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**New Motherhood: a moment of change in everyday shopping practices?**

*Young Consumers* Vol 15, No. 3 'New Parents and Young Children in Consumer Culture' p 211-226

**Abstract:**

The meanings, practices and implications of the transition to motherhood have long been a topic for sociological inquiry. Recently interest has turned to the opportunities offered by this transition for the adoption of more sustainable lifestyles. Becoming a mother is likely to lead to changes in a variety of aspects of everyday life such as travel, leisure, cooking and purchase of consumer goods, all of which have environmental implications. The environmental impacts associated with such changes are complex, and positive moves toward more sustainable activities in one sphere may be offset by less environmentally positive changes elsewhere. In this paper we draw on data from sixteen interviews (two each with eight women) to explore some of the ways in which everyday shopping may change as women become mothers.

Our focus is on the ways in which modes and meanings of everyday shopping may shift through the transition to mother, and on indicating any potential sustainability implications. We explore the adoption of more structured shopping and of shifting the mode of grocery shopping online or offline. We draw attention to the way in which practices are embedded and interrelated and argue that more consideration needs to be given to the influence of all household members.

Research supported by Defra, the ESRC, and Scottish Government.

## Introduction

In recent years sociological approaches to understanding sustainable consumption have increasingly focused on understanding how everyday practices which use resources and energy and create waste (such as cooking or washing) change or remain stable. One suggestion is that points of transition (such as retirement, moving house or becoming a parent) might result in disruption to established routines and provide a moment in which new – and perhaps more sustainable - ways of doing things take hold. This paper explores this idea, taking as its central question how everyday shopping practices change with the transition to motherhood.

New motherhood is a time at which many women experience profound change in the content of daily life, with some prior activities (going to work, going out) abandoned, new practices adopted (diverse aspects of caring for a baby) and the temporal order of day and night disrupted. Jackson *et al.* (2006) note the extent to which changes in household size and composition impact on household consumption practices and conclude: 'Future research...should place greater emphasis on consumers' household dynamics and changing lifestyles' (2006: 64). We respond to this by examining how everyday provisioning practices change – or remain stable - with the birth of a first child. Our question here is not whether women purchase different products or consume more once they have a child, but rather how does the everyday activity of shopping for groceries and the meanings it has change with new motherhood and what sustainability implications might this have? In this it provides a novel addition to research on new mothers and consumption.

We introduce the concept of 'moments of change' before moving on to consider shopping as social practice comprised of materials, meanings and skills. We then draw on interviews with eight women before and after the birth of their baby to explore some of the diverse ways in which their modes of everyday shopping have changed.

### **Transitions, moments of change and everyday practices**

Recent work within psychology, focuses on 'moments of change' when the circumstances of an individual's life change considerably (such as going to university, having a child, moving house or retiring) and are potential points at which existing habits may be more easily broken and new (more sustainable) habits easily formed (Verplanken, 2006). Such lifecourse transitions are known to bring about changes in household economy, leisure practices and social networks, and may also be points at which individuals consciously reflect on the lifestyle they want and are able to have (Horne *et al.*, 2005; Thompson *et al.*, 2011). Evidence for change in the performance of practices following the transition to motherhood, however, is limited and to a large extent related to changes in health behaviours, such as giving up smoking and alcohol (Sevin and Ladwein, 2008). We suggest that understanding of the dynamics of such changes might be enhanced by taking a longitudinal approach which follows women through the transition and by applying concepts from social practice theory to elucidate shifts in everyday practices.

Practice approaches diverge fundamentally from a psychological 'moments of change' perspective as the practice itself is placed at the heart of the model of social change rather than the individual (Spaargaren, 2003). Shove Pantzar and Watson (2012) develop a

necessarily simplified model of social practices, drawing attention to their constituent elements of Materials (objects, infrastructure) Skills (practical knowledge and know-how) and Meanings (social norms, ideas and interpretations). They argue that understanding change in social practices involves exploring the relationship between these elements, practices 'emerge, persist and disappear as links between the defining elements are made and broken' (2012: 22) and 'change when new elements are introduced or when existing elements are combined in new ways' (2012: 120)

Shove *et al.*'s analysis seeks to understand the dynamics of changes in practice at a macro scale (e.g. how to explain the rise in popularity of showering over time) and deliberately ignores 'the lives and ambitions' (2012: 40) of individual actors. In contrast we explicitly start with individual women, exploring how everyday life changes for them and the meanings this has. We suggest, however, that the conceptual model of meanings, materials and skills may be useful for exploring how performances of everyday shopping practices shift or remain stable as they become mothers. In exploring how shopping practices change we pay attention to stability and change in these elements and notice how the elements interconnect. We take practice theorists focus on 'doings' and use it to look at shopping in a way which focuses not solely on the stuff bought (though that is important) but also on the activity of shopping itself.

