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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted everyday consumption routines and rituals, as well as their accompanying relationships. In doing so, the importance of such familiar activities to social meanings, cohesiveness, and wellbeing was made apparent. Often overlooked in their familiarity, the day-to-day and mundane aspects of consumption that take place in the immediate surroundings of consumers, are shown in this article to help define, preserve, and give meaning to everyday life. Autoethnography of everyday familial consumption during COVID-19 develops themes of retreat, reconfiguration, and resistance, whereby routines initially disrupted by the pandemic were recalibrated using digital technologies and altered habits and reasserted via minor resistances. Illustrated is the resilience of everyday consumption rooted in the practical, imaginative, and cynical responses of family to restrictions upon.

Introduction: unpacking everyday consumption

The shopping is all unpacked onto the kitchen counter. A few adjustments arrange the haul to best effect. The La Mère Poulard biscuits, an exciting find at any time, and a bargain at 99p, are brought to the front. Behind them a range of manuka honey-infused toiletries. Essentials, bin bags and sponges, do not enhance the scene and are pushed to one side. The roll of tin foil does make the cut, however. It is a new type that claims to be ultra non-stick and has an unusual star pattern. Lastly, the till receipt is unrolled, straightened, and placed over the top of the assembled items, like a show ribbon. Scene set, a photograph is taken and uploaded to the family group chat. For the next twenty minutes or so, and then intermittently throughout the evening as others observe and comment, the purchases will be discussed and compared. Exchanges focus on consumer deals. The identifying and maximising of consumer value gains as much attention as the actual consumed outcomes. Mutual pleasure is in highlighting, comparing, and sharing consumer transactions.

Idiosyncratic consumption routines and rituals on a micro scale, such as this familial unpacking practiced by my in-laws, happen everywhere all the time. These are the myriad mundane and everyday activities touching upon consumption that make up its richness and

variety. Inspired by COVID-19 lockdowns in the UK, a context of restrictions upon day-to-day routines that paradoxically made these more appreciable, autoethnographic research questions what happens when everyday consumption is disrupted? Research highlights the frayed social connections, declining emotional wellbeing, and growing concern for vulnerable group members that accompanied constraints upon habitual consumption. Findings also capture creative adaptations of consumption that subverted restrictions by incorporating new technology and shifting established shopping patterns, as well as rising cynicism leading to instances of ignoring or rejecting limitations on collective consumption.

The contribution of this research is to highlight the importance and resilience of everyday consumption habits typically invisible in their familiarity. Rook (1985) notes the pervasiveness of ritual behaviour in everyday life, comprising activities across home, work, and play, as well as those that mark significant life events or rites of passage. Yet, there is a danger that the ordinariness of the everyday is taken to mean 'unremarkable', and thus gets overlooked (Grumley, 2015). Studies of consumer ritual, for example, characterised by elements of dramatic performance and personal-collective meaning (Rook, 1985), and their associated routines, the daily rhythms of lives that provide their predictability (Highmore, 2004), have tended to prioritise the former. As framed by Tinson and Nuttall (2010), research on consumer ritual has investigated special holidays, such as Valentine's Day (Close & Zinkhan, 2006), life-changing events, such as marriage (Otnes & Lowrey, 1993), personal experiences, such as car consumption (Belk, 2004), and shared occasions, such as gift giving at baby showers (Fischer & Gainer, 1993). Such examples demonstrate a tendency towards exploring the unusual, dramatic, noteworthy, rather than the day-to-day, of the ritualised activities and events that symbolise important and meaningful life experiences regularly practised by consumers (Ruth, 1995).

Using COVID-19 as an opportunity to recognise and explore what is often overlooked, therefore, this focus on the everyday differs from analyses of novel consumer behaviours necessitated by COVID-19-related mandates, such as mask wearing (Ackermann et al., 2021), or contact tracing app downloads (Robin & Dandis, 2021), by evaluating familiar consumer behaviours during the pandemic. Elsewhere, Cho et al. (2021) note the increases in boredom and nostalgia amongst sports consumers deprived of their usual fitness activities by COVID-19 restrictions. Their findings suggest initial impositions upon and strategies for preserving everyday consumption and its meaningfulness to individual and collective lives. Here, consumption routines and rituals were found to be similarly missed in their absence, as well as organically and creatively re-established in the immediate environment of consumers. Research illustrates consumption may be adopted as integral to and strengthening familial routines and relationships as well as adapted to protect and propagate these.

Theoretically, this paper draws on Agnes Heller's[1] (1984) philosophy of everyday life, using this to frame analysis of everyday consumption during COVID-19. In everyday life, Heller sets out her ambition to query the simultaneous individual routines, collective meanings, and institutional norms that frame and are perpetuated by daily human lives. Wolin (1987) characterises Heller's thinking that the extent to which customs, habits, and traditions are simply there, the everyday is largely unconscious. Thus, social and cultural theories of everyday life are interested in highlighting details that are likely to be overlooked in the performance of banal routines (Kalekin-Fishman, 2013). This paper begins with a review of everyday consumption, the mundane habitual consumption that occurs

in the immediate environment of the consumer, linking this with Heller's outlining of everyday life.

Methodologically, autoethnography was used to explore familial consumption in the UK during March 2020 – March 2022, a period shaped by the global pandemic, national government mandated lockdowns, and other health and safety measures (see Institute for Government, 2022). This time of disruption ironically provided fertile ground for reflecting upon the everyday and revealing the flexible side of habits and routines so often imagined as stable and stubborn (Trentmann, 2020). Autoethnography was used in selecting, representing, and interpreting familial experiences of COVID-19, and to inform meanings and shared understandings of this period (Haynes, 2011). Grouped around themes of retreat, reconfiguration, and resistance that reflected the shifting experiences, attitudes, and feelings of family, findings share insights from two years of mundane consumption during the pandemic, before discussion considers insights gained from examining the everyday.

