Examining chain bookshops in the context of 'third place'

Introduction

This paper examines consumer experiences of chain bookshops and the potential which bookshops have to be a 'third place' for the people and communities who use them. The paper outlines the concept of third place as introduced and explored by sociologists Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) and Oldenburg (1999, 2001). It goes on to discuss the contribution of the humanistic geographers to the concept of third place, as well as looking at how the research paradigm of the restorative environment and directed attention contribute to this concept. The paper analyses how third place has been applied to changing social and leisure situations over the passage of time (Ducheneaut et al, 2007; Rosenbaum, 2006, 2008; Rosenbaum et al, 2007; Rosenbaum and Smallwood, 2011; Slater and Koo, 2010; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006) and goes on to explore consumers' current experiences in chain bookshops, beyond that of mere utility, as a place of restoration and therapy, encompassing browsing, 'flow' and the spending of time. As many UK bookshops reprofile as destination stores (Clements, 2005; Horner, 2009; Giles, 2011), the function of the coffee shop within the concept of third place is explored, as is its role as a supporter of socialising and meeting others, especially in bookshops. For managers, there are opportunities to encourage retail venues to explore their potential to be third places and restorative servicescapes. This can consequently encourage economic benefits.

Contributors to the concept of 'third place'

Prior to research examining the concept of third place, humanistic geographers such as Relph (1976), Tuan (1979), and Seamon (1993, 2007) were questioning the role of 'place' in our lives and the relationship between the human condition and tangible surroundings. Relph introduced the idea of 'insideness' which concentrates on the relationships between a person and a meaningful place. He proposed that when an environment generates a strong sense of belonging, then that environment becomes a meaningful place. Tuan notes that place 'incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people' and should be 'clarified and understood from the perspective of the people who have given it meaning' (Tuan, 1979, p.387). Similarly, Seamon (1993, 2007) explores the relationship between human identity and the surrounding environment, including buildings and place. The current research acknowledges the theoretical foundations laid by the humanistic geographers and their relevance to the current study. In particular Tuan's assertion that meaning of a place is ascribed by

the user is important to remember. Efforts to create a third place or restorative servicescape may be successful, but meaning of a place is ascribed by users (Fournier and Lee, 2009). While the humanistic geographers were laying the foundations for the idea of third place, the concept itself was introduced by Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) in response to what they saw as the disintegration of American community. The third place is so named, because after the 'first' and 'second' places of one's home and work, it offers the opportunity to relax and socialise. A third place will present the possibility of making conversation and meeting others. The perceived lack of any third place in a person's life may result in dissatisfaction 'as a consequence of the increasing narrowness of people's spheres of involvement with others' (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982, p.282).

Seminal work by Lofland (1998) has explored the relationships that can develop in public spaces (parks, streets, buses) and which give meaning both to those spaces as well as to the people who use them. Both Jeffres *et al* (2009) and Lofland (1998) argue that it is the individual's perception of the meaning of space and its uses that are important, rather than any meaning which might be prescribed by others, or by the administrator of a given space. Sociologist Sherry (2000) noted that some consumers immerse themselves so deeply in a given place that it takes on a significant role in their life. Like Jeffres *et al* (2009) and Lofland (1998), Sherry notes that it is the consumer's experience of the place rather than how that place is portrayed which is vitally important in ascribing meaning or significance. This has important implications for the current research which finds that bookshop users can often spend time as 'therapy', rather than necessarily visiting bookshops with a retail transaction or even a specific book search in mind. The paper explores the meaning ascribed to the bookshop (and coffee-shop) space, by its users.

Focus of the paper

This paper examines chain bookshops in the context of third place, drawing upon current marketing literature and building upon the current body of existing third place literature. The aim of the paper is to extend scholarly knowledge of how consumers use bookshops (beyond that of the simple act of purchasing books) examining in what context we might call bookshops a third place, as well as looking at how their integral coffee shops fit with this concept. The paper explores how bookshops, along with their integral coffee-shops serve to act as a third place for some of their customers. It explores alternative and non-traditional uses, with a view to clarifying academic knowledge of the third place in bookshops and their potential to be utilised as restorative servicescapes. A restorative servicescape (Rosenbaum, 2007, 2009)

is a commercial place which contributes to a customer's health and personal well-being. As noted above, while there is an existing body of research which has explored a variety of venues in the context of third places (Rosenbaum, 2006, 2008, 2009; Rosenbaum *et al*, 2007; Jeffres, 2009; Slater and Koo, 2010), the current research examines third place qualities specifically in the context of chain bookshops and – vitally - examines the contribution of coffee shops (within bookshops) to a 'third place' environment. A third place model is constructed and the research findings are tested within the conceptual framework of this model. The 'socialising' role played by the presence of coffee shops within bookshops – and potentially other retail settings – is also explored. The paper identifies future opportunities for industry as well as managerial recommendations. The research extends our knowledge of consumer behaviour patterns and preferences in bookshops by noting the presence of 'flow' and the potential for bookshops to be experienced as a restorative servicescape (Rosenbaum, 2009).

