

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract approved:

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The shoe repair transaction, as it occurs in the 5000 or so remaining shoe repair shops in the United States, is currently unexamined in academic literature for the significance it holds for either shoe repairers or their customers. Making use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, this work serves to explain both the reason why this transaction occurs and the meaning part it plays for defining the self for shoe repairers and their customers. In the condition of late modernity, infatuation with the ephemeral is evident when considering jobs, relationships, or objects. Shoe repairers and their customers reject temporality as a model for their lives and come together to define themselves in opposition to these understandings of people and objects. Relatively wealthy "well-heeled" customers understand objects as investments and seek out shoe repair services to maintain their investments. Shoe repairers exist as a residual element from a bygone era and through their craft align with old understandings of objects, relationships, and

occupations. The new appearance of repaired objects provide an effective way for upper class customers to appear to align with dominant values of conspicuous consumption while in fact supporting residual values of long term stability in objects and relationships.

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To Restore What Once Was: A Mixed Methods Approach to Understanding the Shoe
Repair Transaction

by

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Michael P. Giulietti, Author

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1. Introduction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a more complete understanding of the 21st century shoe repair transaction in the United States of America. As the shoe repair industry currently exists in 2013, it is viewed by the media (and likely the public at large) as antiquated and the thought of repairing shoes is quaint and nostalgic rather than an economic necessity (Green 2011; Harkavy 2007). I utilized an ethnographic approach by immersing myself in shops located in Texas, Washington, and Oregon over a 3 year period (2010-13) in an attempt to realize the meanings behind these uncommon transactions for customer and repairmen alike. Furthermore, I gathered and analyzed data using quantitative methods to arrive at insights that qualitative methods cannot provide.

The idea for this topic of inquiry did not simply materialize onto my desk; it was the result of a personal inquiry and a failure of the literature to provide for an answer. In 2010 while at the University of North Texas, I had just returned from archaeological fieldwork working in South Texas. As a consequence of my work in the trenches, I was now in the possession of a pair of boots that were falling apart.

My normal strategy was to toss objects that had outlived their usefulness, but I could not part with these boots due to the symbolic value they held. We had both suffered in the field and to relegate them to the status of a discarded banana peel would be the highest form of



Figure 1: Entrance to the shop in Ft. Worth Texas

injustice. I stored them and didn't think much of it. On my way to the university, I passed by a local shoe repair shop dozens of times never once considering its existence (See Figure 1). A windworn handcrafted sign in front of the shop caught my eye one day; the sign exclaimed “boot and shoe repair.” On a whim, I took my boots inside to see if they could be repaired.

The old screen door slammed behind me with a loud clack and I found myself standing in a small, loud room filled with machinery and blanketed with dust. Smells I couldn't identify at the time engulfed my senses (I would later learn these to be a combination of leather, glue, and paint thinner). The walls were lined with shelves of decaying boots, heels, and belts; each with its own story. The portly repairman ceased his work at the sewing machine and came up to the small and worn counter to service me. Not only could he repair my boots, but the charge amounted to 4 USD (2009 dollars) for a glue job. I was shocked. Why had I never considered shoe repair as an option before that day? What was the story of this repairman, his industry, and the

customers who used his services? Furthermore, why did they use his services rather than participate in American "throwaway culture?"

Significance

Like any good researcher, I looked to the literature for answers and found that no academic had ever considered a case study of American Shoe repair. A small body of research exists for shoe repair in the European context. These reports consider the environment/working conditions of the shoe repair industry rather than attempting to understand the subculture or the implications of their interactions with the public (Bonneterre et al. 2007; Uuksulainen et al. 2002). Reports on the state of the American shoe repair industry were very revealing and overwhelmingly confirmed a decline of the industry as a whole. Since its apex of 75000 shops in 1946, shop numbers have declined to about 5000 as of 2011 (Hicks and Durning 2004; U.S. Department of Labor 2012). This decline is expected to continue into the 2010s (The Gale Group Inc. 2013). This overall decline of the industry adds a sense of urgency to research pertaining to the shoe repair industry of America.

