and there was always somebody behind the counter who wanted to know how 'Aunt Mable' was getting on and things like that. A social occasion. [...] I found it frustrating. I mean my mother enjoyed it [...]

She liked all of that, but because I was younger and I suppose I wanted things to be on the move really. So yes, I found it frustrating.

Throughout the study period, it was not uncommon for children to shop on behalf of households and the counter-service queue was a source of both challenge and opportunity for young shoppers. For example, Heather (QR/244/F/1946), who shopped in a village in Hampshire in the 1950s, recalled that as a 'child it was intimidating buying meat as...you would be passed over in the queue'. In contrast, Lily, (OH/16/F/1934) who took up shopping duties for the household following the onset of her mother's chronic illness in 1945, valued the moral order of the queue. She recalled that 'queuing was the only way to be fair, if you hadn't had queues a little girl like me would have been pushed to the side'. Other young shoppers used the queue to their own advantage. Raymond (OH/RS/M/1933), a resident of Manchester, calculated the total of his shopping order in the queue, because 'if you weren't sharp then you got done'. The

time spent in the queue to plan for and calculate expenditure was perhaps particularly important for less experienced shoppers and those who were accountable to others on returning home from the shop.

Having children accompany parents on the shopping trip generated additional perspectives on queues and queuing. When asked what she didn't like about counter-service shopping in Radlett (Hertfordshire) during the 1960s, Peggy (OH/581/F/1934), a lower middle class housewife answered: 'If you had to queue at individual counters and you were a bit rushed and the children were fractious'. Yet accompanying children could also be used to speed the counter-service shopping experience. As Heather (OH/809/F/1944) explained of her memories of shopping in outlets with multiple counters, 'people used to put their kids in the other queue to save your place'.

The oral history data suggested that social class could be an influencing factor in the counter-service shopping experience more generally, as a result of shop keepers' differential treatment of customers. For example, it was perceived by some contributors that certain shop keepers would reserve more expensive and scarce goods under the counter for their most valuable customers. Interestingly, we find relatively little mention of social class being a factor in shoppers' experiences of counter-service queues and queuing. However, one telling case is provided by Margaret (OH/104/F/1932). The daughter of a working class father who worked as a joiner, Margaret had been sensitised to differences in social class when attending a grammar school on a scholarship. Differences in social class were evident to her, both culturally and economically. By 1955 Margaret was working as a radiographer which she considers 'was a bit of a notch up from the usual sort of jobs', and by 1957 she was managing a hospital department.

Living on a new build housing estate in Cheadle Hulme (an urban district to the south of Manchester), she noted of the clientele of her local shop that lived in a group of older houses:

[they] were the sort of people who didn't know about mortgages or they had no concept of what it was like, and they didn't like, work, and never had since the day they were married and you know, nice enough people but they weren't street wise like we were.

She recalled the attitude of counter assistants she encountered in shops and the effect this had upon her queuing experience:

you had to be very careful not to let yourself be elbowed aside when you were waiting in a queue, while they stood and talked ad nauseam with the people from the big houses. "Oh yes and what happened to your son?" and then you'd be standing there waiting to buy whatever you were there to buy, because that was the way it was done.

It is evident that the grocery queue was an arena in which virtues of discipline, patience, self-respect and tenacity might need to be exercised, particularly in contexts where service encounters conformed to the time budgets of wealthier patrons (e.g. the time afforded by shop keepers to conversations with more affluent shoppers). Also, in the case of the 'privatized queue', queue management extends beyond those in the line to those interacting with it, including shop staff.

Incidents of counter-service queue jumping were reported in contemporary sources. These reported incidents were frequently associated with the period of austerity

in the early post-war years and related to the heightened physical and psychological demands placed upon shoppers by queues at this time. For example, the *Daily Mail* reported that a fight broke out in Leeds between housewives who had been queuing for two to three hours during shortages following the unexpected announcement of VJ Day.⁶⁵ In 1948, Mass Observation diarist Edie Rutherford, a 46 year old housewife from Sheffield, recorded an incident of queue jumping at a tripe shop when ‘some half-dozen women and one man’ jumped an existing queue.⁶⁶ The inclusion of this incident in her diary perhaps indicates that when a group of shoppers contravened the FCFS principle it was more difficult for other shoppers to contest. Rutherford also records the practice of holding places in the queue for shoppers, which was another cause of frustration to her:

That tripe shop is the most unreliable ever. Women keep dodging out to ‘just go to pikelet shop’, run over t’ fish shop, just fetch us eggs and so on, so that when one joins it, it may seem twenty strong, but when all the missing women return there are thirty ahead of me.⁶⁷

The diary reveals that whilst blatant acts of queue jumping were usually contested, other queuing practices like holding places in the queue for others, were regarded as generally legitimate.