Defining a conceptual framework of 'third place'

The concept of third place has usually been applied to restaurants, bars, bookshops or even garden centres (Oldenburg, 2001); venues where sociability and conversation can be enjoyed in a non-judgemental environment. The study of restaurants or diners has tended to dominate any study of the concept of third place (Cheang, 2002; Rosenbaum, 2006; Rosenbaum *et al*, 2007), although video arcades and gyms have also been studied in this context (Rosenbaum, 2008). More recently the emergence of virtual communities and social networking has seen Oldenburg's concept of third place applied to elements of sociability online, in particular in the context of MMOGs - Massively Multiplayer Online Games (Ducheneaut *et al*, 2007; Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006). Recently, the notion of third place has been explored in an arts context, specifically by examining public consumption of Tate Modern and the Southbank Centre (Slater and Koo, 2010).

Attention Restoration Theory

There is a strong affinity between the current research and the established body of work carried out by psychologists such as Kaplan (1995) and Hartig (Hartig and Staats, 2003) which explores restorative environments and their impact upon directed attention. Attention restoration theory suggests that our ability to direct attention 'is a biological mechanism which becomes fatigued with use' (Rosenbaum, 2009, p.174). Directed attention fatigue occurs when this mechanism becomes tired and ability to concentrate upon external stimuli is impaired. While historically much of

the focus of this work has been upon outdoors settings, Rosenbaum (2009) introduced attention restoration theory to servicescapes, finding that they are also potentially restorative and can 'mimic the restorative properties found in nature' (Rosenbaum, 2009, p.173). In subsequent research cancer resource centres have been found to offer a transformative, restorative servicescape to many of their users (Rosenbaum and Smallwood, 2011). This paper explores the potential for bookshops and their integral coffee shops to be experienced as restorative servicescapes. Kaplan and Talbot (1983) have suggested four qualities which are central to a restorative environment: fascination; 'being away'; an environment 'with extent' and compatibility between the environment and one's purpose (pp. 172, 173).   To expand, fascination can be broadly thought of as an interest, albeit one that is thoroughly absorbing. Kaplan (1995, p.172) suggests bird-watching, the reading of murder mysteries, or walking as potential sources of 'fascination'. 'Being away' involves a 'conceptual rather than a physical transformation' (Kaplan, 1995, p.173). Indeed, one can see the parallels between 'being away' or undergoing a conceptual transformation, and the presence of 'flow' which the current research finds is experienced by many bookshop visitors (see below).   An environment with 'extent' must be rich enough that it 'constitutes another world' (Kaplan, 1995, p.173). Finally, there should be compatibility between what one is doing, and the surrounding environment. The notion of compatibility resonates strongly with Oldenburg's writings on third place (1982; 1999; 2001). Kaplan describes compatibility as '(W)hat one does comfortably and naturally is what is appropriate to the setting' (Kaplan, 1983, p. 173).

Third place and books

There is certainly an affinity between the concept of third place and bookshops, firmly established by the work of Oldenburg (1999, 2001). Libraries have been examined in the context of third place (Lawson, 2004; Fialkoff, 2010; Johnson, 2010, Moss *et al*, 2009) and the presence of coffee shops seems to support this view, (Waxman *et al*, 2007) since the therapeutic qualities associated with such a setting are then present (Fialkoff, 2010; Banning *et al,* 2006). There has been little research carried out which examines the concept of a bookshop (or a coffee shop within a bookshop) as a third place (Laing and Royle, 2006; Laing, 2009). Nevertheless, there is some evidence of consumers 'losing' themselves as they browse the shelves (Cartwright, 2001). This element of losing oneself – or 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) – is, according to Oldenburg an important element of third place. The passage of time goes unnoticed in a third place 'amid the interesting company afforded by third

place association' (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982, p.276). While the narrative approach taken by Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) does not 'list' the qualities associated with third places in order of importance, nevertheless, the following qualities seem to be essential, although not exclusive, components of such settings as referred to by Oldenburg and Brissett (1982).

i.   *The 'possibility for sociability' must exist*
ii. *The 'existence of flow' should be present*
iii. *'Conversation or communication takes place freely, democratically and without censure'.*