Theory: everyday consumption

'Everyday' refers to those routines and rituals which constitute the bulk of daily life, such as preparing meals or relaxing, and mundane everyday consumption occurs while and as an integral part of negotiating these daily life tasks (Schultz-Kleine & Kernan, 1992). Everydayness connotes routinised and domestic (Featherstone, 1992), the normal run of things, the usual and the commonplace, whereby everyday experience is what happens in typical form today as it did yesterday and will do tomorrow (Sandywell, 2004). Consumption plays a dynamic role in the experience of everyday life, sometimes acting as the driving force in our life-worlds, and at other times disappearing or fading from view, becoming naturalised, taken for granted, the background, or frame to our behaviour (Miller, 2010). Alongside the transformational and memorable, consumption often involves micro happenings that we soon are unable to recall (Megehee et al., 2016). Marshall (2005, p. 69) describes food consumption for example, as 'extraordinary in its ordinariness, exceptional in the extent to which we treat it as mundane'. For Trentmann (2020), this normal and quotidian is organic and spontaneous, a process in which fragile orders are ruptured and repaired. Describing disruption as an integral constituent of the quotidian, Trentmann positions routines and habits as outcomes of repair work around the creativity and destruction that accompanies it. Illustrating this, Marshall (2021) highlights how domestic practices, such as household food storage, attempt to manage and control everyday life with its routines and disruptions. In this sense, consumers' everyday lives are full of dilemmas and ambivalences, and involve multiple consumer choices of varying complexity and consciousness, taking place under different conditions, and requiring various competencies (Fuentes & Sörum, 2019).

Referring, therefore, to 'an immense domain of defeasible practices and transgressive experiences that are continuously in play as individuals and groups construct and reconstruct the configurations through which they reflexively make sense of their lives' (Sandywell, 2004, p. 175), analysis of the everyday can provide insights into and critiques of market patterns, systems, and power (Kalekin-Fishman, 2013). Indeed, studies within consumer research have illustrated the value of recognising, recalling, and reflecting on the everyday as a means of better understanding consumers

ordinary routines, settings, identities. Marshall (2005), for example, explores the typically unconscious and inexplicit cultural scripts, norms, connections that are associated with the daily routines and rituals around meals. Holttinen (2014) similarly surveys how consumers enact cultural ideals around the mundane consumption that is weekday dinner practice, describing them as pragmatic, flexible, fragmented, and evolving cultural identity projects and ideals, consumption meanings and choices. Elsewhere, Liu et al. (2016) analyse consumers' managing of their everyday self-presentation to attain a sense of wellbeing, Compeau et al. (2016) review consumers' expressing and defining of self and relationships via everyday shopping experiences, and Banister et al. (2020) analyse the ways that individuals may work creatively with mundane objects and routine activities to provide routes towards status and self-transformation. Meanwhile, Bhattacharjee and Mogilner (2014) find that consumers consciously seek and engage with momentarily exhilarating experiences to explore potential identities, and then switch to routine patterns of consumption once they have formed durable and stable identities.

Hence, Kleine et al. (1993) suggest that though ordinary products used in day-to-day living are not dramatic, they nonetheless contribute to and reflect a sense of identity as it manifests in mundane tasks and the consumer behaviours necessary to enact them. Illustrating, Holt and Thompson (2004) look at the consumption and construction of masculinity through an investigation of the more quotidian and pervasive aspects of American men's consumption in their everyday lives. This everyday focus allows them to explore a complex cultural dialectic that emphasis on more unusual consumption might not be able to develop. Thompson and Haytko (1997) meanwhile, explore the ways that consumers can negotiate, appropriate, and resist dominant fashion discourses and norms. They do this by integrating abstract socially contextual fashion meanings into various aspects of more concretely personal daily lives, such as adopting aesthetic ideals of athletic bodies as more natural than the thinness often found in fashion marketing. In this way, consumers express critical readings of those selected aspects of the fashion world they deem relevant to their everyday lives and articulate 'a personalised sense of fashion that runs against the grain of what they perceive as a dominant fashion orientation of their social settings' (Thompson & Haytko, 1997, p. 35).

As such, the everyday helps to rethink ways that consumption is often an ordinary and integral aspect of everyday life, as well as to recognise the ways that the myriad outcomes of repair work found in daily life shape consumption and markets. The everyday nonetheless remains somewhat neglected in consumer studies. Kravets (2011, p. 35) suggests that because of an interest in change and transformation processes generally associated with or more visible among marginal groups, extreme behaviours or happenings, and magical spaces, 'in consumer and market culture research, we have given only a scant attention to mundane objects, experiences, and spaces while most consumers, most of the time, engage in ordinary, routine, and continuous consumption practices entailing simple objects in plain spaces'. In a related area, Tadajewski (2019) suggests that habits, defined as activity influenced by prior activity, which helps to background organise minor elements of action (Dewey, 1922), are a neglected area of marketing. Hence, Carù and Cova (2003) call for further appreciation of ordinary consumption experiences, whilst Banister et al. (2020) recommends greater attention be given to how consumers' everyday interactions and practices with objects inform their experiences.

Complementing this overdue and still niche appreciation of the ordinary in consumption is Heller's (1984) philosophy of everyday life. In this, Heller theorises that the everyday always takes place in the immediate surroundings of the individual and represents a process of individuals reproducing themselves as individuals and in doing so, reproducing society. This reproduction involves growing into a ready-made world, learning to use the things, acquire the customs, and meet the demands of society, but with a causative dimension also, as the everyday also includes representing to others the rules and norms of this world. A story is always a story of choices, as individuals are both encompassed by and animate pre-existing social norms and values (Heller, 2019). From this conceptualisation, Heller sets out her ambition to query everyday norms and rules, which she recognises are typically taken for granted, to make possible change in everyday life which all humans share. Colebrook (2002) characterises that it is only through reflection on the very forms through which we live life, can life realise its potential, whilst Gardiner (2000) elaborates that it is through fully appropriating and activating the possibilities that lie hidden and repressed within the ordinary that enriched experience can then be re-directed back to daily life to transform it.

If Heller provides a framework to recognise and the encouragement to analyse the everyday, then the COVID-19 pandemic, a period when everyday life was significantly disrupted and as such noticeable, provided opportunity to analyse. A natural feature of lived normality, disruptions offer a snapshot of rhythms as they unravel and are braided back together again (Trentmann, 2020). An example can be found in Epp and Price's (2008) observation of family identity practices, whereby multiple bundles of (sub)identities perform their own rituals, stories, social dramas, everyday interactions, and intergenerational transfers, which may be challenged and changed as they interact and are interrupted by events such as divorce. Thus, disruptions capture the work that is needed to keep routines going, revealing the elasticity of everyday life, and highlighting the complexities and tensions of our material world as tenuous and fragile, involving energy, maintenance, and adjustments from consumers (Trentmann, 2020). As observed by Kapoor et al. (2022), during this period many rituals were redesigned and repurposed in response to the virus. Stating their belief that 'consumers' revised religious rituals are a potential lens through which we can understand how we respond to such unexpected and threatening situations" (p. 278), this research drew on similar inspiration to consider how familiar consumption practices can be modified and invented during uncertain times. Identifying phases of retreat, reconfiguration, and resistance, research highlights everyday consumption routines and rituals as adaptable and as such a source of continuity during and despite difficult times.