Much of the recent literature on practices has focused on those that are clearly defined (e.g. , Shove and Southerton, 2000; Hand *et al.*, 2005; Warde, 2005; Shove, 2005). There is recognition, however that 'the majority of mundane everyday life consumer practices are not delimited but highly integrated with each other' (Gram-Hanssen, 2011: 76). DeVault (1991) demonstrates how shopping is just one element of the work of 'provisioning' which in itself is tied up with broader household strategies. Even shopping is clearly not a single, easily defined

practice. Individuals have different ways of shopping for different kinds of goods and often combine several different modes of shopping for groceries (some online shopping, some popping into local shops, a veg box, milk delivered to the door etc) . Thus rather than trying to delimit the characteristics of 'the practice' of shopping we talk throughout of shopping practices to draw attention to their multifaceted and variable nature. Further, everyday shopping practices are inextricable from other everyday practices most notably those of cooking and personal transport, and embedded within broader projects of parenting (see Watson and Shove, 2008).

### *Shopping materials*

In terms of its material dimensions the infrastructure of shops within a locality and what they stock, along with the available transport infrastructure, impact both on how shopping is done and what is bought. Gregson *et al.*'s (2002) study of charity shopping emphasises that practices of shopping are intimately connected to specific shopping spaces and that consumers make choices within a particular geographical and social context (Clarke *et al.*, 2006; Donkin *et al.*, 1999; Ellaway and Macintyre, 2000; Zukin, 2005). More recently the rise of online shopping and increasing ownership of computers enables another mode of shopping. Other 'materials' within the home, along with the infrastructure of the home itself, also have implications for shopping practices - whether you have a car, a computer, a freezer, space to store bulk bought goods, a microwave and a large buggy may all play a part in shaping how, where and for what you shop. We also consider money as an absolutely crucial part of the materials which inform how shopping is done.

### *Shopping skills*

DeVault's rich ethnography of the provisioning practices of Chicago households reveals the extent to which 'shopping for food can be seen as a complex, artful activity' (1991:59). In a

study of consumers' reactions to the emergence of self service supermarkets from the 1950s to the 1970s, Alexander *et al.*, (2008) note that shopping for the family's food was considered to be a challenging task requiring skill, with proficiency in shopping taken to be a distinguishing feature between 'good' and 'bad' housewives. While women may now be less likely to seek the identity of the 'good housewife', shopping practices still require skills of budgeting and organisation (DeVault 1991). Purchasing goods from different kinds of shops also requires skill. Gregson *et al.* demonstrate this clearly in relation to shopping in charity shops: 'buying individual acts of second-hand clothing ... puts a strong premium on particular stocks of knowledge' (2002: 600). This knowledge encompasses where such shops are, the range and value of goods within them and the knowledge of how to find bargains. These observations are equally applicable to other kinds of shopping venues, for instance in supermarkets (see Alexander *et al.*, 2008), and from markets. In applying Shove *et al.*'s simplified model of practice to shopping we might also see the skills component as involving whether individuals can drive, whether they are skilled cooks and how skilful they are at online shopping.

### *Shopping meanings*

This element of shopping practices has received considerable attention. The observation that shopping may be variably understood as a chore, a treat (Gregson, 2002), or a social occasion (Jackson *et al.*, 2006) is well established. Sometimes 'doing the shopping' is about 'doing family' relationships. This is an observation made forcibly by DeVault (1991) who emphasises the extent to which it is fundamentally about 'doing the work of 'wife and mother'' through which 'women quite literally produce family life from day to day' (1991: 13). Miller (1998) also illustrates how grocery shopping is bound up with family relationships, seeing it as an act of devotion or love, most notably for partners and children.

Shopping is also informed by broader social discourses which play a 'co-coordinative role, providing a common point of reference for disparate practices' (Shove *et al.*, 2012: 85).

Notions of comfort, convenience, security, normality, organisation, care and thrift are often drawn on to explain shopping practices (see Clarke *et al.*, 2006;). These discourses are not particular to shopping but inform diverse aspects of parenting. Ideas and social norms about appropriate ways of behaving as a parent, as a wife, as a mother and as a woman also inform shopping practices (DeVault, 1991; Thompson, 1996).

The meanings element of social practice might also be taken to encompass values. In common with Hards (and in a longer discourse analytic tradition (see Potter and Wetherell, 1987) we do not treat values as residing within individuals rather we consider them as 'expressions of ideas circulating within society as cultural, ethical and political discourse and norms' (Hards, 2011: 26) .

In trying to understand how everyday shopping practices change as women become mothers we pay attention to changes in these three domains of materials, meanings and skills, and explore how change in one is often related to changes in the others. We do not assume, however that this conceptual model necessarily embodies all that it is important to understand about the factors which inform changes in everyday shopping practice. By applying it to our data as an ideal type we hope also to elucidate other factors which are important, but which perhaps are not sufficiently accounted for by this model.