As such, fig. 1 represents those essential qualities integral to a third place, as defined by Oldenburg and Brissett (1982).
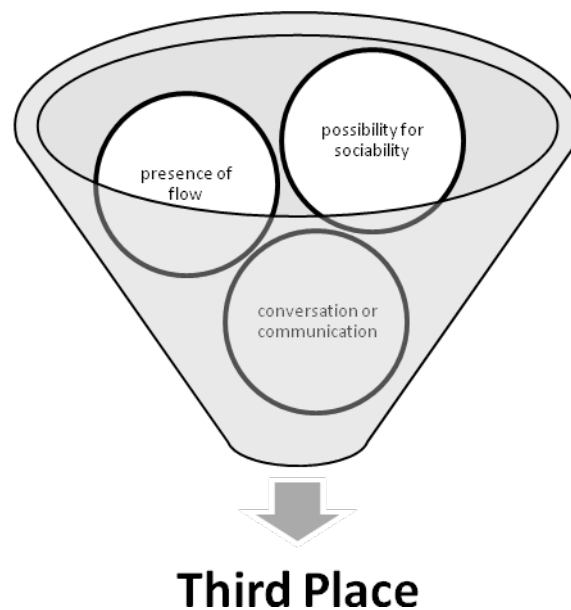
Fig.1 Conceptual model – Third Place (Based upon Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982)

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was taken to the data gathering, in order to answer the research questions most effectively and to triangulate the findings (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). The methodological approach adopted was a developmental one,

allowing each stage of data gathering to inform and enhance the subsequent stage. First, interviews were carried out with bookshop experts (bookshop managers and one marketing manager) from four separate bookshop chains. The interviews probed managers' views of how they believed consumers used their bookshops, and what they experienced there. The interviews were transcribed and common themes and areas of concern were drawn out from these initial interviews, helping to inform the design of the subsequent questionnaire survey. 100 questionnaires were carried out face to face with bookshop users across three chain bookshops. These questionnaire surveys asked whether bookshop atmosphere was important; the time spent in-store and the kind of experience (relaxing, happy, intimidating) a bookshop visit might be. The questionnaires were analysed using SPSS, although the qualitative comments were excised and coded separately. Three focus groups comprising of five, six and seven participants respectively were then carried out. They were used as a method of exploring in more depth the issues raised previously in both the interviews and the surveys carried out (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). The focus group interviews were transcribed and thematically coded (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and finally 158 online questionnaires with online bookshop users were undertaken. These online bookshop users were reached by posting links on an online book group, an online film discussion group, a local online newspaper and an online bookshop. The online questionnaires explored the online shopping experience but also asked these online consumers about their experiences in 'traditional' bookshops and how the experiences compared. While the overall focus of the research was upon consumer responses to various marketing approaches undertaken by chain and online bookshops, a strong theme of using bookshops as a place to spend time, browse or relax emerged throughout the research in traditional bookshops. The manager and focus group comments are particularly central to this paper and it is also supported by results from the face-to-face questionnaires. The methodological ethos behind the research was open, encouraging respondents to share their opinions and experiences in as full a manner as possible. Even in the questionnaires carried out, there was considerable scope for participants to make extra comments at any stage of the questioning, both online and face-to-face. The interviews proved to be a rich source of data (Miller and Brewer, 2003; Kvale, 2009; Silverman, 2010) and given the developmental approach to the methodological design, the findings from the initial interviews were utilised in the design of the subsequent stages of data collection (Hakim, 2000, p.37).

Results and Discussion

Third place – the bookshop managers' perspective

Shifting perspective for a moment from consumer to manager, interviews with the bookshop managers found that they were keen to promote each of their bookshops as an 'independent within a chain' which reflected 'community spirit'. Localisation has been suggested as a strategic approach for smaller retailers to survive globalisation (Coca-Stefaniak *et al*, 2010) as well as being an approach which supports civic community (Tolbert, 2005). There is recent trade evidence of this approach being adopted as an antidote to globalisation, although it often seems to be adopted by large or conglomerate businesses (Levy, 2010). Starbucks cites community and a 'feeling of connection' as being instrumental to its brand, and uses the term third place to describe the kind of atmosphere which it is trying to promote (Starbucks, 2011). In the current research, one bookshop in particular was found to take a rather more proactive approach to the local community. As the manager commented:

> We're involved in community outreach… we're looking to be a space where people come to not necessarily just to purchase stock from us and so on but also somewhere that becomes a kind of a part of the community in lots of ways.

The wish to be relevant to local communities is not confined to bookshops, and is a marketing tool currently adopted by a variety of retail outlets (Bennison, 2003; Goddard, 2011). The notion of the bookshop as a third place was raised by one of the managers interviewed and was given as an example of the kind of atmosphere that his particular chain of bookshops was promoting for their customers:

> This whole idea of the third place…you're not just a store that's involved in selling; you're involved in other things… it is a relaxed place for people to come…we're obviously pushing that by providing comfy seats…by the very fact that there is a café in the store, by the fact that browsing is encouraged.