Research methods: multisensory autoethnography

Kalekin-Fishman (2013, p. 718) explains 'from the diversity of theoretical approaches to everyday life it is clear that this area of study has no single empirical orientation'. Given this methodological flexibility and considered suitable in circumstances where many forms of research were no longer viable, this paper adopted an autoethnographic approach to explore everyday consumption. Involving the use of personal experience to illuminate a structural, cultural, or institutional issue (Stahlke Wall, 2016), autoethnography is a strand of ethnographic writing that incorporates reflexive self-observation and

presents the researcher as an active and engaged participant in the social world or activity being studied (Anderson & Austin, 2012). Here, participation was in the social, and socially distanced, world of the COVID-19 pandemic as it occurred in the United Kingdom. Autoethnography explored both individual consumption experiences during COVID-19 and the contexts in which these took place (Khosravi, 2007). Consumption-related activities, including external outings to shops, home-based actions such as online shopping, in-person, and technologically mediated conversations around these, were participated in, recorded, and reflected upon.

An approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience to understand cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011), autoethnographers look inward into identities, thoughts, feeling, and experience, and outward into relationships, communities, and culture (Adams et al., 2017). In this case, the researcher was an active participant in a discreet cultural community; that of two extended overlapping families (natal and in-laws). Personal experiences of COVID-19 were inevitably intertwined and shared with those of family members. The stresses of the period were magnified by concerns for loved ones, for example. Appreciating that 'being a family is a vitally important collective enterprise central to many consumption experiences and replete with new challenges in contemporary society' (Epp & Price, 2008, p. 50), family was moreover considered an interesting location of ritual as a larger, plural experience, and habit as more singular behaviours (Rook, 1985), as well as for studying the adaptability of consumption rituals, roles, norms, to meet marketplace challenges (Mason & Pavia, 2006). Indeed, Trees and Dean (2018) illustrate how routines and rituals may alter around and support the fluidity of family life, as relating to familial caring for elderly relatives. Family may also be especially relevant to everyday life, as amongst multiple natural and adopted communities of different importance, where skills and capabilities for everyday life are appropriated, Heller (1984) describes family as absolute and basic. Thus, familial experience was both integral to and theoretically interesting for COVID-19-exposed everyday life.

The type of autoethnography adopted here approximates the analytical-social scientific approach that tends to adhere to traditional academic writing structures and practices, to code and thematise personal experience, and treat personal experience as tangential to the fieldwork experience (Adams, 2017). As defined by Anderson (2006), the analytic approach follows principles of complete member researcher status, analytic reflexivity, narrative visibility of the researcher's self, dialogue with informants beyond the self, and commitment to theoretical analysis. Here, the researcher is a family member reflecting on family life during COVID-19, visible in the resulting narratives, incorporating the discussions, feedback, and attempting to represent the intersecting voices and experiences of family members, and considering fieldwork throughout using everyday life theory. Analytic autoethnographies produce a more realist, less emotional, or vulnerable account of ethnographic practice (Haynes, 2018). Albeit in recording and sharing several vignettes from this period, elements of the evocative autoethnographic style that seek to provide accessible, emotional, and embodied accounts of personal and cultural experience (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) were also drawn upon. The intention of these was to capture moments that stood out for the researcher and to share with others the feelings and thoughts aroused by these. Such a blended analytical-evocative approach is outlined by Haynes (2018), who uses narrative, memory, and retrospection, interwoven with

analysis, critical interpretation, and academic conventions, to make sense of past experiences, emotions and turning points.

Various definitions of autoethnography share emphasis on personal experience intersecting with a social and cultural context, with the latter examined through the personal experience of the researcher (Haynes, 2018). Thus, autoethnographic data is autobiographic, comprising the researcher's own personal experiences which make up the field texts that researchers generate and analyse to interrogate or interpret the culture in which they themselves are situated (Lapadat, 2017). Fieldwork took place both online and offline over the period March 2020–March 2022. Taking a multisensory approach, fieldwork consisted of participants' observation of consumption experiences, individually and often with different family members. The multisensory approach realises the potential of non-linguistic sensory data to stimulate fresh appreciation and analysis of consumption, including sound (Patterson & Larsen, 2019) and smell (Canniford et al., 2018). Fieldwork involved both permanent (photographs, message exchanges) and mobile (field observation, walking conversations) methods to facilitate different sensory perspectives, allowing affective and sensual understandings and experiences of these interrelations to be captured (Cheetham et al., 2018). Data was also collected from family via in-person, telephone, video, and written exchanges, throughout this period, and these shared experiences and analyses informed and shaped the researchers' own.

All research followed COVID-19 guidelines to ensure the safety of the researcher and others who they might encounter. As will be outlined, acts of resistance, such as not using track-and-trace apps, were recorded. These infractions related to advisory rather than mandatory regulations and such actions were not participated in by the researcher themselves during fieldwork, but were observed, overheard, or discussed. It is appreciated that readers may disagree with the ways of thinking and behaving that are recorded, and likewise, that sharing such observations might expose those involved to disapproval. Haynes (2018) summarises that autoethnographers must consider the degree to which they disclose issues which affect other parties as well as themselves. Taking a more analytical approach, individual identities, emotions, and vulnerabilities have been downplayed. Some details given about specific events or that are described in vignettes are effectively composites based on, but not wholly accurately representing, the actual people or settings involved (Ellis, 2004). Such stylistic choices are intended to help manage ethical issues around autoethnographic disclosure.

Fieldwork experiences, materials collected, and notes taken, were reflexively analysed over time. This involved sharing, comparing, and discussing individual and mutual consumption. Reflecting on family consumption helped to develop consciousness of and critique of personal experiences of consumption during COVID-19 and vice versa. Through such self-conscious introspection, the autoethnographer aims at better understanding their experience and that of other members of the research setting (Tavella, 2018). Hence, data analysis echoed the approach of Olsen (2021), who incorporates personal subjective introspection with first-person consumer insights in a process of participant observation, extrospection on consumption related interactions, and introspection around the feelings and emotions aroused. An abductive-iterative approach of back-and-forth between fieldwork, field notes, self-reflexivity, conversations with others, and theory (as per Cheetham et al., 2018) allowed the gradual identification and agglomeration of three overarching, interrelated, but distinctive themes around consumption

during COVID-19: retreat, reconfiguration, and resistance. Described in the following, screenshots of conversations around and photographs taken during consumption experiences are used to illustrate. Permission was obtained to use these materials from those involved in producing and publishing this work, and any identifiable details have been anonymised.