From the very beginning, this project concerned both shoe repairers and the customers who utilize their services. As part of an enculturation process that begins during infancy, many Americans are taught to rank new objects as preferable to older/used objects. The inability to procure new objects is a sign that one lacks resources and decreases one's status in the community. Customers of the shoe repair industry reject the preference to buy new objects when their old objects wear out and

regularly persist in their relationships with older objects. Some 10% of Americans utilize the services of the shoe repair industry to continue relationships with their objects rather than throwing them away (Dun & Bradstreet 2001; Harkavy 2007). There has been no research to suggest why these millions of Americans would choose to rank "used" as preferable to "new" in terms of the objects they bring in to shoe repair shops to repair.

Research Questions

With so little academic research written on the shoe repair industry, my initial foray into the investigation of the American shoe repair industry was intended to establish a base for which further research could be done on the topic. The questions I initially asked were very broad such as "what typifies the American shoe repair experience?" and "what generalizations can be made about the American shoe repair industry and the customers who utilize their services?" As I spent more time in the field, my questions grew less descriptive and more meaningful (i.e. less "what" questions and more "why" questions). These are the types of questions I will address in this thesis. Questions about the shoe repairers include "What are the value systems of shoe repairers and how are they embodied via their work?" and "How do shoe repairers perceive of themselves and their work in relation to broader American culture?"

As was stated earlier, I could find no academic literature that arrives at a definite conclusion as to why the customers of the shoe repair industry choose to

repair their objects. Research questions pertaining to the customers of the industry include "Why are customers choosing to repair their products instead of buying new?", "What is the meaning of repair for the customers of the shoe repair industry?", and "What generalizations can be made about the customers of the shoe repair industry in terms of demographics?"

Chapter Organization

The thesis is laid out as follows: In Chapter 2, I provide the historical context for the American shoe repair industry and shoe manufacturing in general (as their histories are intertwined). Factory production, planned obsolescence, and the move towards a "global" economy are elaborated on as part of this history. The section concludes with details of the realities of contemporary shoe repair. In Chapter 3, I situate the thesis in a larger body of literature. Shoe repair is situated as a residual element in the dominant context of late modernity. Objects will be considered as symbols that work as systems that individuals craft to maintain and perform the self in a reflexive fashion. Lastly, cultural re-production of symbols will be discussed as it is foundational for understanding later chapters.

Chapter 4 outlines the methods employed to arrive at conclusions for chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 4 considers the different "zones" the fieldwork took place in to provide environmental context. Chapter 5 is the results section which outlines prevalent themes revealed from qualitative analysis and frequency tables/cross-tabulations from the quantitative methods which provide detailed information about

the shoe repairers and their customers at a glance. Chapter 6 considers the findings together and fully fleshes out the relationships between the various themes. This chapter works toward an understanding of repaired objects as symbols that help customers and repairers define themselves. Lastly, Chapter 7 concludes by considering the thesis as a cohesive unit to wrap up the study. Chapter 7 also offers suggestions for further research which consider questions that are tangential to the research questions posed here.

2. History.

Introduction

For as long as there have been shoes, there has been shoe repair. Recent archaeological finds suggest that the earliest evidence of worn leather footwear (dated to 3500 B.C.E.) shows evidence of wear and repair (Pinhasi et al. 2010). These shoes were likely repaired by the wearer, but as people gathered in larger settlements, technological advances made shoes more efficient and the knowledge eventually became specialized. Wall paintings on Egyptian (Thebian) tombs speak to this specialization as the process of shoe making/maintenance grew to involve specialized tools such as awls, lip knives, and hammers as well as other tools which are still in use today (Erman 1894:451). It wasn't until the renaissance and the emergence of regional feudal barons that the modern shoe/boot would be formed.¹ Initially, each baron would have their own craftsmen supply them with footwear for their detached feudal communities (Hilton 1976:20–22). After the twelfth century, groups of craftsmen and artisans in Europe formed guilds in cities along trade routes to protect their knowledge, rights, and territory (Epstein 1995). A guild's four primary uses were protection from predatory rulers, consumer protection against cheating, monopolization to protect against imports, and better facilitation of supply/demand markets (Grafe and Gelderblom 2010). The guild system that existed during this time

¹ This thesis concerns the shoe repair transaction as it currently exists and only briefly touches on the history of shoes and shoemaking to form a base context for understanding the shoe repair industry's current historical situation.

fostered the master/apprentice system in the shoe repair industry that still exists today to some extent (U.S. Department of Labor 2000).