It is however important to bear in mind that any 'meaning' which a place may have is ascribed by the user, despite the best efforts of retailers to create a third place or restorative servicescape (Tuan, 1979: Fournier and Lee, 2009). One manager commented that his booksellers receive daily positive feedback from consumers

regarding how they enjoy the bookshop atmosphere when they visit and therefore why they visit. Indeed, in 'creating an inviting environment that facilitates social interaction, the bookstore may be encouraging people to associate the act of browsing, and possibly even reading books, with socializing' (Miller, 2006, p.135). This kind of social environment in a relatively public place is central to the concept of third place (Cheang, 2002; Jeffres *et al*, 2009; Rosenbaum, 2007, 2008) offering an environment conducive to relaxation and spending time.

This empirical research found that chain bookshops are actively pursuing a 'third place' approach to their marketing, with the adoption of coffee shops and the encouragement to spend time in comfortable chairs. However, it does seem that this approach is adopted without any knowledge of customer segmentation or customer preferences according to age, gender or socioeconomic grouping. Therefore, there seems to be an all-encompassing 'lifestyle' approach to the provision of sofas and coffee shops without necessarily ascertaining whether this is what all customers actually want. Fournier and Lee (2009) note that 'a brand community is a business strategy' and the development of a meaningful brand community is too important to be isolated within a marketing function. Nevertheless, over time brand communities become 'of and by the people' and reach a stage of development where they defy management and control. They assume a power of their own where different 'scripts' are acted and players assume common 'community roles'. This is also evident in behavioural research in shopping malls (Manzo, 2005) where mall design aims to 'shape' behaviour, but must acknowledge the 'et cetera principle' (Garfinkel, 1967) which understands that human behaviour cannot be predicted or regulated. Therefore, it would seem that while the bookshops examined in the current research have been largely fortunate in the positive responses of consumers to the presence of sofas and coffee shops, managers should be careful to monitor the develop of brand community and mindful of changes.

Consumer behaviour in-store
Now looking at consumer experiences in-store, data from the surveys shows us that spending time, and browsing with no real purpose in mind are important parts of the bookshop experience for many consumers. The results from the in-store face-to-face surveys found that the majority of bookshop visitors (67%) spent around half an hour in the bookshop with 20% spending around ten minutes and 11% spending an hour or more in store. The gender split was 61% female, 39% male, consistent with the usual gender ratio in bookshops (Mintel, 2005). It should be borne in mind that respondents were selected by the researcher and therefore are subject to selection

bias, although every effort was made to select from a range of ages and across gender, subject to the availability of people within the bookshops. Demographic data was collected from respondents (fig. 2) and the majority of bookshop visitors are aged between 20 and 40 years of age, but encompass a broad age range.
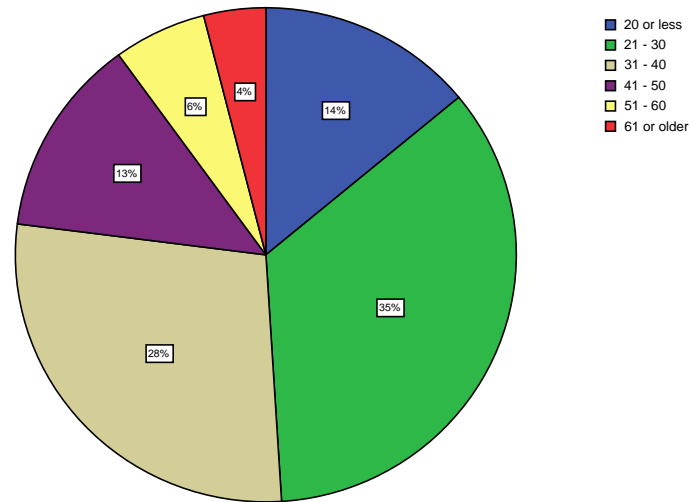
Fig 2. Age of questionnaire respondents

