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## ***Introduction: the affluence hypothesis***

The key elements in this book are work, consumption and culture. The purpose is to look again at the increasingly popular idea that the lives of people now living in the industrialised West are determined much more by the way they consume things than by how they produce them. That consumption has displaced production as the leading factor in shaping the kind of society people are now living in.

So why would it matter if the realm of consumption had displaced the realm of production or work as the dominant realm of activity from which people construct their lives and why might such a change be of interest to sociologists? The short answer is that since the production side of human activity provides the foundation of human activity in general, it is no small matter to suggest either that production is no longer as important as it once was, let alone that some other realm has become more important even than work. If consumption has become emphatic in determining how people live their lives, how they relate to others and how they express their identity, this would mean that a pretty major shift has taken place in the character of modern society (for example: Campbell, 1987; Featherstone, 1991; and Millar, 1995). An apparent decline in the importance of work for people and for society re-opens fundamental questions about why people do the activities they do and the purposes or goals they hope to fulfil through doing them (Slater, 1997a and 1997b). In proposing that production-side activities no longer have the priority they once had, it is not so much a matter of showing that work is no longer important, since clearly human activity in general still depends on the satisfactory discharge of production-side responsibilities, but of saying clearly why the activities of consumption have become more important, how has it come about that 'the figure of the consumer and the experience of consumerism is both exemplary of the new world and integral to its making' (Slater, 1997b: 9)?

### ***Production versus consumption***

In arguing the case for the rise of consumption then, we need to explain why people now seek the outcomes of consumption-type activities more

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vigorously than the outcomes of production-type activities. Compared with other kinds of activity, the meaning and purpose of working activities and the reason why they are given priority is clear, since work is the primary means of satisfying our survival needs. The meaning of work is a largely practical matter and so are the consequences of it for a person's social and economic position, and their status in society more generally. To the extent that consumption is a necessary corollary of production we can explain acts of simple consumption wholly or partly in terms of the same motivations and expectations which we refer to in explaining acts of production – in order to achieve this or that outcome, I need to produce and consume this or that commodity. And if this is the limit of our analysis there would be no need to invoke the idea of a transition from a work-based to a consumption-based social type since limited consumption is part and parcel of production.

Many acts of consumption however, are much more complex than this and administer to desires and expectations which are not always clear and which often vary from one individual to another. In order to support the case for the rise of consumption one would have to show that people seek outcomes through consumption which are somehow outside or beyond what they can achieve through work and that people really do believe in the meaning and purpose of consumption and in a measure which surpasses that attributed to working activities. If these developments had taken place, then a reasonably strong case could be made for describing a type of society, a way of living, in which people give priority to the outcomes of consumption rather than of production. A consumption-based society would be one in which people's lives are largely structured by consumption, and where the activities of consumption are seen as carrying the highest levels of meaning and purpose. As Cross expresses it: 'Consumerism is not only the basis of both the modern economic order and public culture, but it defines how most people organise their time around working and spending' (Cross, 1993: 184).

### ***Sociology and consumption***

In answer to the second question, if one accepts that sociology is all about trying to understand the forms and meanings of human social action,<sup>1</sup> then sociologists are bound to be interested in the boundaries which lie between one realm of activity and another. If the realm of activities we call work, a realm which is believed by many to dominate human social action, has been superseded by its apparent opposite, this is bound to attract a good deal of attention (Warde, 1990a: 1990b). Whether as sociologists or not, we are able to make pretty accurate judgements about where

people stand in society and how we should interact with them, along the various ribs which lead off from the spine which working life provides. It represents a considerable departure from all conventional sociological accounts of modern society to suggest that something *other than* work and production gives society its basic character and structure (Featherstone, 1990). Modern societies are so-called because of their position in the historical sequence, but what makes them 'modern' is the fact that they are characterised by a particular way of *producing things*. What we are trying to do in this book is to see not only if modernity is also characterised by a particular way or *consuming things*, but whether a point has been reached where the consumption side has become dominant.