### **New mothers, shopping practices and sustainability**

Sustainable consumption can broadly be defined as 'consuming in such a way as to protect the environment, use natural resources wisely and promote quality of life now, while not spoiling

the lives of future consumers' (Holdsworth 2003). The question of what a *sustainable lifestyle* actually comprises, however, is a notoriously complex one (Evans & Jackson 2007). Definitions often encompass not only the adoption of pro-environmental behaviours (in terms of personal transport, waste, water and energy behaviours at home and consumption of eco-products (Defra 2008)) but also broader quality of life issues including local participation and engagement with nature (Defra 2010). Following Giddens (1991) We take lifestyle to mean 'an assemblage of social practices, that represent a particular way of life and give substance to an individual's ongoing narrative self identity and self actualisation' (Evans and Jackson 2008:15). Thus we are interested not only in the things that people do and their consumption practices, but also their narrative of the right way to live one's life.

As outlined above, it has been hypothesised that life-course changes, such as the transition to motherhood, might have an impact on the sustainability of people's lifestyles (Verplanken 2006). Not only is early motherhood a time when women are confronted with new consumption decisions but it is also potentially a moment when they are likely to reflect on the sort of life they want for themselves and their child. One aspect of this relates to the acquisition, use and disposal of products. For instance, new mothers may choose products which are organic, opt for re-usable nappies and accept second-hand products. Equally of course they may prefer new products over old, buy disposable nappies and heavily packaged toys. Defining the sustainability of consumption practices is, however, notoriously difficult (Jackson 2006) and the sustainability of specific product categories is particularly highly contested (e.g see Thompson et al 2011 on nappies). While product choices are of interest, our conceptualisation of shopping as a practice also leads us to pay attention to how, where, when and how frequently shopping is done and it is this we concentrate on here.

The sustainability of different modes and frequencies of shopping is not clear cut. Walking to the shop is invariably more sustainable than driving, and driving for a 'weekly shop' is more sustainable than driving each day for immediate necessities. However walking to local shops daily might be seen as supporting the sustainability of the local community and whether online grocery shopping is deemed sustainable will depend on what indicators are drawn on. In this paper, we make no attempt to endorse particular ways of shopping as sustainable (or not). Rather we highlight dimensions of change that *might* have sustainability implications, for instance whether a car is used and whether the mode of shopping results in more or less food waste (see Defra, 2008; Scottish Government, 2013). While many studies of sustainable consumption focus on the extent of a gap between espoused environmental values and actions in accordance with those values (Barr, 2006), we are also interested in the extent to which those who express no environmental values engage in practices that may be considered sustainable.

Following an explanation of our methodology we focus on two clear ways in which the performance of shopping practices changed for a small sample of women as they became mothers.

## **Methodology**

The data analysed are from interviews with eight women before and after the birth of their baby. Interviews were approximately eight months apart. The interviews were conducted as part of a larger longitudinal project exploring ways in which lifestyles may become more or less sustainable as people experience the transition of becoming a parent or

retiring.<sup>1</sup> Interviews were broadly developed around understanding participants' lifestyles with particular attention to aspects of change and continuity. Our data provide accounts of what our participants do, rather than direct observations of practice. However, our focus on the content of everyday life means that when our participants talked about shopping they presented accounts describing everyday provisioning and contextualised this within discussion of changes in other practices, their life more broadly and their evaluations of the meaning of these changes.

We focus here on women living within one of our case study areas with some key characteristics in common. At the time of the first interview they were all aged between 28 and 33 years old, living with a male partner and all of their pregnancies were planned. They were all working (or had just given up work to go on maternity leave) and expected to return to work after the conclusion of paid maternity leave. They all lived in areas of South London close to a range of supermarkets and local shops and well served by public transport. These dimensions of similarity are important, however, there were also key dimensions of difference between them, most notably in terms of their occupation, ethnicity (and partner's ethnicity), tenure and housing type. Future work will explore dimensions of similarity and difference across the different geographical areas and other dimensions of difference. At the time of writing we had completed two interviews with each of eight women in the London sample.

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<sup>1</sup> In total forty new parents were recruited, ten from each of four locations (n=40), South London, Kent, Lancaster town and rural Scotland from a range of socio-demographic groups. Each participant was invited to undertake three in-depth interviews in their own homes, during the course of the project, at eight month intervals. After each interview participants were asked to keep a reflective diary for seven days and following the first and final interview they were asked to complete a questionnaire about their lifestyle habits, attitudes and values.

We begin by providing an overview of the extent to which participants considered that their lives had changed following the birth of their babies, before detailing two key ways in which grocery shopping practices changed: becoming more organised and going on (or off line). Our analysis concludes by considering the role played by partners and babies in changing participants' shopping practices and argues for the need to develop a model of social practice which takes family relationships more seriously.