Pregnant women were entitled to supplementary rations and were sometimes promoted to the front of the queue in grocery shops. Longmate comments that there was ‘no legal obligation to give a pregnant woman priority, but the convention rapidly became accepted’.⁶⁸ One oral history interviewee, Margaret (OH/289/F/1919), recalled her experience of queuing in Earls Court, London in 1946-1947: ‘when you were pregnant you had a queue priority...so that was lovely. I was pretty well always

pregnant when I was there so I always got to the front of the queue, it was great!’⁶⁹

However, legitimate promotion up the queue such as this could potentially be a source of embarrassment for the recipient as it brought attention to the individual’s personal circumstances. Nor did it meet with universal approval. In the Mass Observation data, for example, diarist Edie Rutherford described the practice of giving pregnant women priority as ‘nonsense’ because it was the ‘decrepit sixty-year old women with dropped wombs and fallen arches who should not stand around in queues’.⁷⁰ One ‘Scientist and housewife - 26’, also commented that ‘I have queue priority marking in my ration book, but I have never used it, and have never seen anyone else do so.’⁷¹ The data suggests that there was considerable variability in how exceptions to the FCFS principle were negotiated in practice and indicates the importance of situational factors in the conduct of this routine task .

Some shoppers who used counter-service shops throughout the study period, either exclusively or to a greater or lesser extent in combination with self-service shops including supermarkets, continued to report on the sociability of the counter-service format. Elaine (OH/77/F/1951), clerk (and married to a clerk), recalled her positive experiences of using a counter-service grocer in Stoke-on-Trent to top up her shopping in the early 1970s:

if you were waiting you would chat to the other people in- who were waiting and then again, you’d chat to the people over the counter; but, yes, I mean once or twice you did used to have to wait because people did like to chat and they would do so even, you know, even at the expense of holding other people up and I suppose in one sense that was a

disadvantage of that type of shopping but in a way it was- it was a nice- it was nice that people felt that they could do that and I don't think people used to get very irate about it really.

In contrast to these positive memories, however, there is further evidence that some counter-service shoppers were becoming increasingly impatient with the queues that could form. As one MO respondent described in 1967:

Also at Fenwick's [a department store]; they have a good delicatessen department but you always have to queue at the counters. I stood last week while the girls leisurely served and the queue increased. Then two girls took time out to start arranging things on the trays. Surely with a line of people on both sides of the counter they could leave their rearranging till [sic] the counter was not so busy.⁷²

To summarise, shopper perceptions and experiences of counter-service shops were mixed throughout the period. There was widespread dissatisfaction with queues among those looking for a more efficient, faster shopping experience and for those seeking a less conspicuous service. Yet for others, queues afforded certain opportunities for social contact and the practice of ethical behaviours that were valued by some shoppers. Queue experiences were shaped by a range of factors, including the type of counter-service format, the time of day and the location of shop and, perhaps most significantly, the time period. Counter-service queues were reported to be longer and more frustrating under the system of food rationing that was in place up to 1954. Shoppers' experiences and perceptions of counter-service were shaped by their age, social and economic status and the type of relationship they had with the shop. For

example, as we have seen, women in paid employment often had significantly different time-budgets to housewives outside of paid employment, with implications for their perceptions and experiences of queues and queuing.

The impact of self-service on shopper queues 1945-1975

Some retailers, like many of their customers, were frustrated over the problems of queues in grocery shops. The introduction of self-service during the 1940s and early 1950s was directed in part by the need to create efficiency savings, and offered the potential to lessen the queues associated with the austerity of early post-war Britain.⁷³ The trade press reported shoppers' attitudes towards queuing in early examples of self-service shops in Britain. *The Grocer* was clear that housewives preferred self-service because 'it worked quicker doing away with queues'.⁷⁴ Retailers claimed that on average 100 shoppers per hour could be moved through the checkouts in self-service conditions.⁷⁵ According to one regional co-operative society, whilst with 'the older sales method a person might spend an hour in a crowded store waiting to purchase a few articles, she could come into the self-service shop, help herself to the goods required, pass through the pay box and be out in the street in a matter of seconds'.⁷⁶ In the British Market Research Bureau survey of 1950 some 87% of the 200 people interviewed thought self-service was quicker; whilst 75% claimed they had not experienced any excessive delays at the checkout.⁷⁷ Those that claimed they were held-up in queues at checkouts were reported on average to be waiting only up to five minutes. Moran explains that following the end of food rationing in 1954 the issue of shopper queuing largely 'slipped off the political agenda'.⁷⁸ Whilst we agree with Moran, the rise of self-

service grocery shops also made some contribution to this, albeit it has been in danger of being over-stated as we now illustrate.

Self-service shops were claimed to have effectively solved the queuing problem at a time when recruiting retail shop assistants was proving more difficult due to labour shortages and rising wage costs.⁷⁹ However, contemporary sources point out that at times of peak demand, self-service shops generated significant queues. *First*, the opening of self-service shops could be a novelty in itself, which created queues as curious shoppers were keen to experience the approach in differing retail formats, often encouraged by retailers' promotional activities. For example, Burton's in Barnstaple was reported to be the first supermarket to open in North Devon in 1961, with an opening promotion of distributing one hundred free roasting chickens to shoppers.⁸⁰ The opening, it was claimed, attracted a queue of 400 people, which required police supervision as queues to enter the supermarket blocked road traffic and people were accused of jumping the queue.