Research findings: everyday consumption during COVID-19

Themes of retreat, reconfiguration, and resistance are developed in the iteration between fieldwork and literature. These categories broadly corresponded to the timeline of COVID-19 restrictions and their disruptions to everyday life and consumption, of rapidly adapting around, and then occasionally subverting restrictions. Hereby, family consumption routines and their associated interrelationships evolved through phases, echoing those outlined by Kirk and Rifkin (2020) in their analysis of consumer behavioural responses to COVID-19. Disruption and distancing as initial COVID-19 fears, and government-mandated restrictions upended normality, characterised the first stage. Gradual adaptations to, of, and around new normals, allowing a coming back together and reclaiming of familiarity, typified the second stage. Increasing criticism of and cynicism towards restrictions on familial routines and togetherness, including some minor acts of resistance by family members, were present during the third stage. This is of course a simplification of the ebb and flow of individual and shared familial emotions, attitudes, and behaviours aroused during the pandemic, but does capture a broadly linear process of accrued experience, evolving thinking and being, that typified this period.

Retreat

It is the last day before lockdown is due to begin. A group of us meet up in Manchester to celebrate a birthday. Mutually accessible and fun, the city centre is a regular meeting point in different combinations of family and friends. Most of us don't drive and so we rely on meeting in these places that are accessible on public transport. And, as we fragment over time into different living places and working lives, incorporate new family around romantic partners, sometimes very different in their cultural references, coming together around the shops is easy, inclusive, cohesive. Layers of habit and memory laid down over the years guide our feet and conversations around the city. Meeting at the usual place. The Art Gallery for a toilet stop. Circulating the Arndale. People watching, catching up, remembering absent others. Entirely ordinary, but the time always goes too fast during these get togethers.

    Today is not ordinary. Already shutting down, largely empty of people, but with some shops still open, it is strange to walk the city almost alone. An eerie novelty. The atmosphere of silence yet tension is novel, obvious, memorable, almost like a holiday to somewhere new, not streets and squares familiar from decades of pottering. The emptiness makes one conscious of the few others also outside. Normally a general crowd, now individuals, we exchange glances of what seems to be mutual excitement and apprehension. Self-conscious too, aware of our own physical presence by the absence and presence of others, we become mindful of how to manage our bodies. How to appear respectful in and of the strangely silent surroundings. Whether to sit in a certain place together.

Lowering our voices. Looking suitably grave. Predicting it will take a few weeks, trying to stay positive, we wish each other luck as we say goodbye.

Lockdown sets in and shopping, like so many other things, is stopped. But food and other essentials still need to be purchased. Supermarkets become a domain of petty rules and patchy enforcement. Outside the stores there are queues in the hot weather. Tips on times and places to avoid these are shared. Less popular retailers are tested. Increasingly bizarre meals made out of tins and packets in cupboards. Discussions are held over whether family working for the NHS should exercise their right to queue jump. They don't, much as they might like, because it would be too stressful. Inside stores are one-way systems. The inability to go back and forth for items is a challenge for absent-minded shoppers. Certain aisles are cordoned off because they contain non-essential items. A relative needs a pan but the kitchen crockery section is out of bounds. It wouldn't matter so much except all they have in their cupboards are tins and pasta that can't be cooked without. Enforcement is patchy. Some of us notice that non-white and young customers are much more likely to be corrected by staff if they follow rules incorrectly. Supermarket shopping is both a rare outdoor activity, gladly participated in, and becomes far more stressful than before.

Concerns for family members grow as lockdown continues. It is unusual not to see each other for such a length of time. Several have ongoing health issues and others live alone. Attempts to stay in touch do not always work. With nothing happening there is not much to talk about on the phone, other than the obvious. A socially distanced birthday in a back yard stood far apart in drizzle, underscores the oddness of being unable to interact. A text afterwards that it was hard not to hug compounds the sense of sadness and separation. There begin to be disagreements over how seriously to interpret rules. Some feel a stronger sense of urgency to meet, and it is stressful to be asked to gather, or to be refused. One family group has not left the house and is washing all their food deliveries in bleach after they arrive (an overreaction others think in parallel chats). Another has cut their mandated 30-minute outdoor walk down to 10 minutes (because they are over-weight and lazy, some of us laugh behind their backs). As individual interpretations of rules seem variously sanctimonious or reckless, friction between family members builds.

Later, the shops have reopened and some of us get together in Manchester again. The city centre is busy, but the atmosphere has changed. There is something that we can't put our finger on, but it feels different. Then one of us realises that there are no older people. The retail-scape is dominated by teenagers, which shifts the ambiance. Their slightly scary energy, loud, fast, unpredictable, is more apparent in the absence of others. Meanwhile, some shops haven't reopened. Their absence disrupts the established spatiotemporal rhythms we follow. We miss favourite spots and find our timing thrown off. Ready for lunch too early because of the fewer shop stops, there then is nowhere to have food and chat. The reanimated stores are less friendly than previously. In every entrance, a member of staff must tell us to sanitise our hands. We feel sorry for those who do this repetitive job. Annoyed by those who over-police. No two shops have the same policy. Traffic lights and queuing systems take away any sense of spontaneity. Hands start to chap from the mandatory alcohol gel. We get told off going to the toilet the wrong way. A lady swears at us for getting too close. It is all less enjoyable than before.