Shoe Repair in the United States

In the United States, shoemaking/repairing has been a part of manufacturing history since the 1600s (Warner and Low 1959:54–65). Working from customers' kitchens, shoemakers practiced a highly personal occupation and one that was reserved for patrons who could afford such services. Shoe maintenance mattered to the well-to-do of the time period because shoe ownership signified higher status among populations where actual shoe ownership was rare (Wright 1922; Heyman 1994). The status association of shoes may be explained by the high labor cost of shoe creation and maintenance in pre-industrial United States. This began to change in 1852 when the McKay sewing machine was invented and drastically changed the face of shoemaking.² Capable of producing 54 times the number an expert hand "laster" (shoemaker) could produce, shoemaking steadily became mechanized resulting in the loss of ownership of machines, tools, skilled jobs, and localized production (Warner and Low 1959:54–65). Though many a shoemaker suffered under mechanization of their process, shoes could be had for cheaper prices because of the increased turnout rate, which led to an overall increase in the ability for the average person to afford manufactured footwear. Shoe makers who could afford the new sewing machines ceased to repair shoes and instead focused on shoe manufacturing

² Interestingly, McKay sewing machines still exist in shoe repair shops all over America.

and export while poor shoemakers and cobblers³ (who traditionally bought shoes for the purpose of repair and resale) began to concentrate primarily on shoe repair as a business strategy (The Gale Group Inc. 2013). These shoe repairers benefited from the increase in footwear availability and were fortunate because many of these new shoes were comprised of interchangeable parts which lent themselves to easy repair.

The Rise of Consumerism

During the Great Depression, a series of political and economic changes in the United States led policymakers to the idea that ever increasing consumption would stimulate production and lead to economic recovery (Packard 1960; Weber 2009). Various methods to increase consumption were adopted including planned obsolescence (Slade 2006; Adamson 2005). The term "planned obsolescence" is defined as "the production of goods with uneconomically short useful lives" meant to stimulate product replacement (Bulow 1986:729).

War efforts in the late 1930s would be the true savior of the economy, but many economists worried about what would drive the economy after World War II. Factory production fell post World War II, but consumption policies such as planned obsolescence ushered in modern consumerism and bolstered the economy. Paul Mazur, in an early book on consumerism, linked a higher standard of living for Americans to increased consumption and proclaimed that "[w]e are a nation that consumes its way to property, security, prosperity, and freedom" (Mazur 1953:iv).

³ Participants in this study use the terms "shoe repairman" and "cobbler" interchangeably

American "progress" was married with consumption and an "objective" measure of our progress via consumption (Gross Domestic Product or GDP) was born to gauge how much we collectively consume (Naess 1993:110–120).⁴ This time period from the 1940s to the late 1960s became known as the "Golden Age of Capitalism" (Marglin and Schor 1992). The United States emerged from WWII as the dominant superpower and positioned itself to guide international monetary policy on a more global scale. Increased consumption at home was met with cheap resources from abroad to elevate American levels of consumption (measured by GDP) to new heights. Newer models of automobiles, kitchen appliances, and clothing were churned out at increasingly quicker intervals to create an "emotional obsolescence" of products as these products lacked serious technological innovation but instead pandered to fashion/appearance (Zukin and Maguire 2004). Above all, American consumptive progress was driven forward by the "creation of dissatisfaction" with the goods that one currently owned. This stood in stark contrast to earlier understandings of objects which prized their history and wear patterns over their newness (Steele 1993; McCracken 1990).