Second, self-service shop queues usually varied throughout the week. In 1959, an article in *The Times* reported that a group of supermarkets were reported to take 10 per cent of their weekly profit between 6pm and 8pm on Friday evenings.⁸¹ It was noted that 'these evenings are more likely to produce queues at the check-out positions', but a defence of the supermarket format was offered on the basis that it 'is a queue in one store as opposed to queues in four or five shops.' In 1963, a reader wrote to *The Financial Times* to report that Friday evenings and Saturday mornings were peak times in supermarkets due to the presence of weekly wage-earners and noted that '[m]illions of hours are wasted every week by women of this nation standing in queues in shops

waiting to buy this or that'.⁸² The letter pointed out that the time saved in supermarkets for the shopper could be lost if goods were out of stock, as was most likely on Saturday afternoons up until the next restocking point, typically on Thursdays.⁸³ The implication was that unless self-service shops were well managed, shoppers would again be required to queue in a number of shops to make up their order.

Third, many self-service shops and supermarkets introduced a potential further delay at checkout by issuing trading stamps.⁸⁴ Grant Thompson wrote to *The Times*, based on his experience as a checkout assistant in the United States:

the extra amount of time required to hand out the stamps (calculated by one supermarket to be equal to the time required to count out the change) means either that queues will be much longer, or that extra check-out positions will have to be opened, sending costs up again.⁸⁵

By May 1963, it was estimated that 18,500 food shops were issuing stamps in Britain.⁸⁶ Some of the larger supermarket chains were soon to follow this trend, with Tesco and Fine Fare adopting stamps in November 1963.⁸⁷

Fourth, inefficient shop design, combined with high levels of demand, meant that queues could disrupt shoppers' access to both the aisles and shelves. One consultant described the space between 'check-outs and the floor sales area' as 'a constant jam of customers with trollies, trucks, baskets etcetera, the whole area can be absolute chaos'.⁸⁸ This was a particular issue that emerged in the oral histories and one witness group in particular. For example, Anne (WG/0708/F/1938) describing her experiences in a shop in Wigan recalled that 'sometimes you couldn't get around that shop could you? It was so packed'. In the same witness group Ceila (WG/070807/F/1951) corroborated:

‘you couldn't move in the alleyway [i.e. aisles], so when the queues started building up we really did get annoyed’.

Moreover, for some shoppers queuing at the self-service shop or supermarket checkout represented a more impersonal experience than that in the counter-service environment. Elaine (OH/77/F/1951) who enjoyed the counter-service shop experience, described her self-service shop experience thus:

rarely did you engage in a real conversation with anyone. So you would just wait there and sort of, daydream or your eyes would be going around the shop or whatever. Occasionally, I would exchange a few words with the girl on the till but very rarely with anybody in the queue.

Dissatisfaction among some shoppers with the more impersonal aspect of self-service shopping led contemporary analysts to predict a more personalized future for self-service shops and supermarkets.⁸⁹ Such ideas were highlighted in the popular press with *The Times* pointing out that:

For many people shopping remains a social experience, with people – assistants – an essential part of it. Sadly, for some, it provides the only escape from loneliness.

Probably the ideal envisaged by a few, of self-service softened by the addition of some personal attention when this is required, will eventually prove most efficient overall, combining back-stage economy with the attraction of more customers.⁹⁰

As with counter-service shops, experiences in self-service shops were shaped by a variety of personal and environmental factors and were far from uniform. Whilst new,

larger supermarkets in particular were at risk of generating feelings of isolation among some shoppers, in other self-service shops an element of social experience centring on the queue could persist. For example, one of the oral history respondents, Mary (OH/62/F/1945), who patronised a self-service shop called Cee Jay in Blackheath, West-Midlands, recalled it had a single checkout and generated significant queues. When asked what she would do in the queue, Mary replied: 'Mostly, people chatted to me, because when you've got children people tend to. We tend to chat, we knew quite a lot of people as well who lived in and around the same area.' Michael (OH/128/M/1944) who worked as a clerical officer for the London County Council in the mid-1960s also observed the sociability of the self-service queue. Shopping during his lunch hours in a Tesco supermarket, queuing was not a social occasion for Michael. However he observed that for others: 'It was a regular talking shop. People seemed to know each other'.

The new self-service shopping experience thus could be far from devoid of the necessity of queuing, albeit the queues took on a somewhat different form, being typically associated with the check-*out* rather than the counter-service check-*in*. Cochoy, for example, demonstrates how self-service demanded the spatial reconfiguration of the payment system and the invention of the checkout queue.⁹¹ The transition from counter-service to self-service shifted consumer attention, and also the emotional experience of queuing, from the question of how to effectively get into the shop, to the question of how to effectively exit the shop.

That queues continued to be seen as a problem in the minds of many shoppers and retailers is indicated by continued attempts to create a more efficient self-service

experience. In 1961, for example, the innovations promoted to delegates at the Automatic Vending Exhibition included vending machines designed for installation in shop windows and to serve ‘as a supplement to the supermarket, so that the housewife who resents the necessity of standing in a queue to purchase only a loaf of bread and a tin of baked beans can obtain her goods without entering the shop’.⁹² Whilst such innovations were promoted to combat shopper frustrations with queuing for subsidiary grocery purchases, the available data suggest that shopper irritation with self-service queues would reach new levels and demand a more fundamental search for solutions from retailers.