### ***Actions speak louder than words***

As one might expect then, much of the discussion in the following chapters will be taken up with an account of differences in the types of things people do when they are producing things and when they are consuming them. Continuity from one phase of social development to another is a consequence of the fact that people keep on doing many of the same things, and in this instance, that means work. This must be the case since certain of our actions are unavoidable if we want to keep ourselves alive. Basic needs are not negotiable and so neither are the basic survival-making or, in our kind of society, income-getting, activities. Continuity is also maintained because the same people are involved in production and in consumption; these activities are not carried out by different sets of people who only ever meet at the moment of exchange. Unless one holds to the idea that people living in these societies are suffering from mass schizophrenia, it follows that the needs and desires which motivate one part of their activities are going to have an impact on other parts of it. Another of the arguments we will be making is that understanding the relationship between work-based and consumption-based society means that we have to understand how production and consumption are interrelated. More often than not they are two parts or phases of a larger single whole and so consequently, 'production and consumption must be analysed as a unity rather than as a simple opposition' (Fine and Leopold, 1993: 253).

### ***The meaning of it all***

Although we will need to spend some time describing and evaluating physical similarities and contrasts in the activities of the two realms, we are also interested in similarities and contrasts in the ways which people understand and justify their activities as producers and as consumers.

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Differences in the ways which such understandings are arrived at, and in the contents of those understandings, tell us a good deal about whether, and how, consumption-based society might differ from work-based society. We will work from the premise that the understanding people have of their activities is made up partly of practical meaning in the sense that some physical outcome emerges, an outcome which confirms or validates that activity, but that it is also made up of a cognitive or ideational meaning in the sense that intellectually, we try to justify or legitimate our actions by reference to our value system.<sup>2</sup>

The search for meaning is carried out on a number of fronts and often at the same time. One of the fronts in which this volume is particularly interested is the front along which people struggle to understand the meaning of activity as it affects their sense of personal and social identity. Accepting that an important aspect of the meaning people find in or give to their activities is how it enables them to express their sense of self, it follows that one of the key respects in which the activities of work and of consumption might be thought to differ one from the other is in terms of their impact on how people develop a sense of identity. If it is the case that '[modern] identity is best understood through the image of consumption', that the resources 'through which we produce and sustain identities increasingly take the form of consumer goods and activities ...' (Slater, 1997b: 85), then it is important to know whether such a change really is taking place and what may have become of the identity-meanings associated with production.

#### **THE AFFLUENCE HYPOTHESIS**

Not only are we interested in the kinds of activities and experiences which we take to be constitutive of work-based and consumption-based social types, we are also interested in the mechanism by which one type might develop into the other type. Many factors are implicated in such a change (and many of them have been discussed at length),<sup>3</sup> but in this account we want to single out the decisive role played by 'affluence' defined in the first instance, and quite simply, as ready access to surplus income. The basic argument we hope to support is that affluence – a capacity and expectation to spend freely – increases the range and variety of people's experiences because surplus income gives people choice over the commodities and services they consume. Choice signifies autonomy and autonomy signifies an awareness that things do not have to remain as they are. If we accept that choice and autonomy are universally desirable features of human social life, the prospect of living in an affluent society will be regarded by many as 'a good thing', as 'better than' living in one

where freedom to spend has yet to be achieved. (Affluent) consumption becomes '... the privileged site of autonomy, meaning, subjectivity, privacy and freedom' (Slater, 1997b: 31). Both in terms of the kind of activity it is (at the level of formal rationality), and in terms of the meanings people attribute to consumption as they try to understand and justify their activities as affluent consumers (as a form of substantive rationality), affluence is an enabling force in social development.