Using this new objective definition of progress, self-reliance or conservation of any kind was deemed detrimental to the economy while consumption of any kind represented a gain.⁵ As the American economy became increasingly dependent on

⁴ There has been major criticism across dozens of fields about using GDP as a gauge of higher standard of living or progress. Even popular literature has joined in the criticism (See Cobb, Halstead, and Rowe 1995).

⁵ For example, an anti-smoking campaign to improve public health would be considered detrimental to the economy because it discourages people from consuming tobacco products.

consumption, alternatives to consumption such as shoe repair began a steady decline that exists to this day. Shoe repair had reached its peak in 1946 with 75000 shops but has since experienced a 93% decline in shop numbers (Hicks and Durning 2004; Giulietti 2011). The 1960s were particularly difficult for shoe repairers as they struggled to keep their shops open. During the 60s, shoe manufacturing corporations took up the banner of obsolescence and began to make footwear that lacked interchangeable parts and was thus "anti-repair."⁶ Molded foreign imports made up 40% of the U.S. shoe market by the end of the decade (Hicks and Durning 2004; Associated Press 1969). One observer summed up the importance of this transitional decade: "[In] 1959, shoe imports constituted 3.5 per cent of the American market. By last year [1969], foreign shoes were taking 37.5 per cent of the market" (Campbell 1970). Leonard Sloane adds depth to this scenario by highlighting the state of the shoe industry in the mid-sixties (Sloane 1966). He asserts that 950 million pairs of shoes were purchased in America in 1965 with 630 million pairs of domestic leather footwear (likely repairable), 129 million imports, and 191 canvas, rubber, and miscellaneous types of shoes (both likely non repairable). By his calculations, roughly 33.68% of shoes were likely non-repairable by traditional means as of 1965. Sloane's and Campbell's accounts of non-reparable shoe imports taking over the domestic market go a long ways towards explaining the unfavorable environment for the shoe repair industry. The increase in imported anti-repair molded sole footwear

⁶ Many of these "anti-repair" shoes are composed of materials such as polyurethane foam, paper, cardboard, and special rubbers that are prone to rotting with time while others such as plastic or synthetic leather destroy grinding machinery that shoe repairers use to remove soles from footwear.

helped cause a 40% decline in shop numbers during the 1960s (The Gale Group Inc. 2013).

Despite the rather dismal outlook and end result of all these changes, the shoe repair industry made active attempts to resist threats to their livelihood. In the 1960s "leaders within the industry took a proactive approach" gathering petitions to initiate "legislation that required adequate labeling" of shoes (Hicks and Durning 2004). This was followed in 1969-1970 by rallying behind the Hollings-Cotton Bill (S 2885 & HR. 14178) which sought to impose import quotas (limits) on cheap foreign textiles that were hurting the shoe repair industry (and other industries as well). The supporters of the bill included textile workers and other parties who wished to keep jobs in America (Associated Press 1969). Unfortunately, public opinion was against the bill. An opinion piece from the time period lists numerous reasons why the proposed import tariffs were bad for America as a whole and concludes with a blunt "This legislation should be vetoed" (Drummond and Drummond 1970:22). Consumers and economists alike distrusted "protectionist" legislation (which is overall how the public perceived the legislation) and Nixon, who was looking forward to his 1972 re-election, withdrew his support after overwhelming opposition to the legislation became clear. This led to its quiet death on the senate floor (Campbell 1970).