## **Analysis**

### ***A time of change***

For all of our participants everyday life had changed significantly between the two interviews. They had all stopped working and were spending more time at home and in their local neighbourhoods. Time was no longer spent commuting and at work, but new activities involved with caring for their babies and socialising with other local mothers had taken their place. All but one (who had savings from lucrative past employment) commented on the change to their financial circumstances now they were relying on maternity pay and also anticipated a future in which they might work part time. Despite universal agreement that caring for a baby is 'exhausting' (Helen: int 2) all of them commented on how much they were enjoying this phase:

"I love it, I am having a ball." (Charlotte: Int. 2)

"Very enjoyable": "it's very lovely, very fulfilling." (Samantha: Int. 2)

"I love being a mum." (Helen: Int. 2)

All reflected on how their priorities had shifted with the birth of their baby with everyday decisions and activities revolving around their baby's behaviour and routines and their

perceptions of what was best for them. This was often conceptualised as a major change, not just in their daily practices but in their whole outlook:

“I don’t think you can ever anticipate really how it changes, how your life is focused around a baby now.” (Samantha: Int. 2)

“I think it’s quite a humbling thing – when you realise that you’re not . . . not in control and she’s another little person who, you know, you can’t make do this and that, like the book says.” (Helen: Int. 2)

“Every waking thought is her really and now we’re a family it’s changed all sorts of things.” (Fiona: Int. 2)

This sense of loss of individual control and re-orientation around the baby recurred throughout the interviews. Thompson (1996) suggests that this is such a powerful ideology of gender and motherhood that: ‘it would constitute a social taboo for a woman with children not to place motherhood at the centre of her identity’ (Thompson, 1996: 398) and Miller (2005) suggests:

‘It may well be that the virtual cult of the infant...has for some people replaced religion as the main experience in life within which the sense of transcendence of one’s individuality is felt and avowed’ Miller, 2005: 34).

Taken together these changes in daily activities, everyday location, finances and personal re-orientation led some participants to describe their everyday life after the baby as profoundly changed: ‘It’s just a different life and I feel more comfortable with this life now.’ (Denise: Int. 2)

All of these aspects of change (of time, money, location and orientation) potentially inform changes to everyday shopping and it is to this we now turn.

### ***Shopping ‘habits’***

Before exploring two areas of change in shopping practices it is worth noting the extent to which participants talked of their shopping practices as habitual and reflected on their attempts to change their habits. Clear ideas of good and bad habits pervaded the interviews. 'Bad' habits related mainly to buying too much, of excessive or un-regulated shopping. For instance in her first interview Fiona talked about buying clothes for her (as yet unborn) baby:

"Interviewer: Have you done lots of that?

Fiona: Yes... vowed never to do it again, I have got bags of stuff. .. I was terrible... all of a sudden now Mothercare is my favourite shop so I have to go in every so often just to see what is new. Which is really bad. I have had to stop. We can't buy anything else." (Fiona: Int. 1)

Her account here is suffused with the language of bad habits which must be broken ('vowed never to do it again', 'have had to stop'). In contrast 'good' shopping habits revolved around being organised, planning and budgeting. This is a theme we will return to, but for now Samantha's account of her attempts to be more organised in her grocery shopping and to stop constantly popping into shops illustrates the extent to which this is talked about in terms of trying to acquire new habits:

"But you know, like today, I was stuck in Asda again just buying something ... but I think I will get better at being strict and just saying okay we'll top up with milk and that's it." (Samantha: Int. 2)

Her account suggests that she found herself 'stuck in Asda' almost against her will and emphasises that the acquisition of new habits requires time and perseverance

### ***Getting organised: Shopping with a list and meal planning***

In the first interview participants were asked to consider how aspects of everyday life might change once they had a baby. A common response was that they expected to have less money

and this would impact on the way they shopped, with aspirations to be 'more organised' or 'sensible', to shop with a list and to plan meals. This is a change which we might consider to have some implications for sustainability as this approach to shopping would be expected to result in less food waste (WRAP, 2013).

In a study of working mothers, Thompson draws attention to the importance attached to scheduling as a prominent source of control in a lifestyle in which women see themselves as responsible for holding the family together: 'control issues can reflect a caring orientation in which one feels responsible for maintaining the integrity of social network' (1996 : 404) . At the first interview our participants looked forward to life with the baby but often commented that they had no idea how it would be:

"I'm a little apprehensive, I know it's going to change because it has to... but it's just, I ... don't know exactly how". (Danielle: Int. 1)

Shopping is one aspect of life which they feel able to make plans for. Arguably, talk of the desire to get more organised in this domain of everyday life is not only informed by material concerns about changes in financial circumstances but also by a sense of increasing responsibility and desire for a sphere of control similar to that experienced in employment (Bailey, 2000).

In the first interview Fiona described her 'project' to get organised and spend less on her shopping:

"We'd end up just going up to say the Cooperative, just up the road, or Sainsburys, the convenience ones, not the big stores, and just buying as we go which was crazy because it's so much more expensive ... it's not organised in any way or form ... you know, I said, "Right, we're going to ...get organised again," (Fiona: Int. 1)

Similarly, Samantha talked of her desire to do more 'structured' shopping and thus save money. Their grocery shop involved walking to local supermarkets and shopping most days for extra 'odd bits':

"I am forever saying we need to sort our shopping out because we just spend so much money. We just spend ten or fifteen pounds each time and you think 'how have I spent all this money?' ... when we move somewhere else I think I am going to get more structure around how we do our shopping. Just being a bit more organised.  
(Samantha: Int. 1)

For Samantha shopping with a list was about ensuring a diverse diet as well as saving money.