In order to argue convincingly that affluence influences social development in this way one would need to show not only that there is such a thing as affluence and that it has become a general characteristic of the way of life of people living in that kind of society, but also that it has materially altered the balance between work and consumption as the primary influence over people's lives. The basic argument here is that as people are more easily able to satisfy their basic survival needs, they have devoted an increasing proportion of their disposable income to consumption and leisure activities, and have consequently come to regard work as of secondary rather than primary importance. Rather than living in a society in which our orientation to self and other is largely determined by activities carried out in the realm of work, we are now living in one in which these orientations are largely determined by activities in the realm of consumption: a society wherein 'consumption now comprises the labour by which we appropriate goods and prise them out of the anonymous and oppressive conditions under which they are manufactured and exchanged ...' (Millar (ed.), 2001a, Vol. I: 7). The significant thing about affluence and choice is that under conditions of affluence we are able to consume things because they bring pleasure and satisfaction in and of themselves without always being tied to the satisfaction of basic needs. Affluence allows consumption for purposes other than simple subsistence. As a result 'the meaningful or cultural aspect of consumption comes to predominate, and people become more concerned with the meanings of goods than with their functional use to meet a basic or "real" need' (Slater, 1997b: 133).

Whilst recognising that the analysis of needs and wants, of survival and satisfaction deserves close attention (standard points of departure are Soper, 1981; Doyal and Gough, 1991) and may be something which should be central to a critical evaluation of 'how we live in consumer society' (Slater, 1997a and 1997b) we will simply state two things which guide the discussion in this book. One is that particular actions, whether of production or consumption, can provide more than one type or aspect of satisfaction or pleasure and often at the same time. For example, eating *tapas* in a trendy wine bar satisfies private as well as social needs; nutritional as well as symbolic ones and, even if in different measures, simultaneously. Second, that the desire for satisfaction is very often something which

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is constantly renewed because many needs are only ever temporarily fulfilled. However completely I satisfy my hunger at breakfast time, I will have to do so all over again at supper time. In saying that such-and-such an action satisfies this-or-that need we have to accept the multi-faceted nature of satisfaction and the rarity of needs which can actually be satisfied once and for all.

A counter argument would be that even if an increasing proportion of the population can afford to spend more of its resources on consumption-type activities this does not mean that everyone is able so to do. Affluence is a fortunate circumstance for the minority but is not universally achievable. In addition, it is logical to assert that a consumer ethic has to be based on a work ethic of some kind, since people still have to earn enough money to support their consumer lifestyle. Maintaining high levels of disposable income might actually reinforce the work ethic, and motivate people to work more rather than less energetically. As we shall see in the following chapter, there is strong support for this view amongst economists and sociologists. Reviewing explanations of why hours of work have tended to increase rather than decrease during the twentieth century despite increases in the efficiency of production, Voth concludes for example that this was because 'of the lure of new and increasingly affordable consumer goods' (Voth, 1998: 157). Similarly, Cross concludes that consumer society is characterised by a preference for goods rather than for free time such that people prefer to work the same hours (or more) in return for the capacity to buy more consumer goods: 'The triumph of consumerism meant a rejection of the progressive reduction of worktime and of "democratic leisure". It realised instead the dominance of a work-and-spend culture' (Cross, 1993: 5). As far as economic position, social status and identity are concerned, whilst these are undoubtedly affected by our behaviour as consumers, they are also and already affected by participation in the realm of working activities. To the extent that consumption is one of the ends to which work is the means, work must retain a primary rather than subordinate role in people's lives.

### **PLAN OF CHAPTERS**

The discussion roughly divides between Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 which describe the basic differences between our two proposed types of society, and three further chapters (6, 7 and 8) which attempt to understand how these differences might affect particular aspects of life and society. If these consequences are sufficiently large – if a turn to consumption really does alter the basis of social and personal identity and give rise to a different kind of culture – then this would support the argument that a general

change is taking place in the nature of society: that the social form based on work is being superseded by one based on consumption.

### ***Work-based society***

In considering whether the position of work in the hierarchy of activities has changed, whether the realm of working activities is as important as it used to be, we need to know what position it used to hold and why, and to what extent it has slipped and why. We need to say clearly what the principal characteristics of work-based society are. What is it about this society that allows us to designate it as a particular type we have called work-based?