Things do not return to normal with restrictions loosened over the summer and into autumn. However, elements of consumption routines are re-established. Several of us
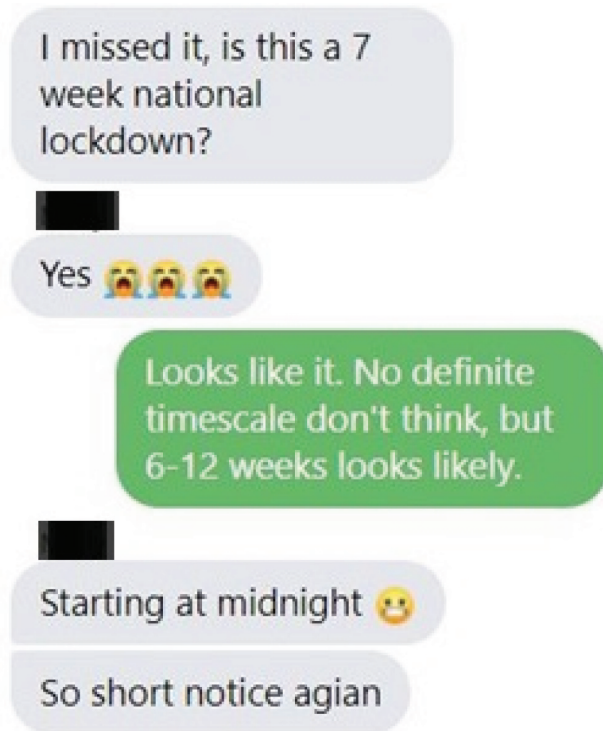
I missed it, is this a 7 week national lockdown?

Yes 😭😭😭

Looks like it. No definite timescale don't think, but 6-12 weeks looks likely.

Starting at midnight 🙃

So short notice agian

Figure 1. Discussing second lockdown, December 2020.

throw ourselves into the government's 'eat out to help out' scheme of subsidised meals in restaurants over the summer, for example. The ability to meet up with family members and do such things remains partial, as many are unwilling or unable to travel. Those more cynical or confident are better able to embrace and enjoy such activities where possible. Others remain largely housebound. Thus, consumption remains fragile and fragmented. A second lockdown, announced abruptly in the run-up to Christmas, comes as an unpleasant surprise (see Figure 1) that puts a stop to even these limited forms of consumption. The disappointment of cancelled Christmases is obvious, especially for those family members that had been more cautious around COVID-19 who had anticipated it being a time to finally meet up. A sense of foreboding also comes from knowing what this lockdown will be like, as opposed to the first one.

Reconfiguration

I am on the train to meet relatives. It is our first get together after the long initial lockdown. Face masks have been mandated from today in public spaces, but I don't have one yet, and am intending to buy one when I get to the shops. So, I have wrapped a long winter scarf round my mouth. It is very uncomfortable in the heat. The train is a slow and crowded stopping service. The seats fill up. Across the aisle from me a young lady in mom jeans starts to prick my consciousness. She is shifting her weight regularly and muttering. She starts to talk louder until shouting about non-mask wearing. I don't

know if she means me, or the man opposite with two empty cans of larger on the table in front and who has been slumped asleep since before I got on at the second station. I shrink further down in my seat and urge the journey to end. My relatives laugh at me when I tell them this on arrival. That I was bullied by a millennial! They know I hate scarfs! We look for masks throughout the day but can't find any. They have theirs from work. Most shops are closed. We have a picnic in the park. It is cold but sunny. Lots of other small groups are doing the same. On the train home, I wear the scarf again. Nobody seems bothered.

Such disruptions caused by COVID-19 stand out, especially at first. Altered social and physical landscapes encountered are stressful but also interesting in their novelty and provide plenty to talk over with family. We are curious for example, as to where the homeless people have gone. For us, this reiterates homelessness is a political choice that the government can solve if it chooses to, as it currently has because of COVID-19. These discussions reflect on and help to interpret the new and noticeable. Practical advice is also shared, such as on where to find face masks. Consumer activity is found in looking for fun face covering designs and posting to those who might appreciate it. These intellectual and practical exchanges help to navigate novel issues, making sense of these, problem-solving, making contact, reiterating togetherness. Through such exchanges, the difficulties of imposed social distance, the sensations of isolation, boredom, worry, and irritation, are reduced.

Facilitating these conversations are new technologies taken up by family groups, such as WhatsApp. Reiterating its usefulness as a social mediator, something to do and discuss together, consumption is something we refer to from the outset, alongside our usual in-jokes around academic pedantry and suchlike (see Figure 2). Consumption itself becomes more interconnected with this communication technology. My in-laws' shopping unpacking routine traditionally takes place in-person as the household gathers in the kitchen, and those who have been out shopping pull purchases one-by-one from bags. Everyone discusses, samples, and helps to put things away. Unable to consume and unpack together physically, my in-laws find ways to do so digitally. Photographs and videos of individual shopping trips are taken and shared on family digital chats. Long digital discussion threads form around kitchen counter displays of purchases. Similarly, the discovery of a food waste app by one relative spreads via online messages (see Figure 3). This allows the user to buy discounted leftover items that would otherwise be thrown out by retailers. Soon everyone has downloaded and is using to find and compare purchases. This becomes quite competitive as various people show off their latest bargains. Disappointing hauls, such as one blind bag that turned out to contain sixty leeks, nothing else, are also shared and laughed over. Supported by technology, old familial consumption routines and rituals, and the connections brought about through these, are reconfigured.

Offline consumption changes too. As restrictions begin to lift, some of us start to meet up in city centres again. Enough essential retailers are open at this stage to provide some familiar structure and activity. The nearby city of Leeds has more of these stores open, and so becomes our preferred destination instead of Manchester. Initially less familiar with the centre, we soon establish routes and routines. There is still relatively little to do, in that many shops, and all cafes and cultural venues remain closed. So, our pace slows as we take time to browse all aisles and categories in the few retail outlets available. A discount

Figure 2. Introducing family WhatsApp, April 2020.

store that has managed to reopen by launching a small but 'essential' food section, becomes a favourite. Product categories that would have been boring and ignored before, such as laundry detergents or toiletries, are now browsed and talked over together. New products from these previously neglected aisles are tried out. Different home fragrances are trialled and compared, with the newly encountered merits of reed diffusers versus wax melts discussed at length. Doing this prolongs time, provides purpose, and makes shopping trips worthwhile. Sharing photos and descriptions of these trips digitally, meanwhile, includes absent others who are unable to join because of their continuing travel or health restrictions.