For Charlotte, uniquely in this group, it was also explicitly about cutting down on food waste.

In the first interview Charlotte indicated that her shopping practice was informed by concerns about materialism and waste:

"[The] Sheer volume of what we consume and the cheapness... you buy crap for very little money, it doesn't last very long, so things like handbags I've started to try, If I'm buying myself a new handbag ... it'll be a good handbag that... will last me 5 to 10 years rather than sort of buying something and then throwing it away again."  
(Charlotte: Int. 1)

In terms of food shopping Charlotte and her husband drove to the supermarket to shop for groceries at the weekend. Their decisions about what to buy were informed by ideas about health, enjoyment and 'natural' food rather than cost:

"When we ... started earning real money we made a decision that we would just enjoy our money so we don't really worry about what we spend on the shopping overly.  
(Charlotte: Int. 1).

They did not shop with a list ('I don't know what I want to eat till the day') and Charlotte was a skilled cook who usually 'makes things up' rather than relying on recipes. Charlotte was conscious that their approach to shopping and cooking led to food waste and while they have

a compost bin in their garden, say the amount they waste 'will have to change'. She anticipated that their shopping would change with the birth of their baby largely as 'the way we manage our money will change'.

At the time of her second interview Charlotte was very conscious that they had less money as she was not working. Their main mode of grocery shopping had not changed, and they still drove to the supermarket at the weekend. Charlotte explained that not being at work gave her 'the mental head space' to think more about shopping and cooking and she now shopped more economically, used a list and had become skilled at finding 'bargains' :

" I have become quite a bargain queen. My sister who is very tight looks at me sometimes! So I will be looking at the per unit price, or if there is two for one offers on cheese and that kind of stuff, and [I] also plan our meals for the week ahead and buy for meals. I don't think we used to shop with a shopping list to be honest but we do now." (Charlotte: Int. 2)

As she anticipated in her first interview she bought fewer organic vegetables but 'there are still certain things I won't compromise on, I still buy free range meat, sometimes organic. I am not buying cheap meat. I would rather forgo meat a couple of nights a week'. Charlotte was not using her compost bin anymore 'mainly because our compost bin got full.. and we haven't got round to get another one, but we have got out of the habit and we need to get back into it'. However she indicated that they were now wasting less food, both because they shopped to a list, and because she was able to use up small amounts of fruit and vegetables in making baby food. She also said 'at the end of the week rather than going to the shops to get stuff in I will look at what we have got and make do with what we have got'.

If we look at the development of more structured shopping with a list of in terms of a modification to practice, how do the elements of meaning, skills and materials come into play? In Charlotte's case while a material (financial) element underpinned the change, her pre-existing values around avoiding waste and concerns about materialism were reflected in, and

reinforced by, her new approach to shopping. Her existing skills in cooking enabled her to use leftovers creatively and her new skills as a 'bargain queen' were positively evaluated by members of her family. In all of the accounts we note the extent to which interviewees often referred to what 'we' do, drawing attention to the fact that decisions about finances, shopping and provisioning were negotiated within and as households, and often involved family members participating in different ways. We will return to this observation later.

### ***Going online/offline***

Another clear change in some of our participants' shopping practice was the adoption, or cessation, of shopping online for groceries. The sustainability implications of online grocery shopping are not clear cut. Zukin suggests that while internet shopping promises to save both time and money 'the virtual space of internet shopping works against- rather than for these values' (2005:232) and might be expected to 'feed consumer desire for commodities' (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2010: 59). More positively, online *grocery* shopping might encourage more structured shopping (which might be linked to less food waste) and reduce the purchase of items which are not on the list. It also cuts down on car journeys to the supermarket. However, online grocery shopping is clearly not a straightforwardly sustainable option. The increase in shopping online has implications for the viability of local high streets which might be seen as an essential part of a sustainable community (Living Streets, 2012).

All of the eight women interviewed had computers and bought some products online. We focus here first on two women who changed to online grocery shopping over the transition and then on two who moved away from it.

### *Going online*

Samantha and her partner did not have a car. Samantha's husband bought all their fruit and vegetables from Brixton market, she explained that he used to work at another market and is skilled at this sort of shopping. At the time of the first interview the rest of their grocery shop involved walking to local supermarkets. Samantha was mindful that her shopping was unstructured and therefore more expensive than it need be, and she aspired to be 'more organised'. She resented the amount of time spent shopping at the weekend and suggested that she would rather 'do an internet shop, do a big shop every ten days or something'. She had not done her grocery shopping this way, however, although frequently shops online for other goods and services.

By the time of the second interview the way Samantha and her husband shopped and cooked had changed. She had started doing her grocery shopping online because of her frustration with the time and the money she was spending on shopping. She described how she felt 'we were always in a flipping supermarket' and found the arrival of the online shopping 'just lovely', although her husband thought that it was expensive. They were still getting their fruit and vegetables from Brixton market and she enjoyed this as an opportunity to go out with her husband : 'it's quite nice to walk around Brixton market and like go for a drink down there'. The opportunity that shopping can offer for time with partners was also echoed by other participants.