We will say that a work-based society is one in which the ends to which work is the means are given clear priority over the ends of activities performed in all other realms. One would have to show that people regard work as their central life interest in the sense that they attribute great significance to the benefits which come from working, that their lives are somehow saturated by work. Quantitatively, we can look at data on working hours and other measures of work dependency and work intensity to see what the patterns of time use and distribution are within a work-dominated society. Qualitatively, we can briefly review evidence of the intrinsic benefits people expect to be able to fulfil through working. Adopting a Weberian style of analysis, the main contention of this chapter will be that the realm of working activities has become dominant because it is accepted as being both formally rational in terms of the means it employs, and substantively rational in terms of ends to which those means are directed. Moving outside or beyond the realm of work is difficult because this would mean resisting these rationalities and developing new ones.

Whilst one would have to accept that not all work-based societies, or societies passing through a work-dominant phase, will exhibit each of these features in their most extreme or purest form, these elements would certainly need to be there in some concentration or we would not be justified in categorising such a society as work-based. When we discuss the idea of consumption-based society, we will take this as our base line for judging whether the activities of consumption have come to provide an alternative means of achieving the ends listed here, and/or whether consumption-based society is characterised by different kinds of priorities and expectations.

### ***Consumption-based society – a theory of the new consumption***

Having identified the key characteristics of work-based society in Chapters 2 and 3, we will follow the same procedure in Chapters 4 and 5 and identify

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the key characteristics of consumption-based society. Invoking the affluence hypothesis described above, we will assert that consumption-based society is characterised by a particular kind of consumption which we will call 'the new consumption'. In developing a theory of the new consumption (its key characteristics, how it interlocks with other realms of activity, the way it affects people's behaviour), we will make a basic distinction between two different types of consumption. Simple consumption which can be further divided into necessary, elaborated and indulgent consumption, will be distinguished from complex consumption which includes the categories affluent, conspicuous and symbolic consumption. Our basic argument is that people undertake different kinds of consumption in order to find different kinds of pleasure or satisfaction. For analytical purposes, these pleasures and satisfactions can be understood as forming a continuum of utility. At one end utility is sought in terms of the basic satisfaction of day-to-day needs and desires, and at the other end utility is sought in terms of more elaborate, sometimes quite abstract even symbolic kinds of satisfactions.

What distinguishes one type of consumption from another is that different types of consumption activities are aimed at achieving particular kinds of utility. Whilst it is obvious that all types of human society offer opportunities for simple and complex types of consumption (we have already noted that plenty of consumption goes on in work-based society), it will be argued here that for a society to be classified as consumption-based, there must be clear evidence that increasing amounts of time and other resources are being shifted towards complex types of consumption. This would indicate that the kinds of pleasures and satisfactions which people increasingly expect to be able to fulfil are very much at the complex and abstract end of the scale of utility. A desire to achieve these kinds of satisfaction, and society-wide access to the means of so doing, is a defining characteristic of consumption-based society. We will use statistical data to assess what type of consumption activity and utility is typically being enjoyed by the UK population at the outset of the twenty-first century. Assuming that affluent consumption has something to do with levels of disposable income, we will look at data on incomes and income distribution. Emphasising that affluence has as much to do with *the types* of consumption activity people engage in as it does with absolute levels of such activity, we will go on to consider recent trends and patterns of consumption and consumption activities.