Questionnaire respondents were asked to select which bookshop qualities were most important to them, from a list provided. They could select as many options as they wished and could add their own options to the list provided if they wished. Examining fig. 3, which illustrates the bookshop qualities most important for consumers it is clear that while the range of books is vitally important, atmosphere is also of prime importance for 83% of in-store consumers.
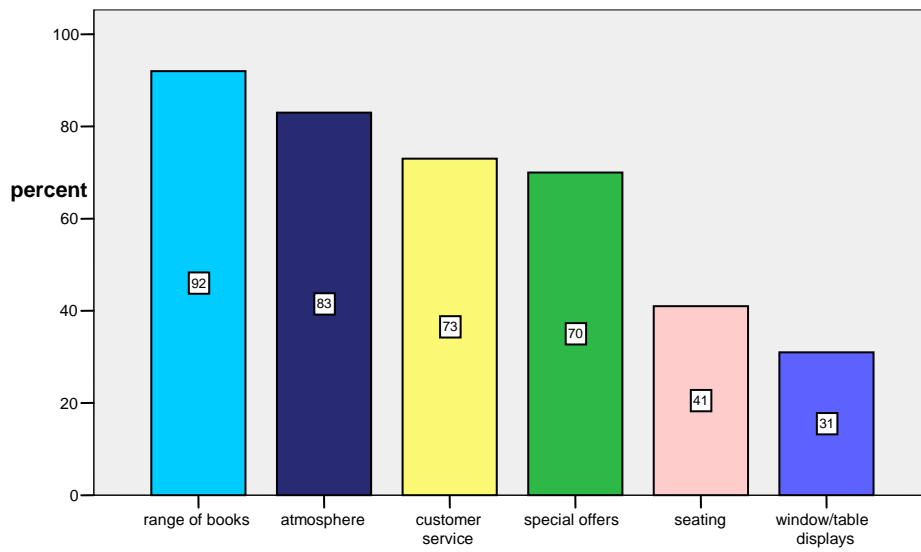
Fig. 3 Important bookshop qualities

Again, choosing as many options as they wished from a provided list consumers told us what they usually do in-store (fig. 4). Again they could add their own options to that list if they wished. Many of the activities involve spending time amongst books, perhaps browsing without necessarily purchasing.
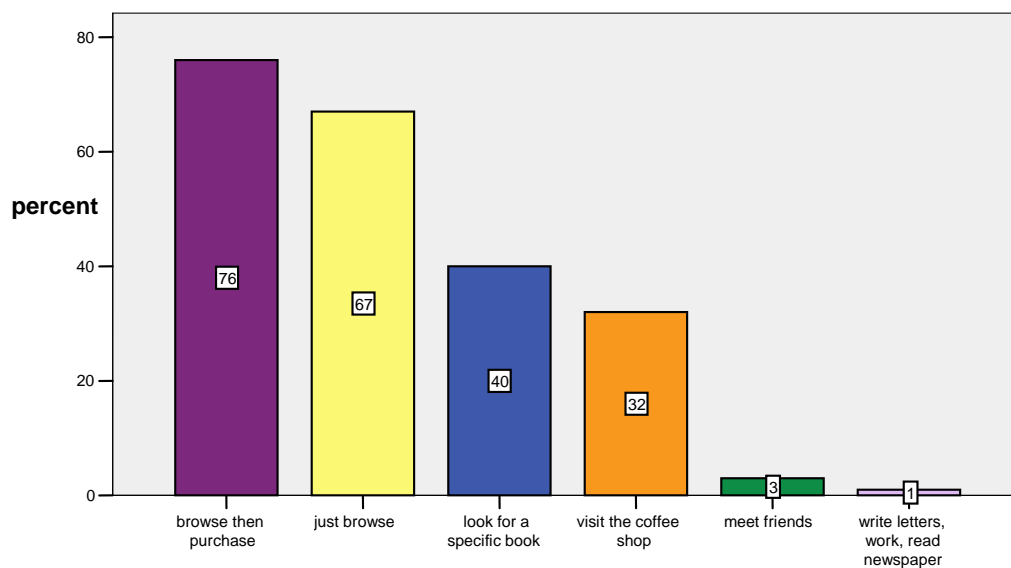
Fig. 4 Usual in-store behaviour

Figures 3 and 4 tell us that bookshop visiting is not a solely functional occupation. There is a tendency to participate in relatively time-consuming activities, like browsing, and incorporating a visit to the coffee shop is not uncommon. The research therefore establishes the chain bookshop as a venue beyond that of merely purchasing, where the spending of time is inherent to the most common activities.

In their study of how the public experienced arts venues, Slater and Koo (2010) segmented the consumers using these venues by their motivations, into four categories: 'place to see', 'place to hang out and meet' 'place to drop in' and 'third place'. While 'place to see' does not apply in bookshops, 'place to hang out and meet' and arguably 'third place' are potentially applicable to bookshops. In the current research, just a single focus group participant was found to 'drop in' to bookshops. In the face to face survey with 100 bookshop users in-store, the research found that while consumers tended to visit traditional bookshops less frequently than online bookshops, consumers were also inclined to spend more *time* in traditional bookshops. Within the focus groups, several of the bookshop users referred to 'hanging out' or spending time in bookshops without necessarily having a time limit or a particular aim:

I do just enjoy the atmosphere, wandering about the store not buying anything.

I'll go even if like I'm not even looking for a book, but I've had like a bad week or a bad day I might just go to the bookshop: em you know have a wander round; look at some books; go for a coffee, stay there for quite a long time…and I'll always feel better.