The Rise of Neoliberalism and Consumer Credit Options

This trend towards the elimination of barriers to "self-regulating markets" would be a common theme throughout the 20th century (Polanyi 1944). By the end of the century, it was considered part of the "neoliberal project." The neoliberal project is a complex alliance of ideological commitments, institutional practices, and specific class relationships across varying geographic scales (Harvey 2005). It is concerned with expanding capital into new regions and is inextricably linked to the before mentioned consumer culture and the determination of national progress as measured by GDP (Harvey 2011). Increased consumption offers new avenues for capital accumulation for those who are looking for continual capital growth. Like planned obsolescence before it, the expansion of consumer credit (debt) was instrumental in increasing the ability of Americans to consume (Graeber 2012). The rise of "charge plates" and "charge cards" in the 1960s and 1970s functioned to offer consumers alternatives to repairing their objects as they could simply purchase new ones on credit and worry about paying later. Figure 2 shows an advertisement for cheap imported non-repairable shoes which implores the consumer to "Just Say 'Charge It'" (Fred Meyer 1969:23). This is a poignant example of how easy consumer credit dovetailed with cheaper "anti-repair" shoe styles to further decrease the number of available shoes to repair.

Give 'em the old soft shoe!



Classic Tennies
Cotton duck uppers with full cushion insoles. Black or white. Women's sizes 5-9, girls' sizes 8 1/2-3. **\$1.99**

Basketball Oxford
Rugged cotton duck uppers, full cushion insoles with special molded arch. Prototype pivot outsoles. Black or white.
Men's Sizes 6 1/2-12 or boys' sizes 2 1/2-6 **\$3.99**
Youth's Sizes 11-2 **\$3.79**



Boat Shoe
Ideal for vacation, boating or casual wear. Washable cotton duck uppers reinforced at pressure points. Gum rubber skid resistant soles. Cushion insoles for comfort. Loden green.
Men's Sizes 6 1/2-12 or boys' sizes 2 1/2-6 **\$3.99**
Youth's sizes 11-2 **\$3.79**



Plaid Tennies
Classic styling with cushion insoles and bouncy rubber soles. Girls' sizes 5-9, pink plaid infants sizes 1-4. **\$1.99**



Tennis Oxford
Washable, fadeproof uppers... cushion insole and molded arch. Deep cushion bouncy rubber soles. Black, white or light blue in women's sizes 4 1/2-10. Black or white misses sizes 12 1/2-3. **\$2.99**





Just Say "Charge It" Use your BankAmericard to charge all your shoe needs at Fred Meyer.



Open 9AM to 10PM daily, including Sunday.
Always plenty of free and easy parking.

Figure 2. Molded sole soft shoes on credit– June 29th 1969 – The Oregonian

As markets opened up and cheaper forms of labor began to be exploited overseas, the price of footwear continued to drop so as to stimulate consumption further (Barff and Austen 1993). The rise of the athletic shoe in the 1980s recognized the epitome of the anti-repairable shoe in terms of both price and construction. The 1980s saw employment in non-rubber footwear production in the United States drop from 143,000 to 90,000 by 1990 while imports increased more than twofold (Footwear Industries of America 1989). In an interview recalling the success of Nike as an athletic shoe brand in the 1980s, Nike's Phil Knight noted that production of athletic shoes tripled in the 1980s to quickly become the most common shoe type

worn in America (Willigan 1992). The price of shoes continued a steady decline to the point where today the average⁷ price of shoes sold in America is about \$31 which is \$10-15 less than most shoe repairers charge for soles and heels on a pair of shoes (providing the shoe is actually repairable; less repairable shoes mean more time which adds to the cost)(Harkavy 2007).

Individual shoe repair shops struggled throughout the 1980s to pay a living wage and benefits to their employees; the few unions for shoe repair shops disappeared (Dinlersoz and Greenwood 2012). Shops dwindled not only in numbers but also in size. In the past, shoe repair shops may have hosted a dozen workers, but currently shops average just two employees, usually an owner and an employee (Dun & Bradstreet 2001). Furthermore, trade magazines associated with the industry (*Master Shoe Rebuilder*, *Shop Talk!* and *Shoe Service*) have ceased production entirely in the last 30 years. At the end of the 1980s, 18,462 "footwear and leather goods repair" shops remained (Scoop 2003), by the year 2000, 6000 shops remained (U.S. Department of Labor 2000), and by the present day, 5000-8000 currently exist (U.S. Department of Labor 2012; The Gale Group Inc. 2013; Harkavy 2007).⁸

The combination of easy credit, foreign imports, planned obsolescence, lower priced consumer goods, and an overall self-identification of Americans as "consumers" all factor into the structural reasons for the spiraling decline of the shoe

⁷ Average is the mean average.