It feels relaxing to be in shops like this together again. Relaxing because the worries about each other are lessened by mutual presence, because the legitimate activity of essential shopping means we don't fear being stopped by authorities for illegally gathering, and because browsing and buying products is a familiar activity that feels normal and safe. The altered shopping format even starts to be appreciated as having its own positives. For those of us who feel confident enough to take advantage, the emptiness of previously crowded cityscapes becomes eerily enjoyable. Walked, photographed, discussed, this urban stillness (Figures 4 and 5) is appreciated as unique and not likely to be repeated. Deserted shopping centres are fascinating. They remind us of the horror films we used to watch together. The air is noticeably cleaner. Roads can be crossed without waiting. Architecture stands out more. Yet these desolate town centres seem to intrigue only a few. The

Figure 3. Discussing the too good to go app, February 2021.

authorised walks of most must take place elsewhere leaving the town centre empty for us to enjoy. We feel bonded by our similar interest in and appreciation for these empty cityscapes.

Realising that the quietness of COVID-19 has its positives, some of us arrange to meet in London as soon as leisure travel is permitted. Anticipation that the capital will be quiet because of lockdown is proven to be correct. We have never experienced London so quiet, and it is hard to believe at first. There is the opportunity to have famous landmarks to oneself (Figure 6), and we tour sites never visited before because of their long tourist queues. We feel privileged to experience, slightly smug at our good thinking, happy to be together. Through the year we have several trips meeting with different combinations of family, until a final visit in May 2021. As most lockdown measures have been lifted by this point, the tranquillity we had become used to is gone. The crowds have returned and though it is nice to people watch once more, it is harder to move through the city. Landmarks and shops are impenetrable. Pavements and public transport hectic. We agree to split up, going our own separate ways to find more peaceful places to rest and wait for the train home. The new ways of consuming that themselves had started to become normal, are now redundant, and the requirement is once again to retreat, rethink, and reconfigure.

Figure 4. Arndale shopping centre, Manchester, June 2020.

Resistance

A friend who has not really left their house in months agrees to meet us in the city centre, close to where they live. Shortly after meeting they explain that they did not really know what to expect and express that they are pleasantly surprised at how normal everything is. We take them to visit the Krispy Kreme stand; a recommendation passed on through family discussions as one of the first places allowed to reopen serving takeaway refreshments, and where the coffee-donut combos are fun and sustaining. After ordering, we go to find somewhere to eat our donuts. It has started raining outside and we head to the upper level of the mall where it is quieter and sit on the floor. Below us, we watch other shoppers flock around a single café chair that has somehow not been removed along with all the other public furniture. As soon as one person gets up from resting their legs, another will politely take the seat. We reflect that it seems very human, this sharing of a solitary chair. It might be the sugar and coffee, but it feels invigorating watching this utterly mundane scene unfold.

Gradually, and with adjustments, familiar consumption habits re-establish. In doing so, the individual and shared fears that had built up around COVID-19 lessen. Getting outside

Figure 5. Trinity shopping centre, Leeds, January 2021.

Figure 6. Buckingham Palace, London, August 2020.

is reassuring as things continue much as before. We contrast the continuation of life outside the house with the disruption to life inside. However, getting outside is also annoying. There are frequent encounters with rules that seem petty, arbitrary, counter-productive even. In one frequently visited shopping centre the toilets become all male or
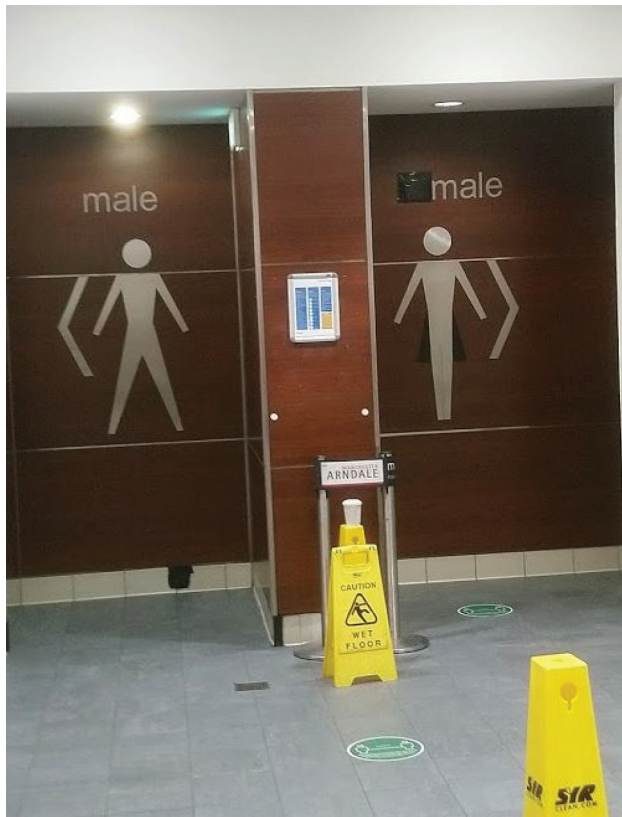
Figure 7. Public toilet gendering, August 2020.

female thanks to some creatively applied masking tape (Figure 7). This tickles the sense of humour of LGBTQ family members aware of the politicisation of gendered bathrooms in other contexts. So does observing the confused shoppers and disruption caused by the new signage. Yet there is a growing sense for some of us that such hastily erected COVID-19 measures are not necessarily well-judged. The COVID-19-fighting advantages of super single sex toilets remain unclear across multiple visits with various friends and relatives to witness it.

Other family members share their own experiences of troubling COVID-19 restrictions and describe the unease or uncertainty seeded by these. Early in the pandemic, one relative tells how the pre-existing one-way system of their train station is reversed, with badly placed signs creating a miasma of red over green and green over red routes that cause much confusion amongst passengers. Another describes how their train station rigidly operates a strict socially distanced platform policy for the few commuters left, only to create a bottleneck at closed and crowded ticket barriers every morning and evening. Both hate the public seating cordoned off in their respective stations (Figure 8), saying it is patronising. Such incidences of ill-thought-out restrictions are confined, initially at least, to those few family members still travelling to workplaces. The negative environmental impact of disposable face masks is the first critique of COVID-19 responses to be articulated during family conversations. Discarded on pavements, these can frequently be seen.

Figure 8. Public bench restrictions, July 2020.

Conversations are around the damage this is causing to the environment, the wastefulness of resources, the alternatives available. Collective agreement is that these should be banned.

In having and sharing such experiences, a sense of mutual cynicism develops that gradually lessens the differences between family members' attitudes towards and behaviours around COVID-19. Recognising and reflecting on the shifting rules encountered in public bathrooms for instance, where hand dryers are variously turned off, taped up, permitted with restrictions, depending on time and place (Figure 9), slowly brings everyone in line with one relative who from early on in the pandemic had raged about bathroom facilities being tampered with in such ways when personal hygiene is a way

Figure 9. Hand-dryer regulations, may and July 2021.

to combat the virus. They seemed a bit shrill then, but now we can see their point. Wide variance in COVID-19 concerns persist for some time, but on a similar trajectory of reduced fear of the pandemic and growing disillusion with its management.