These comments may initially suggest an element of loneliness yet it was understood that this behaviour was not motivated by the desire for meaningful social interaction, or conversation but rather a desire to be in the pleasurable, therapeutic setting of a bookshop evidenced by the focus group comments above. While these comments demonstrate the therapeutic effects which bookshops have on some people, the bookshop environment seems to fall short in what Oldenburg and Brissett call 'pure sociability' (1982, p.270). They underline the importance of communication and conversation between people as being a core quality for a third place. Figure 3, outlining favourite bookshop qualities, distinguishes spending time in bookshops from 'hanging out' in malls (Manzo, 2005), providing as it does, more specific access to books, browsing, a coffee shop within a bookshop, and perhaps most importantly, access to 'like-others' (Rosenbaum, 2009a) who inhabit a common socioeconomic group (Mintel, 2005).

Testing the conceptual framework

In order to discern whether we can consider bookshops third places, it is first necessary to be clear about the definition of a third place. According to Oldenburg and Brissett (1982), for a space to be considered a third place there must exist the 'possibility for sociability'; there is the 'existence of flow' and 'conversation or communication takes place freely, democratically and without censure'. (See fig. 1). These preconditions will be considered in turn, in the context of the current research. With regards first to sociability in the current research, there certainly exists the *possibility* for sociability within bookshops given the ubiquitous adoption of sofas and seating all around bookshops and the installation of coffee shops in many bookshops. Previous research has found that the provision of seating in bookshops is certainly popular with many customers and can also have the effect of encouraging consumers to spend more time and more money while they are there (Laing, 2009). Yet, the evidence from focus groups and questionnaires would seem to suggest the

bookshop is sought out as a place of isolation, restoration, but rarely sociability. This is discussed further, below.

Flow theory, developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975) describes the phenomenon which occurs when a person is 'intensely engaged and absorbed in an activity (Naumer, 2005, p.153). While this theory has been studied in the context of a variety of differently absorbing activities such as acrobatics (Chen *et al*, 2010) and gambling (Wanner *et al*, 2006) and most recently very extensively in the online setting (Lee and Chen, 2010; Hoffman and Novak, 2009; Guo and Poole, 2009) it does not seem to have been applied to bookshops or bookshop browsing. Oldenburg and Brissett (1982, p.276) note that one of the most definitive qualities intrinsic to a third place is 'the effect such places have on an individual's sense of time', adding that 'time "slips by" unnoticed'. There is certainly evidence from focus group participants in the current research that customers can 'lose' themselves while book shopping:

> I'd say it's something that you go and do and you completely switch off and it, it really feeds your soul really. Because you can spend so long and get totally mesmerised by books and…it can be very relaxing.

> (Y)ou can just browse and lose yourself in the pages and, you know, it doesn't matter that you're on your own…

Exploring the degree of conversation or interaction between customers in bookshops, the results were very clear and rather surprising. In the face to face questionnaire, only 8% of respondents were found who ever speak to other customers in store. Slater and Koo (2010) also found in their research analysing consumers' interaction with arts venues that 'the one characteristic from Oldenburg's list [of third place qualities] that was not mentioned was conversation'. The current research found that even if people had set out to shop for books in a group, they tended to split when shopping or browsing then reconvene afterwards, perhaps for coffee. This is demonstrated by the following quote from a focus group participant:

> I think book shopping is a really… isolated thing that you do yourself. But in terms of coffee shops I think you can, I mean for me I'll maybe agree to meet somebody well, after, you know.

As one focus group participant commented:

> The socialising side of it really doesn't apply to me. I have to book shop alone …you know there's no question of it being a social experience for me – it's a very anti-social experience.

The first quote above explicitly comments on the difference between the bookshops and the coffee shop. It seems to suggest that while the bookshops is a place for 'loneness', there is scope to then move to the coffee shop when sociability is sought. Kotler (2006), Dibb *et al* (2006) and Jobber (2010) all emphasise the importance which people (employees) can play in any customer-facing business, as they have the power to develop relationships with consumers (Adelman and Ahuvia, 1995; Price and Arnould, 1999; Rosenbaum, 2008) and provide an element of social support beyond the bounds of a service transaction. Rosenbaum (2009a) notes the health-giving properties encapsulated in these support roles which service–providers can give, while also pointing out the 'dark side' of commercially motivated efforts by service providers to develop 'relationships' (Rosenbaum, 2009a, p.58) in order to reap the rewards of commission or increased sales. The current research found that booksellers are certainly used for routine services such as locating and ordering books, but in-depth knowledge requiring a genuine social interaction is not sought. This tends to contradict traditional emphases upon the positive influence of the salesperson in retailing and in customer-facing industries (Goff *et al*, 1997; Bell *et al*, 2010). There is also an extensive body of research which demonstrates the importance and impact of customer–to-customer interactions (Arndt, 1967; de Matos and Rossi, 2008) These interactions may result in mimicry (Tanner *et al*, 2008) or conversely, consumer actions which underline distinctness of identity and behaviour (Berger, 2008). Increasingly, customer-to-customer interaction and influence is observed and researched online, including the field of bookselling (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). Nevertheless, focus group evidence from the current study suggests spending time in bookshops is a lone pursuit.