So for Samantha going online was explained in terms of her desire to free up time from the activity of shopping, coupled with a commitment to being more organised. Whether this strategy had resulted in financial savings seemed to be a matter of debate between her and her husband. Samantha's husband's skilled market shopping had persisted, and this had now

become an opportunity for them to go out together. Zukin (2005) suggests that internet shopping impoverishes the experience of shopping as it removes the pleasure of seeing and smelling goods. We see here however how Samantha strategically combines modes of shopping to avoid what she considered to be wasting time in supermarkets while maintaining the valued social and sensual element of shopping in her trips to the market.

When Thea was first interviewed she explained that she and her husband drove to Tesco's and did a 'massive shop' once a month, and also 'pick up bits and pieces on a weekly basis' from local stores. When buying groceries 'the main aim would be whatever is on half price or two for something'. While she bought clothes and other goods online she had not bought groceries online.

Thea lived on the fourth floor of a block of flats without a lift, and in the second interview described the difficulty of having to carry her baby up and down the steps whenever she went out. She left her pram in the boot of her car and found it hard that she could not just wheel the pram into the flat if her daughter was asleep: 'obviously I have to fold everything up so she ends up waking up, so that's not ideal'. The reality of having to carry her baby upstairs had influenced the way they shop: 'we have just done internet shopping and got them to deliver it here... It's just really tough carrying her and carrying bags up the stairs'.

Thea also bought more clothes and other commodities on the internet and explained this in terms of the experience of going out shopping with a baby: 'sometimes she's in the mood, but I tend to find any time we go anywhere shopping she'll just scream and it's just a hassle, so I tend to do a lot more buying on the internet'. For Thea the material fact of living in a flat without a lift, impacted on her shopping practices once she had a baby. The physical difficulty of carrying a baby and the shopping was compounded by her concern that this practice upset her baby, and disturbed her sleep. The influence of her baby on her shopping was also

manifested in her increased shopping online for other goods, as she indicated that going to the shops was not pleasant for the baby, and therefore not for her either. This account of shopping being done in a way which fits with the baby's routine also recurred throughout the other interviews.

### *Going offline*

When Danielle was first interviewed neither she nor her partner had a car. She had a driving test scheduled just days before her baby was due and anticipated that if she passed, her father would get her a car. She was strongly opposed to the idea of taking her buggy on a bus 'the thought of taking the buggy on the bus is not appealing, people are so mean and inconsiderate'. Danielle's preferred way of grocery shopping was to do an online order 'and be good for about a fortnight' while her partner preferred 'to do that every other day type of shop'. She does not have a list but aspired to. Apart from these big online shops Danielle said 'my other half has pretty much taken over really with grocery shopping... I think it's kind of his way of being useful. ...Just being involved in part of the whole process and stuff.'

By the time of the second interview Danielle had passed her driving test and had a car. Rather than doing a big shop online she now drove to the supermarket with the baby. She explained this in terms of her need to get out, as online shopping 'keeps me in the house'. She also felt that the baby needed to get out of the house 'I think it's good for her to be out and to be around people...even if it's just...to do grocery shopping'.

For Danielle the fact that she had acquired driving skills and a car meant that she was now able to drive to the shops. This, combined with her pre-existing opposition to travelling on a bus with her baby, and her new need to 'get out of the house' made driving to the shops a better

option. Her account also points to the significance of care for others in shaping how she shopped (not just what is bought). Her desire to make her partner feel involved led her to go to the shops rather than purchase online, and her concern for her baby's social development was implicated in this decision. In her concern to enable her partner to be involved and her baby to be social we see more than a reflection of the desires of other members of the household, as Miller suggests 'It is also ... an educative and transforming means by which these others can be developed and moulded' (1998:38) into a good partner and a good child.

Denise and her husband have what she called 'good careers' and were committed to doing 'everything the right way, work hard etc'. With her pregnancy her focus shifted: 'I'd got to the point in my life where I've done the whole career thing, got to the top of the ladder and now my next stage of life is about family, and that's my focus'. In both interviews she described her new role in terms of a job at which she planned to excel:

"Other friends that have children are 'oh my god I have to do everything on my own' like they're saying it in a negative way. And I kind of think that that's your job, you know for me personally I'm now not working and... I see (this) as my job now."  
(Denise: Int. 2)

During the first interview she outlined her plans to become more organised with her shopping which for her meant doing it online. She already did most of her other shopping online as she: 'hates shopping centres' and has 'concerns about 'some horrible person that wants to ...take your bag'.