***Social identity and activism – workers versus consumers***

In Chapters 6 and 7 we look at the implications of a transition from work-based to consumption-based society in terms of how it might affect the



way people form a sense of social and personal identity. What factors does each social type bring to bear on the formation of identity? If we define identity formation as the process by which a person acquires a sense of themselves as a unique being in the world, a perception that is fundamentally shaped by the circumstances of their biography (Craib, 1998) then such a significant transition in those circumstances is bound to have far-reaching implications for social and personal identity. Starting with the formation of social identity, given that occupational role (some might say 'position in the means of production') provides people with the most important measure of where they stand in society relative to other people (their 'class' position), the idea that these markers could be assessed more accurately by looking at where people stand in the hierarchy of consumers is certainly very challenging. Fundamental questions would have to be answered about how effectively people can understand their economic position and social status as consequences of their activities as consumers rather than as workers. Do the hierarchies of consumption provide an effective alternative to work as the key regulatory device in the character of social experience and social interaction? (Saunders, 1984, 1986 and 1988; Pakulski and Waters, 1996).

A further important consideration is how the factors which shape social identity also determine the way that people subsequently express their identity through various kinds of social *activism*. Position in the occupational hierarchy for example, is assumed to provide a very reliable indicator of the kinds of social activism a person is likely to get involved with, the causes a person or group might be prepared to fight for, and the likely make-up of their allies and adversaries in these struggles. One is bound to consider whether a shift away from worker identity towards consumer identity means that old struggles have been resolved and/or will be replaced by new ones. What form is social activism likely to take in a consumption-based social type (Crow, 2002)?

### ***Personal identity – proletarian or sovereign consumer***

Turning from social identity towards the formation and expression of personal identity, we need to consider how readily people will give up elements of their sense of self which have for so long been crafted out of the experiences of work. People invest a great deal of themselves in work as a source of personal identity, and it is likely that many would be very reluctant to relinquish them (Du Gay, 1996). This might be the case particularly for men since perceptions of what it means to be a man are heavily bound up with assumptions about differences between the roles of income-getter and home-maker. In work-based society, 'gender' is constructed and maintained by being principally involved with particular kinds of

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activity, and paid occupation is certainly one of the most important (Charles, 2002). On the other hand, to the extent that the realm of consumption might be thought to provide an expanded realm within which people can develop and express their sense of personal identity and/or to develop entirely new ways of expressing their sense of self, perhaps the importance of work in this regard will diminish. Might it be that the turn to consumption is actually a response to the fact that people are becoming less and less willing to accept the limits to identity which the paid occupational role tends to set (Hall and Du Gay (eds), 1996)?

***The cultures of work and consumption***

We have already noted that people strive to understand their activities (understanding and motivation are obviously linked), and that that understanding is made up partly of practical meaning (a desired outcome is achieved) and partly of a cognitive or ideational meaning in the sense that intellectually, we try to justify or legitimate our actions by reference to our value system (social cohesion depends on there being alignment between individual value systems and the general value system which prevails in society at that time). If we accept that people understand and justify their activities in a society which is dominated by work by reference to a distinctly work-based value system, it seems probable that social transition would entail considerable modification of this value system. One might say that the degree to which the prevailing value system has been displaced provides a reliable measure of the extent of social transition.

If culture is a realm in which people debate various meanings and understandings of the reality in which they live, one would expect that conflict between established and emergent value systems would be reflected in culture. Whatever else they might have to say on the matter, most academics would agree that the culture of the late-modern period is certainly characterised by considerable turbulence and upheaval: 'In modernity, the individual casts off from the traditional society only to be cast adrift in a turbulent sea of sociability without paddle or anchor' (Slater, 1997b: 88). Some have gone so far as to suggest that the cultural realm has become the primary site of debate and conflict between competing value systems (rather than simply reflecting events which are occurring in other bits of the society) (for something modern see Raymond Williams 1985, and for something postmodern see Featherstone, 1991). If one believes that social progress depends on the resolution of these conflicts, and that such a resolution will have to take place in the cultural realm, then 'culture' becomes more important than 'economy' or 'politics': 'the tendency towards cultural disorder and de-classification ... is bringing cultural questions to the fore and has wider implications for

our conceptualisation of the relationship between culture, economy and society' (Featherstone, 1990: 6). Although the discussion in Chapter 8 rejects the strong version of the culturalist perspective, this does not mean that a transition towards consumption-based society will not be reflected in significant changes in the contents and role of the cultural realm. One might say that such a transition has a great deal to do with cultural change.