Comparing survey data on housewives’ perceptions of supermarket shopping gathered in 1961 and 1970, the authors of the report *Shopping in the Seventies* concluded that whilst ‘shoppers have come to grips with supermarkets’ criticism of ‘the physical discomforts, namely shoving and pushing and queuing are increasing, particularly rapidly.’⁹³ Whilst self-service had hitherto offered the prospect of a faster and more time efficient experience of shopping in comparison to counter-service shops, the impact of queuing was being resurrected as a central element in narratives of the grocery shopping experience.

By the mid-1960s the national press was beginning to question the quality of the shopping experience in the growing number of supermarkets. It was reported that the Consumer Council had informed the Supermarket Association that the most common criticism of supermarkets was the growing length of queues at the checkouts.⁹⁴ *The Times* reported that the housewife was seeing the supermarkets ‘at their true worth,

offering confusion and poor service'.⁹⁵ In 1967, David Morell, Tesco Merchandising Director, told delegates at a self-service forum that:

housewives avoided supermarkets because of “too many irritations” [...].

Most irritating of all were the checkouts where, he said, customers

sometimes queued for long periods to pay for their goods.⁹⁶

In 1972, *The Grocer* cited research undertaken by the Opinions Research Centre that reported an average checkout time of 20 minutes in UK supermarkets.⁹⁷ Moreover the research suggested that over ‘56% of women using self-service stores and supermarkets say that what they dislike most when shopping in these stores, is the long queues at the checkout.’⁹⁸ Survey data from contemporary market research studies reported that the need to queue to get out of the supermarket was identified as a problem by housewives across the social classes.⁹⁹

The oral history data offers evidence from shoppers that provides valuable context to these perspectives. For example, Sheila (OH/698/F/1929) a housewife and former personal assistant, remembered Sainsbury’s in Guildford, Surrey, during the late 1960s, at which time it was ‘the main [grocery] shop in Guildford and you’d queue up for a long time to get out . . . it wasn’t so bad picking up your stuff, it was getting out of it.’ She recalled, ‘I didn’t like the queue of checking out [. . .] you could wait for ages to get out and you’d queue up down the aisles while people were trying to look for what they wanted, it was dreadful’. Similarly, Jeanette (OH/674/F/1940) described her experience of using a Safeway supermarket in Southeast London at peak times during the 1970s:

Well, it would generally be on Friday evening or a Saturday which is- would be busy times so I think from memory, the one in Sydenham probably had six checkouts, it wasn't a huge store [. . .] and they would tend to be all manned but there would *always* be a queue.

In 1968, *The Times* stated that: 'As every busy woman knows, the greatest deterrent to weekend shopping in the supermarket emporia is that the time saved in serving oneself is lost 16 times over in the slow moving shuffle to meet the cashier'.¹⁰⁰ The oral history data reveals that shoppers were making these calculations in practice. For example, Alan (OH/294/M/1946) was from a middle-class family and shopped in supermarkets for the first time with his mother on Saturday mornings during the 1960s. He recalled that the:

tills took for ever, because the girls punched each price in and so it just took forever. So a queue at a supermarket till was far worse than any queue I experienced at a shop before supermarkets.

However, Alan was also keen to stress that the process of selecting your goods was quicker in self-service shops:

Shopping, getting it off the shelf was fast and the choice was fast, and you were in control. That was much nicer. But when you got up to the till, of course it was slow [...]

Rosemary (OH/458/F/1943), a control room operator from Dudley, claimed that the 'greatest thing is supermarkets save an awful lot of time, because you can collect everything and go to the till [. . .] all in one go'. She contrasted this with counter-service shops in which one could queue for half an hour, only to be

informed by the shop assistant ““I am sorry we have just sold the last one””. In other words, whilst self-service and supermarket checkout queues could be slow and frustrating, shoppers nevertheless could still view the overall shopping experience as faster and more reliable than the counter-service alternative. In counter-service shopping the risk of not achieving the intended goal of the shopping trip was potentially greater at the point of queuing, compared to the situation in self-service shopping.¹⁰¹ In the latter, where the shopper had the sought item(s) in her/his basket or trolley, the risk of not securing the desired items was likely to be lesser, although the need to queue to check-out may still have lay ahead on the shopping trip.