After the birth of her baby her shopping changed, but not in the way she anticipated. She took the baby shopping, walked to local shops for the 'fresh stuff' but drove to do a fortnightly shop:

“We’ve totally changed food shopping now...Because we’ve taken more interest in good food and stuff, the online stuff you just don’t get the good stuff. Plus it’s almost a bit of an outing for (baby) and I go and do the shop. It’s quite a nice thing to do together. So rather than making it just a quick annoying thing to do, we actually go out, write a proper list, bring stuff back and pick stuff.” (Denise: Int. 2)

For Denise online shopping did not enable her to choose ‘good food’ or see bargains in the way that a trip to the shops did. Food shopping had been transformed from ‘a quick annoying thing to ‘part of doing her new ‘job’, ‘properly’, and an opportunity for a ‘nice’ outing with her baby. Beginning to go out more with her baby had led her to reassess some of her attitudes about other people:

“Before she came...I think I would look at society very negatively, like there’s lot of horrible people out there, but weirdly when I’m out with her and it’s a totally different environment....It’s a different world.” (Denise: Int. 2)

In exploring the change towards more or less on-line grocery shopping we have highlighted the varied influences of materials, meanings and skills and changes in each of these domains. Materials, such as computers, the built environment, local shops and available modes of transport clearly have a role. The meanings associated with being a good mother and of maintaining relationships with partners were pervasive and interestingly were drawn on both to support more - and less - on line shopping. Meanings associated with public transport and shopping centres were also important, however as we have seen sometimes pre-existing meanings played a key role in shaping practices and sometimes meanings were challenged or changed by the adoption of new practices. Throughout all of the accounts of change we note the importance of considerations of the welfare of babies and partners. We also note the contribution that partners’ skills make to how household shopping is done.

***Other people: care, gender and doing family***

In all of these accounts of shopping practices we see consideration given to the schedules, desires and needs of others. Individuals act in the context of webs of relationships and the meanings they ascribe to those relationships. Participants often explain that they do things in particular ways because they prioritise what others want (even when this sometimes contradicts what they would do 'if it was just up to me') – 'people shop in, and for, households and families, rather than as 'individuals' (Clarke *et al.*, 2006: 29). Shopping is done when and where the baby is happy, as an outing, to enable time to be spent with a partner or an opportunity to make him feel involved. The observation that grocery shopping can be seen as fundamentally about 'doing care' for others (DeVault 1991; Miller, 1998) and the construction of the self as an appropriate mother (Clarke 2004; Miller 2004) is not new. Jackson notes that 'discourses of care and concern for others fundamentally rooted in cultural ideals related to motherhood may be 'realised concretely through everyday consumption activities' (Jackson, 2006: 390) and Clarke suggests that 'from the onset of pregnancy, the conceptualisation of motherhood is bound up with facets of provisioning and consumption' (2004: 55). Previous work, however, has tended to focus on the choice, purchase and use of the products themselves through which caring work is done and identity is constructed. Our analysis indicates that how, when and where the shopping is done is also profoundly influenced by discourses and conventions of caring and plays a role in women's construction both of themselves and of their family.

The significance of other people should not simply be understood, however, in terms of gendered or maternal ideas about care and concern for others. The very physical presence of others within a household means decisions about shopping (and other aspects of everyday practice) are not individual. For some of our interviewees the presence of partners who do the

shopping and the cooking literally means that these are practices which they do not have to do. The materials, meanings and skills of their partners influence the household shopping practices. For instance the fact that Fiona's husband was vegetarian, had a lot of time at home as he was studying, and was a keen cook affected what they bought and ate. Samantha's husband's skills and commitment to market shopping meant that they got all their fruit and vegetables from a market. The physical presence of the baby was important too. While ideas about appropriate care for particular babies might lead women in quite different directions, (whether it is better for the baby to be in a car or a buggy for instance) the physical presence of a baby affected some practices in clear ways: for Thea to carry her shopping and her baby upstairs was almost impossible.

## Conclusions

Our aim here was to explore how everyday shopping practices changed - or remained stable – in the first few months of motherhood. Unsurprisingly our participants confirmed that this is a period of huge change, with modifications being made to how they shop along with many other aspects of everyday life. To some extent this confirms the idea that this is a 'moment of change' in which individuals are open to change in aspects of their lives and are also consciously reflecting on the lifestyle they want and are able to have (Horne *et al.*, 2005; Thompson *et al.*, 2011). We would caution, however, against the terminology of a 'moment' of change. Our research indicates that change is ongoing and any changes in habit may be ephemeral. The women we spoke to indicated that aspects of their lives had changed during pregnancy and then again following the birth of their babies. As the babies grew older routines and practices adopted in the early days after birth changed – what is considered convenient and appropriate with a tiny baby will not be so with a six month or one year old. At the time of

the second interview our participants were anticipating changes that may take place in the months ahead as they negotiated returning to work. Some were planning to move house, have a second child or anticipated changes to their partners' job and economic status. The changes – in the age of the baby, in the temporal organization of their day, in their economic situation and potentially where they lived, were all expected to impact shopping practices again. Thus rather than talking of a 'moment' of change we see this transition as ongoing and fluid, with practices continuing to shift over time. Here the benefits of a longitudinal approach are clear, allowing for the tracking of practices over time. Follow up interviews will enable us to explore further how practices stick, or continue to change and evolve over time.