One consequence of this is more frequent meetings and diverse social combinations. Decisions are more often to prioritise individual and collective enjoyment. Strictly, some of these meetings are not allowed, but many family members decide not to comply with certain rules. This is a passive, partial, faux-accidental non-compliance rather than something more active, articulate, deliberate. Interpretations of essential travel are decided by some to include leisure-based interactions and activities. In that as these provide vital relief from boredom and isolation, and hence contribute to personal wellbeing, they are justified. Social bubbles also start to expand as various combinations of households get together beyond the official limit of two. A family member who lives alone explains that they could not expect any one household to bubble with them exclusively, but that they have mutually agreed to be an occasional extra. Meanwhile, ignorance, sometimes wilful, allows rules and their latest updates to be overlooked. If they cancel Christmas again at the last minute one relative explains seriously in a WhatsApp thread, they are still going to do it and if anyone asks just to say they haven't been watching the news.

In addition, small acts of deliberate defiance do take place. There is mention of sometimes sitting on public benches or taking short-cuts against the one-way systems. Conscious of the concerns of others and so done when spaces are quiet, these actions express a little bit of the frustration felt at such rules. There are also practical advantages to deliberately avoiding or subverting COVID-19 regulations. We figure out that QR check-in codes can be pretend scanned when entering shops; confidently holding up a smartphone and taking a photo with the camera satisfies most security staff and is much easier than downloading the track-and-trace app that takes up too much phone memory. Phone memories fill with photos of QR codes, testament to the relaxed attitude we now take towards COVID-19 rules and capturing the variety of shops, cafes, and cultural spaces that we have now returned to (Figure 10). Contravening in such small ways, appearing to comply with some rules, privately defying others, helps to (re)assert familial attitudes, behaviours, identities.

Discussion and conclusion: everyday resilience

Everyday consumption is the domain of day-to-day consumer routines and rituals that take place in immediate environments, comprise often mundane activities, draw on habitual rhythms, and are shared with familiar others. This is a vast and varied area of consumption, yet one that is difficult to recognise in its ubiquity. The circumstances of COVID-19 provided opportunity to reflect on ordinary consumption. Early in the pandemic, Žižek (2020, p. 3) realised that 'it is only now, when I have to avoid many of those who are close to me, that I fully experience their presence, their importance to me'. Similarly, it is only with the habitual and background of consumption disturbed that their presence and importance are felt. Demonstrated by the stresses of COVID-19-mandated lockdowns, which upended familiar routines of togetherness often based around shopping, is the importance of everyday consumption to everyday life. Consumer capitalism is often critiqued for colonising and homogenising everyday life (Burkitt, 2004). Kalekin-Fishman (2013, p. 725) recognises for instance, that 'many researchers into the forms and
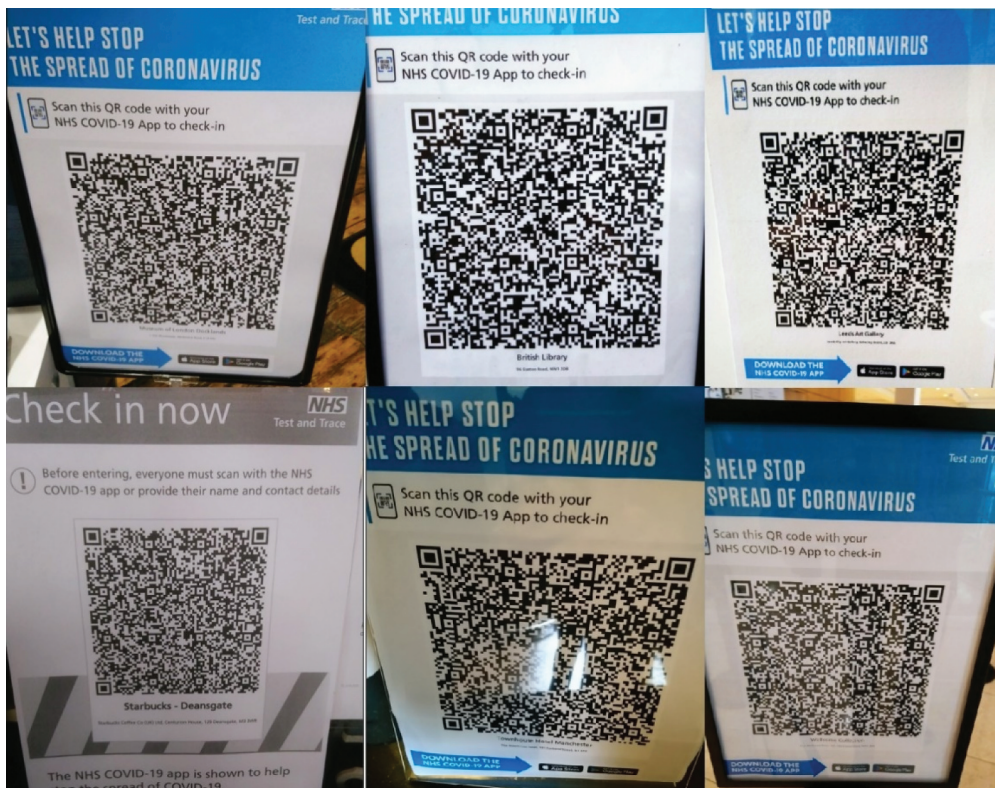
Figure 10. QR codes, may – August 2021.

procedures of everyday life highlight complex insights into how everyday life is inevitably patterned to confirm the intricate hegemonic connections that impose capitalism, the market economy, and globalisation'. Yet, as a facilitator of familial connections, coalescence, and continuity, findings show that everyday consumption also helps to define, preserve, and give meaning to everyday life.