In response to customer dissatisfaction with queuing times and the need to remain competitive, increasingly against one another rather than against counter-service rivals, supermarkets began to invest in new techniques to ease the problem of checkout queues. Shorter queues were perceived to encourage shoppers into a shop, and once there to spend more of their overall shopping time looking at, and retailers hoped, selecting from the goods on display.¹⁰² Rowley, from the National Cash Register Company, explained: ‘The supermarket operator has been concerned about his checkout queues and is closely examining the modern techniques which are being developed to solve a pressing problem’.¹⁰³

Some interventions involved an attempt to modify customer perceptions. For example, a representative of Osram (G.E.C.) noted that ‘[s]upermarkets are an exception to the general rule that bare fluorescent tubes are not the best means of lighting for selling’, but suggested that ‘lighting of a more restful nature could be used here to relax

the impatient customer' at the checkout.¹⁰⁴ Checkout advertising and merchandising were also considered useful in distracting waiting shoppers, but with the risk that cashier operators would be less visible, with attendant risks of malpractice by them.¹⁰⁵ Other initiatives were focused on demand management, flattening peaks across the week by offering special promotions on certain days. Lipsey for example, claims that Tesco on Tottenham Court Road (London) gave double stamps on Tuesdays to attract shoppers away from more congested times.¹⁰⁶ The majority of efforts in this period, however, were designed to tackle the cause of supermarket queues through greater operational efficiency at checkouts.

For some shoppers the queue problem brought the economic trade-offs between shopper and retailer back into sharp focus, and the private management of the queue in the self-service store could be a source of some frustration. As Ray (OH/756/F/1932) surmised of a supermarket chain:

I felt [. . .] they limited the number of manned checkouts, so that the queues you know it was your customer queuing and the people sitting in the offices saying "if we only use two checkouts this will save us so and so much money and in wages, salary and the customers can wait."

For Ray and others the solution lay in getting more staff at the checkout. For many retailers additional check-out staff were introduced in combination with new techniques of managing queues. For example, fast lanes for shoppers purchasing a small number of items were introduced, which had the additional virtue of encouraging more time sensitive shoppers into self-service stores; long queues could be tolerated by those purchasing larger quantities of goods, but not by those needing just a few items.¹⁰⁷ These

lanes came under the surveillance of staff and also other shoppers operating with everyday notions of fair play. Jeanette (OH/674/F/1940) recalled the introduction of fast lanes to Safeway's in Sydenham: 'they did start the business with five items or less and that would cause punch-ups practically- because people would have six items and people are watching each other like hawks in case they're sliding through'. It is significant to note that the managerial restructuring of the system of queuing was seemingly dependent upon publically enforced notions of proprietary order.

The enhanced use of new technology was often the retailers' preferred solution to maintaining profitability more widely.¹⁰⁸ One report 'Electronics at the Point of Sale' (1972) argued 'that the problem [of queuing cannot] be solved by simply adding extra checkout points, because the cost is too high, particularly in high rental central areas where every possible square foot of floor space must be given over to selling'.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the proposed solution lay in optimising checkout functions and adopting new systems.

Identifying different aspects of the checkout process, supermarket retailers and suppliers of shop equipment experimented with several technological innovations. One such aspect was the presentation of goods to the checkout assistant by the shopper. To speed up this process, conveyor belts were installed that could be operated with a foot pedal by the checkout assistant. Towards the mid-1970s this system began to be automated in supermarkets by a magic eye system that stopped a moving belt when the goods were in the correct position.¹¹⁰ A concomitant innovation was the adoption of multi-bay packing facilities, which permitted the (self-) serving of two shoppers simultaneously by means of a movable divide, which allowed the goods of the

subsequent shopper in the queue to be separated from those of the preceding shopper; whilst one shopper's goods were packed after payment, another would have their goods checked-out.¹¹¹

Entering price information was another area for efficiency gains and one that could lessen queues. The report, 'Electronics at the Point of Sale' predicted the first British orders for a generation of Electronic Cash Registers which would improve the speed and accuracy of supermarket cashiers.¹¹² The same report also claimed that Sainsbury's had 'carried out dummy runs which have shown that checkout processes can be speeded up by 20%.'¹¹³ A more fundamental innovation was to follow, with Universal Product Codes and barcodes, introduced in the US in 1971 and 1974 respectively and capable of being read by optical scanning equipment at the checkout.¹¹⁴ However, in Britain it was not until the mid-1980s that scanner technology became widely adopted.¹¹⁵

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper provides an historical perspective of grocery shop queues and queuing in counter-service and self-service shops over the period 1945-1975. Within this context there is clear evidence from a range of sources, and especially from detailed oral histories that shoppers' perceptions and experiences of queuing were transformed as they encountered self-service retail operations, whether directly or indirectly. The paper illustrates that retail innovations have the potential to alter temporal and spatial patterns of in store consumer behaviour with far reaching consequences for both retailers and shoppers, as well as for the social reproduction of the institution of the queue itself.

Counter-service queuing could be frustrating for some shoppers, as shown by Mass Observation for the period under food rationing (1939-1954) and to a lesser extent in the ensuing decades. However, oral histories show that for some the experience was not entirely negative. The counter-service queue was viewed by some shoppers as part of a social network in which valuable news and information was exchanged. In addition it represented a space where children could be socialised into the role of shoppers. This socialisation included the disciplinary principles associated with the FCFS proprietary order of queuing, that whilst not inviolable was commonplace.¹¹⁶

Yet for other shoppers, counter-service queuing could be an impersonal experience, for instance when shopping was conducted for convenience in locations in which the shopper had weaker social ties or associations. For example commuters shopping around workplaces during lunch breaks or at the close of the working day before returning home.