The role of coffee shops

The current research finds that sociability is more likely to take place in the coffee shop, rather than in the bookshop itself. Of the bookshop visitors who liked the coffee shop, 74% of those said they like to meet friends there, substantially more than the 3% of bookshop visitors who said that what they do in bookshops is 'meet friends'. This is unsurprising, given that one might expect more people generally to meet friends in a café than in a bookshop, but it does underline the way in which the

presence of a coffee shop seems to encourage, even legitimise sociability. Miller (2006, p.126) states, 'cafes have been one of the most important elements in making the bookstore into an entertainment center, and they are tremendously popular among the public'. The bookshop experts and managers believed strongly that the presence of a coffee shop enhances the ambience of the bookshop. As one bookshop manager commented:

> I think…having a coffee shop definitely…contributes to the identity. It adds…to the idea that it's a third place. Definitely, I mean hugely.

Previous research into shopping centres and leisure shopping (Howard, 2007, p.661) has also suggested that 'catering may be the most important provision' in order to provide consumers with the option of incorporating leisure into their shopping experiences.

Investigating consumer responses to coffee shops within bookshops, it seems as if it is the unique evocative pairing of coffee and books to which consumers are most attracted. The consumers were questioned about their use of the bookshop coffee shop and the research found that the fact the coffee shop was 'within a bookshop', and that they can 'drink and read at the same time' were among their favourite qualities. Coffee-shop users within the bookshops examined, also enjoyed the atmosphere of the coffee shop and - crucially - using the coffee shop as a meeting place. Fig 5 below illustrates the unique link between the coffee and shop and the bookshops and also shows us the importance of atmosphere to coffee shop users
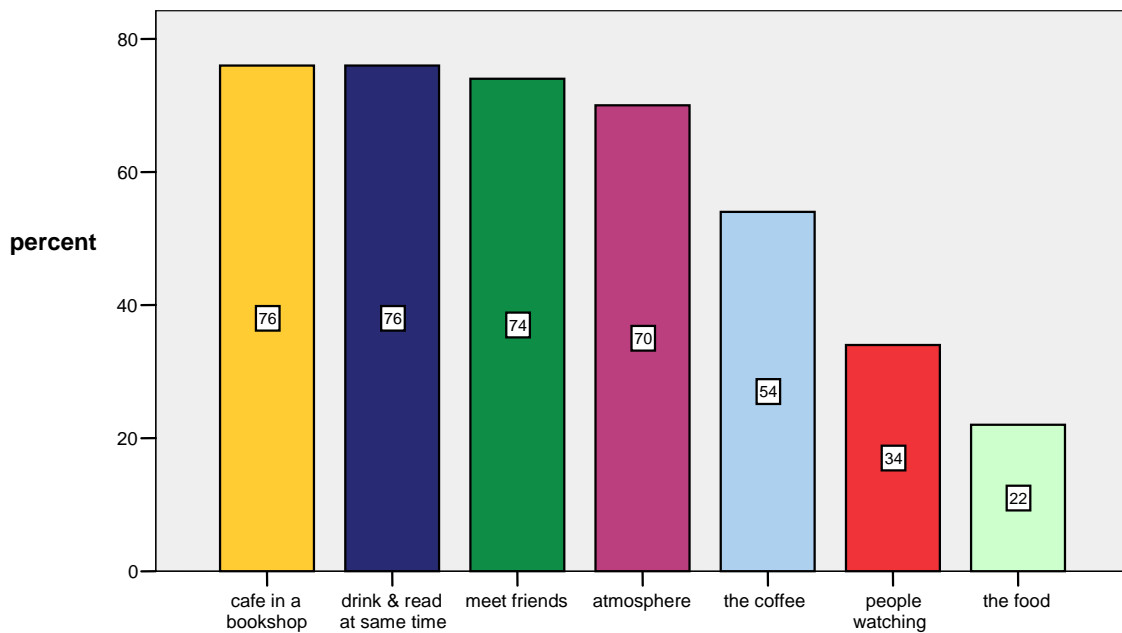
Fig. 5 Preferred coffee shop qualities

One focus group participant had strong views about the presence of coffee shops in bookshops, stating very firmly that in her opinion, they enhanced the book buying experience:

> I think that it's part of the process…I think it adds value to the experience that when you go to buy a book or browse it, it's something that you add on to the experience that I, well I personally enjoy and it extends the time that you're actually in the bookstore, so I'll maybe have a look and I'm maybe not quite sure which books I'll buy and, and then I'll have a coffee and I'll think about it then go back and then I'll decide which ones to buy and then leave.