⁸ The U.S. Department of labor statistics on shoe repairs estimates that between 5000 and 8000 shops exist. While most sources put the number at around 5000, the 8000 estimate likely includes many shops that I would not consider to be shoe repair establishments such as dry cleaners that export their work to shoe repair shops.

repair industry⁹. While the Bureau of Labour Statistics predicts further decline of the shoe repair industry in the next decade, many shoe repairers remain optimistic and understand the decline in business as part of a necessary adaptation process (The Gale Group Inc. 2013). While some aspects of the contemporary shoe repair industry have been alluded to, the following paragraphs offer a more detailed picture of the shoe repair industry as it exists in 2013.

Contemporary Shoe Repair

American shoe repair shops exist to this day practicing the trade with many of the same tools and basic knowledge that past shoe repairers utilized. Shops tend to be situated in large urban areas, preferably within easy visual and physical access by possible customers. The location of the act of shoe repair is the shop (although there is evidence that some work may be done from home as well). Shops are typically small as the average (mean) shop only employs two shoe repairers and many shoe repairers cannot afford the rents of larger facilities (Dun & Bradstreet 2001). The average shoe repairer earns a median annual pay of \$23,950 (Mean = \$26050) as of 2012 (U.S. Department of Labor 2012).

Shoe repair is primarily a service industry. When customers bring in objects for repair, the shoe repairer may choose to accept the object, provide the necessary

⁹ While the listed reasons are important, they are not the sole reasons for the decline of the industry. I suspect internal factors such as the inability to afford main street shop fronts, declining rates of training children to learn the trade, the inability of shoe repair work to provide a "family wage" or benefits, and a lack of knowledge about the industry due to scarce centralized advertising campaigns have all contributed to the decline of the industry.

repairs, and then return the object to the customer. When working with shoes, a shoe repairer's goal is "to restore a shoe to its original shape and appearance" (Karg 1948:40). To achieve this goal, tools are often necessary. "All leather workers and repairers use handtools and machines. The most commonly used handtools are knives, hammers, awls (used to poke holes in leather to make sewing possible), and skivers (for splitting leather). Power-operated equipment includes sewing machines, heel nailing machines, sanding machines, hole punching machines, sole stitchers, and computerized machinery to analyze foot needs and conditions" (Herman and Abraham 2000:480).

This goal of returning a shoe to its original shape and appearance has become more difficult over time as shoe repairers increasingly confront shoes that are considered "anti-repair." A commonly held belief among shoe repairers is that they choose to repair shoes today that in the past shoe



Figure 3. Cross section of a layered traditionally repairable shoe

repairers would have turned away. Shoe repairers are increasingly forced to repair newer footwear styles to the best of their abilities, but pine for traditional repairable shoes with interchangeable parts as highlighted in Figure 3. Shoe repairers respond to a decline in traditional forms of footwear by expanding their available services to include dry cleaning, repair of general leather goods (briefcases, purses, sports

equipment, etc), key-cutting, or any marketable skill an individual shoe repairer can bring in to generate profits (The Gale Group Inc. 2013).

Contemporary Shop Environment

The shoe repair shop typically has a counter built into the building structure that facilitates the shoe repair transaction. This counter (and sometimes an adjacent doorway) often separates the "customer" area from the "shoe repairer" area. Figure 4 provides an example of the "customer" area of a shoe repair shop. The walls of the customer area are often adorned with various retail products related to shoe repair that are available for purchase by customers. These include shoe laces, polish, insoles, and in some places shoes or boots. Figure 5 provides an example of the "repair" side of a shoe repair shop. On the shoe repairer's side, the walls may be lined with family mementos, shop art, or humorous images.