Self-service was seen initially as an antidote for the queues that plagued counter-service grocery shops in early post-war Britain. Yet, as self-service shops and supermarkets became more popular during the 1960s queuing at the checkout became an increasing problem. It was during this period, it seems, that the perceptions and experiences of many shoppers changed. Overall, negative reactions to queuing in supermarkets was galvanising by the mid-1960s onwards- as these types of stores became firmly established in the grocery retail market. Many oral history respondents tended to view the supermarket queue as a more sterile experience, devoid of social contact and impersonal. However, our research also suggests that self-service queues

could sustain social experiences for some shoppers, particularly where they were embedded through shared local networks.

Recent research on present-day consumer patronage has explored the relationship with community embeddedness.¹¹⁷ In our research the degree of shopper embeddedness influenced the queue experience in both counter-service and self-service formats. However, technological systems designed to deal with the resurgence of self-service queues risked depersonalising the shopper service experience. The increasing emphasis on fast and efficient service meant that consumer attention was focused on the mastering of revised check-out processes involving the shopper in unloading goods, payment and packing, with lessened scope for social interaction with fellow shoppers or cashiers apart from a cursory acknowledgement.

We have no unequivocal evidence that queuing was a significant factor in shoppers' choice of retail formats. However, shoppers' typically perceived shopping in self-service formats to be faster than in counter-service outlets, even though self-service checkout queues were frequently reported as being problematic. Existing studies suggest that the adoption of self-service and supermarket formats was sometimes related to life-course transitions when time-budgets significantly altered for shoppers.¹¹⁸ These findings are also borne out in the analysis of queuing presented here. With more limited time budgets available to those women in dual roles as waged workers and carers (for example, as housewives and mothers), shopping was often regarded instrumentally with respect to time saving rather than in connection to social elements that could accrue from practice of queuing. The queuing problem in supermarkets, whether perceived or experienced, led some shoppers to try to bypass queues wherever possible. Delivery

services provided one option, although from a retail management perspective increasing the cost of service was not something that advocates of self-service typically recommended.

By providing a longer-term perspective on changes to shop queues than is typical in the literature, our research highlights the wider significance of researching the interface between public values and private management. Our research reveals the persistence of rules around proprietary order alongside the social and technological changes that comprised self-service format innovation. In many cases the unspoken rules of proprietary order, revealed by shoppers when discussing breaches of order, supported the efficient functioning of new check-out systems (e.g. fast lanes). The research draws attention to the way in which business innovations draw upon untraded public values for their success.

Finally our research suggests several directions for future research. First, to establish the effect of self-service formats on shoppers' experiences more broadly, it would be valuable to consider shopper experiences of queuing in non-food shops.¹¹⁹ Second, further research needs to be conducting into the psychology of the grocery shopper queuer.¹²⁰ The question of how shoppers' perceived waiting time in relation to the characteristics of goods and services purchased remains to be adequately explored. Third, our research could be broadened to include wider aspects of service. This would include, for example, taking into more direct consideration the role of the self-service cashier and practices of checkout management, noting the effect of these aspects of the service encounter on shoppers' experiences and perceptions.

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Notes

¹ Self-service in this paper is defined as a system of retailing whereby the customer is required to undertake the labour of selecting goods and presenting the selected goods to a cashier before payment is made. For contemporary accounts see: *The Grocer* "Self Service in the Streamlined Age" (1962): May, 24-25; —"Self Service on the March" (1951) 4 August, 23-24.

² For an overview of the development of self service retailing and shopping in Britain see: Alexander et al., "The Co-Creation."; Du Gay, "Self-Service."; Shaw et al., "Selling."; Bowlby, *Carried Away*.; Usherwood, "'Mrs Housewife'." The development of self-service in Europe is explored in: Jessen and Nembach-Langer, *Transformations*. For developments in the US see: Cochoy, *On the Origins*; Mayo, *The American*.

³ Du Gay, "Self-service."

⁴ *ibid.* Du Gay argues that self-service resulted in less queueing, but does not explore the significance of this change for shopper perceptions and behaviour.

⁵ *Daily Mirror* "Serve Yourself Shops: State Backs a Big Try-Out" (1949) 23 March, 1.

⁶ *The Times* "Self-Service With A Smile" (1955) 11 June, 4.; See also Du Gay, "Self-Service"; Shaw and Alexander, "British Co-Operative."

⁷ See Shaw et al., "The Coming," 40.

⁸ David Jones "Taking the steam out of the High Street" (1967), *The Times*, 10 April, 15. Notes that: 'Church Street, Croydon: a large supermarket with 20 customers patiently queuing for a quarter of an hour at each of nine check-outs; the nearest car park half a mile away. The Saturday scene is the same in nearly every High Street.' More generally, see BMRB *Shopping in Suburbia* (1963) and BMRB *Shopping in the Seventies* (1970).

⁹ Board of Trade, "Report on self-service trading."

¹⁰ *The Grocer* "More and More Shoppers Go Self Service" (1958) 23 August, 24-25.