### ***The affluence hypothesis revisited***

In the final Chapter (9) we return to the question of whether to accept or reject the argument that a work-based social type has been displaced by one based on consumption and what part affluence plays in this relationship. There are three basic conclusions which could emerge here. First, that a full-blown consumption-based social type has emerged in the United Kingdom and elsewhere at the outset of the twenty-first century, a development which is closely associated with the attributes of affluence, most important amongst which is disposable income. Second, that notwithstanding the fact that average standards of living/levels of disposable income have certainly been maintained at historically high levels, that work has become more rather than less important as the basis of social life and experience. Third, that a modified social type can be observed, one which is characterised by the coexistence of work and consumption but where the balance between the two has altered not least because of increasing affluence. This latter possibility is perhaps the most attractive as it would allow us the common-sense conclusion that people assemble their personal and social identities by engaging in action in both realms of activity, without either having a truly dominant role. The pluralist outcome is often the most reassuring if least exciting.

### **THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT**

Throughout the discussion which follows we must be wary not to get carried away with the idea that just because some change or other has taken place in the conditions which surround people's lives (and it would be truly remarkable if none had occurred), that this inevitably provides evidence of a fundamental shift in the character of modern Western industrial society. Knowing that work-based society at the outset of the twenty-first century is not the same thing as it was mid-twentieth century does not necessarily mean that everything about that kind of society has changed. In considering the extent to which the changes which have occurred relate to the emergence of the new consumption, we must also

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be careful not to confuse changes which can be corroborated by controlled investigation, with changes which might or might not have taken place in the real world, but which are *believed* to have taken place by theorists who have already invested heavily in the idea of social change. Changes in the lives of the observed may or may not be the same as changes which are ascribed to them by those doing the observing. To the extent that the angle of view of the observer affects the impression they have of what might be happening in social development (as Hanson puts it: 'there is more to seeing than meets the eyeball' (Hanson, 1958: cited in Phillips, 1987: 9), changes in the perspective of the observer and/or differences in the perspectives of different observers, are bound to generate different interpretations of change and its consequences.<sup>4</sup>

For the purposes of abstract discussion and debate this separating of the phenomenon we are interested in (what people do at work, what impact consumption has on identity, etc.) from our examination of it (the ideas and theories we develop to understand what is going on) is not necessarily a problem since by definition academics develop thoughts which are lifted away from the actual object and context to which they apply. At a more mundane level however, we must avoid the temptation of applying to the real world, conclusions about changes which have themselves been developed from largely or wholly theoretical origins and/or largely for the purposes of theoretical exposition. These conclusions are actually conclusions about changes in the theory rather than conclusions about changes in concrete observable reality. For example, in his critical review of accounts of the (alleged) 'communicative intent' (Baudrillard, 2001) which may or may not lie behind consumption (itself part of ongoing debates over the 'consumption as communication thesis'), Campbell warns that 'it is one thing for academics to "discover" symbolic meanings attached to products: it is another to assume that the conduct of consumers should be understood in terms of such meanings' (Campbell, 1997: 350). It is one thing for Sherlock Holmes to sift fragments of evidence and then test a hypothesis based upon them, but quite another for him to hallucinate an entire crime without any concrete evidence at all. The two stories generated by these two methods might be equally interesting and dramatic, but only the former will result in actual criminal proceedings. The latter is truly fictitious.