The presence of a coffee shop was found to facilitate thinking time for mulling over a potential purchase. However, the current research found that chain bookshops were inclined to install coffee shops, although this approach tended not to be based on any

market research by bookshops, and the assumption that all bookshop users like coffee shops in bookshops, was a misapprehension.

Conclusions

The research demonstrates that many consumers enjoy a restorative experience in bookshops, experiencing flow and enjoying the spending of time in a relaxed fashion, often with no thought of any ultimate purchase. Very little interaction or socialising with other consumers or booksellers takes place. Many bookshop users experience a restorative or therapeutic quality in bookshops and wish to spend time there without necessarily wanting to talk or socialise in a literal sense. The current research suggests that referring to bookshops as third places is misleading. While elements of third place are often experienced by consumers in the bookshop environment nevertheless it must be acknowledged that conversation rarely takes place. The research finds that the presence of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) and the spending of time are vital elements of a therapeutic bookshop experience. The research acknowledges the restorative environment as proposed by Kaplan and Talbot (1983) as well as building upon the restorative servicescape proposed by Rosenbaum (2009). However, further research with a larger sample size is necessary in order to establish whether bookshops are conceptualised as restorative servicescapes. There are clear parallels between flow and the spending of time in the current research, and the four qualities integral to a restorative experience, as described by Kaplan and Talbot (1983). Future research should test these specific qualities of restorative experience in the bookshop setting. It would also be necessary to be clear about different kinds of bookshop, distinguishing between independents, chains, superstores or even book departments within garden centres, since these different venues may be ascribed different meanings by their users.

The research finds that the presence of a coffee shop in a bookshop has the effect of promoting that retail environment as a socialising space, something which the bookshop in isolation does not do. Consumers are more inclined to meet friends in the integral coffee shop within a bookshop and the coffee shop can therefore be seen as a marketing tool which can be used to encourage consumers to experience that integral coffee shop as a third place. The research enhances scholarly knowledge of the consumer experience in bookshops, evidencing the fact that sometimes it is more important for consumers to spend time and browse, or visit the coffee shop than simply to purchase books. The research findings demonstrate that consumer experiences of bookshops, while meaningful and important for many, often fall short of those qualities which Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) found to be integral

to a third place. Most importantly, Oldenburg and Brissett go on to point out that third places 'are places where people gather *primarily* to enjoy each other's company' (p.269). This cannot be claimed for bookshops. Future research might explore whether this is the case for the integral bookshop coffee shop. While people were found to meet friends in the coffee shop, this might be incidental to the act of book shopping, rather than being 'primarily' to enjoy others' company. Bookshops provide a place of relaxation and restoration for many and more research should be undertaken exploring the other beneficial qualities which consumers experience in bookshops, such as flow and the serendipity associated with browsing.

Managerial recommendations

There are potential economic benefits to be had by retail organisations, should they adopt marketing approaches which encourage the development of a restorative servicescape. While this cannot be entirely controlled, since identity of a third place or restorative environment is ultimately ascribed by users (Fournier and Lee, 2009) there are strategies which can be followed. For example, the presence of an integral coffee shop is found to increase socialisation, encouraging the spending of time and often money. Even without an integral coffee shop, the bookshop still has restorative qualities, where consumers experience flow. This gives traditional book retailers a strong and unique competitive advantage over online booksellers and e-book retailers as well as encouraging economic benefits for retailers. While the current research found that, overall, consumers responded positively to the presence of coffee shops, there was broad agreement that coffee shops should be in a clearly demarcated area within the bookshop. Mintel research (2007) has found that coffee shops tend to attract socioeconomic group ABC1. This could prove advantageous for bookshops which also tend to be populated by this social group, a growing proportion of the wider population.

Consumers were very positive about the potential use of bookshops as social venues, particularly in the evenings. Kreitzman (1999b, p.36) also suggests that the bookshop can be a 'social club', a venue which customers can come to in the evening, 'as though it were an event, an entertainment, rather than just buying a book'. Recent research also suggests that shopping events can be powerful tools, helping retailers to enhance their brands (Howard, 2007; Leischnig *et al*, 2011; Backstrom, 2011) although more research is needed to understand the subtleties of how events affect different consumers in different store types (Sands *et al*, 2009). While the use of bookshop space for these kinds of event is common in large cities,

they could be developed in smaller cities and towns, developing the role of the bookshop in local communities.

The limitations of the research should be borne in mind. The interviews, focus groups and face-to-face surveys were carried out in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh. This may limit the transferability of findings. Furthermore, research participant numbers are relatively modest. The geographic focus and relatively small sample numbers should be borne in mind when drawing conclusions.

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