Interruptions of everyday consumption may therefore undermine everyday life with which it is intertwined. Christians (2002) summarises how a healthy everyday life for Heller consists of balancing three spheres corresponding to everyday cultural practice, to the rules and norms of religion, art, and philosophy, and to society's institutional practices. At the start of the pandemic this balance broke down as new rules, norms, and institutional practices upended everyday cultural practice. The skills, materials, and competencies consumers need to negotiate their circumstances and fulfil their potential are appropriated via the everyday (as per Heller, 1984), and, as this research reiterates, the mundane consumption activities that are part of this. Elsewhere, Epp and Price (2008) similarly illustrate marketplace resources as part of the everyday practices, rituals, and narratives, in which families constitute and manage interplays between individual, relational, and collective identities, and as such maintain a sense of cohesiveness even as they evolve. Indeed, previous research has found that shopping helps define individual selves and acts as a mechanism for consumers to define and negotiate their relationships with others (Compeau et al., 2016), with attending norms and patterns that frame consumer

behaviour (Petrescu et al., 2018), and foster group identity and cohesiveness (Veeck et al., 2018). Here, cut off from market resources used in social interplays and without mundane consumption activities to facilitate the skills and materials of coming together, checking in on, and navigating differences between family members, familial togetherness was eroded in the initial phase of the pandemic.

Nonetheless, as shown by consumer reconfigurations of ordinary consumption under duress, consumers can think and act creatively in their immediate surroundings. Disruption is a natural, constitutive, creative as well as a destructive part of everyday life (Trentmann, 2020), and the circumstances of lockdowns inspired consumer adaptations. Digital technologies were incorporated to re-establish virtually the family consumption routines dislocated by COVID-19. Updated physical consumption patterns adapted to and took advantage of the shifted shopping landscape, before themselves being disrupted by an eventual shift to looser COVID-19 restrictions, leading to further reconfigurations of shopping routines. This everyday adaptability as a source of continuation links with Gardiner's (2000) description of how everyday life reflects on and helps to account for the remarkable abilities of humans to adapt to new situations and cope with on-going existential challenges. Indeed, minor adaptions of consumption rituals are noted by Bartram et al. (2017) as assisting social groups' continuation alongside change. Accordingly, where Martin (1984, p. 23) discusses routines as 'the mundane process by which meaning is created and maintained even in the face of the chronic flux and disturbance of experience', then this research demonstrates such a process of continuing familial meanings via the on-going reconfigurations of mundane consumption during COVID-19. Revising rituals during troubled times (as per Kapoor et al., 2022) here supported the persistence of the deeper social meanings and connections associated with these.

Also arising from and responding to COVID-19 restrictions encountered in immediate surroundings were small acts of consumer resistance. Partly inspired by and expressed through consumption, these acts of resistance helped to reclaim familiar routines by avoiding restrictions. Allowing family members to get together by flexibly (mis)interpreting social distancing rules for instance. Such actions are akin to the everyday resistance described by Heath et al. (2017) as more elusive, invisible, concerned with coping more than change, and serving to rise above, reclaim agency from, or simply hide from restrictions. Thus, fake scanning QR codes was a simple, unobtrusive, non-confrontational action that made consumption easier by appearing to comply with a rule considered by most family members to be unnecessary, whilst avoiding the technical effort of actual compliance. Such subtle forms of resistance to institutional controls over the everyday have been noted elsewhere in studies considering everyday life. Just (2012), for example, elaborates how in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s, popular culture fashioned everydayness that was neither opposed to the authoritarian regime nor compliant with it. Similarly, resistance here was not typically anti-COVID-19 rules and norms, but it was not always compliant either.

The ways of rethinking and redoing everyday consumption identified in this research, as well as the minor acts of consumer resistance assisting these reconfigurations and continuations of habitual consumption, were relatively insignificant. They nonetheless recall Heller's outlining of everyday life as a recalcitrant ordinariness through which bureaucratised and technocratic worlds and discourses are put into question and

transformed (Sandywell, 2004). The everyday rhythms of community can be radical in their rethinking and enacting of alternative ways of being (von Redecker & Herzig, 2020), and can provide space for negotiating individual and collective freedom within the various paradoxes and restrictions of civil societies and markets (Ebert, 2019). These might be hinted at in the ways family members rethought and re-enacted consumption during and despite of COVID-19 lockdowns, and in doing so acquired space for individual and collective freedom in the sense of self-group expression and togetherness negotiated around pandemic restrictions. Overlapping with Tadajewski's (2019) assessment of consumer habit as suggestible to but not simply reflections of the needs of dominant systems, being also critical towards, created through, and destabilised by them, here COVID-19 restrictions destabilised habitual consumption, and in doing so stimulated the creative and critical responses that allowed their continuation.

The theoretical contribution of this research is therefore to highlight everyday consumption as an integral part of everyday life, part of its richness and resilience that Heller (1984) suggests defies containment and always holds the potential for renewal. The myriad mundane micro-level routines and rituals taking place within consumer culture are continually updating considering changing circumstances, negotiating, and managing these, transcending even as they are interrupted by such things as COVID-19. As such, and echoing Trentmann's (2020, p. 81) analysis that 'disruptions disturb the conventional view of consumer culture, which has been painted either as a paradise of choice and freedom or as a smooth materialistic machine that has turned active citizens into docile, privatised consumers', this article offers a counterpoint to on-going discourses within marketing that frequently offer more pessimistic takes on the roles of markets and the freedom of consumers within these. For example, resistance is often represented in marketing from the perspective of anti-consumption (e.g. Cherrier, 2010; Pentina & Amos, 2011). Hereby, consumers may use non-attendance at consumption rituals, such as high school proms (Nuttall & Tinson, 2011), or cynicism towards consumption, such as expressing disillusionment with the commercialisation of Christmas (Mikkonen et al., 2011), as forms of resistance against markets and marketing. In this case, however, resistance was pro-consumption as consumers found ways to avoid at a micro-level the restrictions on consumption imposed at a macro-level and thus continue attending everyday routines and rituals around familial shopping. Here, cynicism fed a progressive resistance into limitations on consumption in the sense of denying power by refusing to submit (Heath et al., 2017). If consumer resistance often implies empowerment by breaking away from a marginalised consumer position (Harju & Huovinen, 2015), then the case here was a breaking away from marginalising restrictions on consumption. Consumerism as something to be resisted, is somewhat ironically a sentiment little articulated in consumer studies.

Note

1. Agnes Heller (1929–2019) described herself as having four identities, one chosen and three re-chosen: Hungarian, Jewish, female, philosopher (Heller, 1994). Having survived the Holocaust, Heller studied under the Marxist intellectual Georg Lukács and worked as an academic in communist Hungary, enduring periods of denouncement and eventual exile (Genzlinger, 2019).

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