What is clear, however, is that during the period when new mothers were on maternity leave they were particularly focused on ideas of being organised, of economising and of caring for their babies and partners. Our analysis indicates that these considerations inform not only what is bought but also how shopping is done. The pervasive use of discourses of good and bad shopping habits suggests this is an area in which explicit interventions aimed at enabling 'good habits' might have some purchase. Previous work on the opportunities for the adoption of sustainable practices among new mothers has, however, recognised the challenge of introducing sustainability advice and initiatives at a time when women are already coping with myriad changes and are often overwhelmed with information and advice (Thompson et al 2011). Indeed, initiatives targeted specifically at mothers could be seen as reinforcing gendered roles, increasing the burden of household responsibility on women and making them feel guilty 'for not caring enough for their family's health and the health of the planet' (Seager 1993: 258). Initiatives aimed at encouraging more sustainable shopping practices thus need to work with an awareness of the reality of life for new mothers and in ways which help them realise existing priorities rather than introducing new demands.

We are not interested only in how shopping practices change but also in the extent to which these changes might contribute to more sustainable lifestyles. We have chosen here to focus on changes in the mode of everyday shopping, but clearly considerations of what is bought are relevant. Our data indicate that issues around buying meat, buying/accepting second-hand goods and nappies will be particularly interesting to pursue in future analyses. What our analysis confirms, however, is that assessments of the sustainability of practices are notoriously difficult to make and depend on what aspect of sustainability is focused on. Practices which are positive in terms of carbon emissions may be less so in terms of local sustainability. It is also clear that even when change in shopping practice might be evaluated as in some way more sustainable, this is seldom a rationale which participants themselves use. In this analysis only Charlotte presented values of anti materialism and aversion to waste which then led her to see the changes she had made as particularly positive. However, even for her, changes in her shopping practices were explained primarily in terms of changes in their financial situation, the desire to be organised and the fact that she had more time at home. As in many other spheres, sustainable practices may not be best encouraged by any talk of sustainability but rather by drawing attention to other advantages (in terms of wellbeing, economics or organisation for instance).

While Shove *et al.*'s (2012) simplified theory of practice, with its constituent elements of materials, meanings and skills, is specifically *not* intended to explore changes in individual practice, we find that focusing on these elements is useful in understanding the dynamics of changes at this level. Changes in shopping practice cannot be understood simply by pointing to material changes (in household income for instance) but also rely on alignments between the meanings ascribed to different ways of shopping and the shopping skills of household

members. The presence of particular meanings, materials or skills does not mean, however, that shopping will take a particular form. Individuals may share materials, meanings and skills (for instance the desire to be organised, the need to do what is best for their baby or ownership of a car) but yet have different shopping practices; the same elements can be used to justify radically different configurations of practice. Conversely the content of the elements of practice cannot simply be read off from a performance. While participants share similar practices (shopping online, walking to local shops etc) the materials, meanings and skills which explain these vary considerably. In their study of the transition to motherhood Thomson *et al.* (2009) developed the concept of 'the situation' to capture the commonalities of the experience without ignoring the contingencies and differences.

'The situation can be simultaneously embodied, biographical and specific, yet also understood as produced and constrained by historical circumstance and social patterning' (Thomson *et al.*, 2009: 199).

We find this approach appealing as it allows us to try to trace common aspects in changes to the performance of everyday practices through the transition to motherhood whilst not losing sight of participants' diverse personal circumstances, histories and values.

Attempting to map how shopping practices shift at this point of transition highlights the extent to which practices are interconnected and constituent of bigger projects. Most obviously shopping practices cannot be fully understood without understanding cooking and transport practices and need to be seen in terms of overarching projects of parenting. As Clarke *et al.* conclude: 'From such a perspective, food shopping emerges as a routine practice, deeply embedded within other social practices, infrastructures and sociotechnical systems' (Clarke *et al.*, 2006:29).

While consideration of meanings, materials and skills is essential to understanding how practices are constituted and how they change, we have found that if we use this model to explore individual practices it does not adequately capture the influence of other people in the household. Some aspects of care and concerns for the wellbeing of others can be subsumed within the meaning element, but this does not capture the extent to which the partner's materials, meanings and skills inform how shopping is done, nor satisfactorily account for the impact of the physical presence of a baby. Approaches to sustainable behaviour change which focus on individual attitudes and behaviours note the importance of others (see Chatterton, 2011) but continue largely to treat individuals as if they act in isolation. While practice approaches are inherently social, emphasising the importance of shared meanings and norms in shaping everyday practice, to some extent individuals are treated as somewhat isolated agents subject to these shared social meanings. The location of individuals within personal relationships is not given much attention. Our analysis indicates that other family members play a particularly critical role in shaping the shopping practices of individuals - indeed it makes more sense to focus on household – rather than individual – practices. This is an issue which deserves further exploration.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group (SLRG) is funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Economics and Social Research Council and the Scottish Government. The authors gratefully acknowledge this funding, the respondents for taking part in the research, and the support of colleagues in SLRG. Thanks also to Lydia Martens and Mary Jane Kehily for really helpful comments on earlier drafts.

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Not for Citation