Although the academic community is generally smart enough not to be taken in by these manoeuvrings (although see Mouzellis, 1995 and Callinicos, 1999), one of the factors we do have to take into account when considering arguments about a change in the balance between work and consumption is that there has been a change of direction in the interests and thus perspective of the sociological and cultural studies communities. If a sufficient proportion of this community is predisposed to investigate

consumption rather than work, to see identity as something which people acquire as consumers rather than as workers, then expectations have already been raised that evidence can be found to substantiate claims about these kinds of changes (standard points of departure are taken to be Saunders, 1988 and Warde, 1990a). In the production versus consumption debate for example, Fine and Leopold have noted that in the headlong rush 'to put consumption forward as a substitute for production to serve as an explanatory category in sociology', not only has the continuing importance of production been somewhat overlooked but ironically, 'this has come about despite an earlier attempt to eschew the reductionism associated with exclusive dependence on class relations of production'. At least up until the early 1990s then:

consumption in the new analysis has displaced production in name alone ... There are insuperable problems in constructing an opposition between production and consumption ... The result has been the failure to develop, and a hostility towards, theoretical structures that unite production and consumption'. (Fine and Leopold, 1993: 247, 250, 253, 255)<sup>5</sup>

Regarding the theoretical/empirical pitch of this volume, the hope is to develop a largely conceptual framework within which to grasp key aspects of the debate over whether something called work-based society has been, or might be displaced by something called consumption-based society. The model I have in mind is Durkheim's text *The Division of Labour in Society* where he famously compares key elements of pre-modern and modern society. The language and concepts should be familiar to the reader. Whereas Durkheim deploys the concept of social solidarity as the primary *mechanism* by which different social types develop (the mechanical solidarity characteristic of pre-modern or traditional society is contrasted with the organic solidarity characteristic of modern society), the key mechanism explored here is affluence.

Conscious of distinctions drawn (following Althusser (1969)) by Mouzellis (1995), and heeding Fine and Leopold's (1993) warning that it is all too easy to get stuck in the 'middle-range' between 'unified' grand theory on one side and 'working hypotheses' on the other side – something which has blighted attempts to develop a satisfactory theory of consumer behaviour, the bulk of this text could best be classified as 'conceptual'. Efforts have been made however, to 'take in the slack' by rigging with secondary analysis of empirical work carried out by others, fresh analysis of statistical data on hours of work, levels of income, and on patterns of consumption and leisure activities, and, to further the discussion of personal identity in Chapter 7, presentation of new data from a recently-conducted study into gender and job insecurity in South Wales (ESRC

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award number L2122520120, Nickie Charles and Paul Ransome). Where possible, the propositions made here have been framed in such a way as to make them amenable to empirical testing, that is, to see if sufficient evidence can be assembled behind them to convince the interested reader that they are 'true'.

**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Sociology is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects. In action is included all human behaviour when and insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it ... . Action is social insofar as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual, it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course' (Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1978: ; quoted in Morrison, 1995: 274).

<sup>2</sup>Formal rationality is a matter of fact, substantive rationality is a matter of value. Formal rationality refers primarily to the *calculability of means and procedures*, substantive rationality primarily to the *value* (from some explicitly defined standpoint) of ends or results .... The formal rationality of the modern social order is a matter of fact; whether or not this social order is substantively rational, in contrast, depends on one's point to view – i.e. on the ends, values or beliefs one takes as a standard of rationality.' (Brubaker, 1984: 36–7)

<sup>3</sup>For example, if we characterise the transition from work-based to consumption-based social types in terms of a transition from mass production to mass consumption, factors such as technological advance in commodities, developments in retailing and distribution, the growth of advertising and marketing, the spread of urban living, the emergence of fashion and leisure and so on, all require close attention. For a discussion see Fine and Leopold (1993), also Voth (1998). The now standard point of departure is McKendrick et al. (1982).

<sup>4</sup>Of the evidence presented in a recently published research monograph, the author reflected: 'My eventual analysis will have involved reconstructing previously existing constructions. And the reconstructions of mine will inevitably be informed by my own intellectual formation ... [which includes] the stock of knowledge and frames of analysis acquired from the sociological tradition ...' (Glucksmann, 2000: 49).

<sup>5</sup>Fine and Leopold are particularly critical of the approaches adopted by Castells (1977) and by Saunders (1988) both of whom develop theories in urban sociology which require fairly autonomous concepts of consumption.