¹¹ During the 1960s, supermarkets were defined as 'a store of not less than 2000 sq ft of sales area, with three or more checkouts and operated mainly on self-service, whose range of merchandise comprises all food groups, including fresh meat, fresh fruit and vegetables, plus basic household requisites'. *Self-Service and Supermarket Directory 1961-2*, cited in: McClelland, "Economics," 154. The Nielsen "Annual Review" (1962); The Nielsen Researcher "Future Trends" (1970).

¹² The Nielsen Researcher "Future Trends" (1970).

¹³ *ibid.*

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- 14 *Board of Trade, "Report", 213. ^Henksmeier, *The Economic*. (Note Henksmeier's data is for food shops as opposed to grocery only. However, it appears to accord with the Board of Trade's report that states in relation to the first census of distribution (1950) that 'fewer than 500 traders described their shops as wholly or mainly self-service shops; they were nearly all grocers...'). Data for 1956-1969 is from The Nielsen Researcher "Annual Review" (1963; 1966; 1970). Self-service data for grocery shops is unavailable for the years 1948-49 and 1951-1956.
- 15 For example, for a perspective on queues and queue management from operations management see Davis and Heineke, "Understanding.". For a review of the sociological literature on queuing since the 1960s see Wexler, "Re-Thinking.". From the perspective of law see Gray "Property" and for arguments from justice theory see Sandel, *What Money*.
- 16 Pàmies et al., "What Is Going On," 216.
- 17 Moran, *Queuing for Beginners*, 3.
- 18 Perec, *Species of Spaces*.
- 19 *The Times* "The Socialist Quagmire." (1949) 19 February, 6.
- 20 Nicholas, *The British General*.
- 21 Hinton, "Militant."
- 22 Kynaston, *Austerity*.
- 23 Garfield, *Our Hidden*.
- 24 Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity*.
- 25 *ibid.*
- 26 *ibid.* 118.
- 27 Moran, "Queuing Up."
- 28 Shaw and Alexander, "British Co-Operative."
- 29 *ibid.*
- 30 Black, *Redefining*, 60.
- 31 Moran, *Queuing for Beginners*, 70.

32 ibid. Moran sources his material from Jo Revill “Queuing wastes one day a year” (2003) *The*
Observer, 26 October, 14.

33 Moran, *Queuing for Beginners*, 70.

34 In 1946, 1% of electrically wired households possessed a refrigerator, rising to 20% in 1961, 50%
in 1968 and 75% in 1973. Penetration of freezers rose from 1% of households in 1968, to 20% in
1977. Car ownership increased from 20% of households in 1954 to 50% in 1965. Figures
calculated from data cited in Offer, *The Challenge*, 174. Data for refrigerators and freezers is for
England and Wales

35 Zerubavel, "Timetables."; Mann, "Queue Culture."

36 Gray, "Property."

37 ibid. 168.

38 Yang et al., "Trading Time."

39 ibid. 2394.

40 Sandel, "Market Reasoning."; ———, *What Money*.

41 Gray, "Property," 182. Also see Goffman, *Relations in Public*.

42 Gray, "Property," 191.

43 Wexler, "Re-Thinking," 168.

44 Durrande-Moreau, "Waiting for Service."

45 Houston et al., "The Relationship," 736.

46 Koo and Fishbach, "A Silver Lining."

47 This description of the service environment is based upon that presented in Baker and Cameron,
"The Effects."

48 Bitran et al., "Managing."

49 The oral histories used in this paper are referenced in the following way: Oral History (OH) or
Witness Group (WG) / Identifier code Number / Gender (M/F) / Year of Birth if known. Witness
Groups were convened as a group interview numbering three to five participants. Participants

interacted with each other around their narratives of shopping. The convenor used an oral history interview schedule to provide cues for discussion.

50 For oral history and narrative methods generally see Tonkin, *Narrating*. For specific discussion of oral history to consumer studies see Nell et al., "Investigating."; Witkowski et al., "Qualitative."

51 Davies and Elliott, "The Evolution ".

52 *ibid.*

53 Mass Observation Archive: Food Box File 3 C (various reports from 1941); File Report 3036 on Queuing (September 1948); File Report 3055 on shopping (November 1948); Mass Observation, "A Report"; Mass Observation, "The Offside".

54 Abrams, *Social Surveys and Social Action*; Firth, "An Anthropologist's."

55 Pickering and Chaney, "Democracy."

56 Gurney, "'Intersex'."

57 Hinton, *Nine Wartime*, 17.

58 Levy's opinions about the bias of 'trade journals' in support of self-service retail modernisation in Britain and Sandgren's work on the contribution to trade journals to self-service advocacy in Sweden caution against viewing industry sources as disinterested. Levy, *The Shops*, 210; Sandgren, "From 'Peculiar Stores'."

59 On derationing see Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity*, 26-35.

60 Mass Observation "A Report", 9.

61 Negotiated with local authorities under the Shops Act 1950. See http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1950/28/pdfs/ukpga_19500028_en.pdf. (Accessed 27 March 2017)

62 The term 'housewife' was widely used in the contemporary documentation to describe the shopping habits of all women. Our use of the term throughout this paper reflects this and carries no pejorative connotations.

63 Mass Observation "A Report", 1.

64 Mass Observation “A Report”, 2.

65 *Daily Mail* "Peace begins with a muddle and a queue 'battle' for bread." (1945) 16 August, 3.

66 Edie Rutherford (1948) 9 April, cited from Garfield, *Our Hidden*, 500.

67 *ibid.*

68 Longmate, "How We Lived," 174.

69 Pregnant women received a green ration book that entitled them to supplementary rations.
Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity*, see 130-131.

70 Edie Rutherford April 9th 1948, cited from Garfield, *Our Hidden*, 87-88. Our oral history data
doesn't enable us to substantiate whether older people and those with disabilities received
similarly preferential treatment to pregnant women in queues.

71 Mass Observation, “A Report”, 6.

72 Mass Observation Archive: Topic Collection Survey: Shopping Box 7: File B Shopping
Experiences and Complaints: letters. D.Lowe, Newcastle-on-Tyne, 18/2/1967.

73 Shaw and Alexander, "British Co-Operative."

74 *The Grocer* “An Interim Report on Self Service” (1951) 7 April, 29.

75 — “Self Service on the March” (1951) 4 August, 18.

76 *North Western Co-operative News* “More Plans for Self Service” (1948), 1.

77 British Market Research Bureau “Self Service.”

78 Moran, "Queuing Up," 289.

79 Montague Smith “Are These Shop Queues Necessary?” (1955) *The Times*, 23 July, 6.

80 *North Devon Journal Herald* “Hundreds Queue as Supermarket Opens Housewives wait five
hours for 100 free chickens” (1961), 18 May.

81 *The Times* “70 New Self-Service Shops a Month” (1959) 9 March, ix.

82 G. T. Gamble. “Housewife in a Supermarket” (1963) *The Financial Times*, 22 June, 8.

83 *ibid.*

84 As we have already noted, the operation of the dividend system was considered by some to
exacerbate the problems of queues in co-operative stores.

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- 85 Thompson, G.P. "Trading Stamps" (1963) *The Times*, 21 May, 13.
- 86 *The Times* "Customers Choice" (1963) 28 May, 13.
- 87 *The Times* "Tesco" (1963) 20 November, 17; — "Weston Group Enters Trading Stamp Fray"
(1963) 2 September, 10.
- 88 Hillyard, D.E.W. (Assistant Manager, Cater Bros.) "Checkouts the problems and possible
solutions" (1972) *The Grocer*, 23/30 December, 38.
- 89 BMRB *Shopping in Suburbia* (1963).
- 90 *The Times* "Co-op Loyalties and Self-Service Snag" (1962) 26 September, 13.
- 91 Cochoy, *On the Origins*, 154.
- 92 *The Times* "New Pattern of Shopping" (1961) 16 May, 8.
- 93 BMRB *Shopping in the Seventies* (1970), 38.
- 94 *The Times* "Waits at Supermarkets" (1964) 27 May, 6.
- 95 *The Times* "Shopping Revolution – 1: Supermarket Customer is Fighting Back" (1965) 31 May,
6.
- 96 *The Grocer* "Irritations of self-service" (1967) 18 March.
- 97 *The Grocer* "The case for the automatic checkout" (1972) 22 April, 86.
- 98 *ibid.*
- 99 BMRB *Shopping in Suburbia* (1963).
- 100 *The Times* "Speeding the Process," (1968) 5 February, 7.
- 101 Hui et al., "The Effect."
- 102 *The Grocer* "Why Don't All Stores Have Checkout Controllers?" (1972) 28 October, 88-92.
- 103 *The Times* "Speeding the Process," (1968) 5 February, 7.
- 104 Fothergill, A.E. "Influence on Sales in Shops and Stores" (1965) *The Financial Times*, 30
November, 20.
- 105 Hillyard, D.E.W. (Assistant Manager, Cater Bros.) "Checkouts the problems and possible
solutions" (1972) *The Grocer*, 23/30 December, 38.
- 106 Lipsey, *Productivity in Distribution*.

107 Maister, "The Psychology."

108 Lipsey, *Productivity in Distribution*.

109 Cited from: *The Grocer* "A way out of the checkout problem – but it may mean a £50m bill"
(1972) 1 July, 66.

110 *The Grocer* "Storebest speeds up checkout operation" (1974) 27 April, 71.

111 Ralph G. Towsey "Technique for a Quick Exit" (1969) *The Times*, 25 April, III.

112 *The Grocer* "A way out of the checkout problem – but it may mean a £50m bill" (1972) 1 July,
66. For more commentary on the introduction of ECR see Brown, "Arrival."

113 *ibid.*

114 Morton, "Packaging History."

115 Sharples, "Scanning."

116 Gray, "Property." Argues that schools were a primary place of socialisation into the discipline,
rules and routines of queuing. By extension we argue that shops are another key space of
socialisation.

117 Landry et al., "Retailer."

118 Bailey et al., "Consumer Behaviour."

119 Moran, *Queuing for Beginners*, 63. Comments that that readers of *The Times* 'complained
endlessly in its Letters page about the queues in branches of high street banks and post offices.'

120 As suggested by Hornik, "Subjective."