Figure 4. "Customer" area for a Seattle shoe repair shop



Figure 5. "Shoe repair" area of a Texas shop

The shop environment is commonly noisy, dirty¹⁰, and contains vapors from various glues and chemicals to which long term exposure poses risks to health (Bonnetterre et al. 2007; Uuksulainen et al. 2002). The shop contains rows of oily dust covered machines that whirl and provide slight vibrations through the ground when activated. Most shoe repairers maintain an organizational scheme for their shoe repair orders and utilize shelves to hold shoes/objects that are in varying stages of completion. These are organized by name, telephone number, type of job, completion, ticket number, or any combination of these factors.

It is not uncommon for shoe repairers to blend aspects of home and work. As small business owners, they are free to have "shop pets" or have a crib set up in the shop for their small children. They are even free to have an "after hours beer" once the doors are closed to customers. Lastly, it is common for work to continue after the shop officially closes its doors to customers.

Global Effects of the Shoe Repair Industry

Though a declining element of the global economy, the American shoe repair industry has very real effects beyond individual transactions. The shoe repair industry requires materials and tools to do the work they do which requires being connected to the global exchange economy. It is beyond the scope of this research to know the amount of materials needed to repair millions of shoes every year in The United

¹⁰ The tendency towards dirtiness is a personal choice shoe repairers make. Most of the shops included in this study could be described as "dirty" by the researcher, but shop cleanliness is a much debated topic among shoe repairers.

States, but the amount is significant enough to support wholesalers of tools and materials for the industry. The effect of repairing shoes in the United States on the global footwear manufacturing is notable as well. The shoe repair industry prevents or delays between \$1.9-6.2 billion footwear sales annually in the United States.¹¹ Continuing on the subject of global exchange markets, untold numbers of low wage unskilled labor jobs fail to be made real in the "global south" due to repairing shoes rather than buying new ones (Comaroff & Comaroff 2011). The failure of these occupations to be made real affects international relations (which is evident by various trade agreements working to keep foreign shoe imports cheap to bring to U.S. consumers). Looking beyond global exchange, it is hard to deny the environmental impact of the industry. Shoe repair keeps at least 62 million pairs of shoes from hitting the landfill every year (Hicks and Durning 2004). Lastly, the money that is kept in the United States by "going local" surely has an impact on the American economy (although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to elaborate on what that impact is).

Conclusion

Though my general argument in this thesis concerns the meanings inherent in the economic transaction of shoe repair, a firm grasp on the history of the shoe repair

¹¹ At least 62 million pairs of shoes are repaired annually in the United States which cost between \$31 (mean average price of shoes in the United States) and the median average of \$100 established in Table 3 (Harkavy 2007; Hicks and Durning 2004). At a low of \$31 per shoe, shoe repair prevents or delays \$1.92 billion in sales annually. At the \$100 point for shoes in this study, the shoe repair industry prevents or delays 6.4 billion in sales annually.

industry provides context for which to understand the transaction itself.¹² Shoe repair has theoretically existed for as long as there have been shoes, but it is only recently that guilds were created to protect the interests of individuals who possessed the knowledge of shoe production and maintenance. These systems collapsed under the efficiency of the industrial age which led to a split between shoe repairers and shoe makers. As shoes became increasingly cheaper to produce (stimulated by an overall economic belief in the importance of consumption), the shoe repair industry struggled and ultimately declined to a current level of 5000-8000 shops in the United States. Despite such a decline, the shops that still exist are very much still in business and provide services to millions of Americans in much the same way that shoe repairers have in the past. These shops have found innovative means of adaptation to an overall cultural and economic climate that has increasingly been at odds with the desires of the shoe repair industry as a whole.

¹² For the purposes of this thesis, the history of the history related to the shoe repair industry was condensed to the most important parts. A more thorough review, for example, of the reasons for the decline of the shoe repair industry, may be taken up at a later time by the author or another knowledgeable author.

3. Review of Literature.

Introduction

As the second chapter made clear, any investigation of the shoe repair transaction must be considered in the larger historical context of the shoe repair industry. Likewise, the surrounding literature on the topic of material culture and its larger cultural context must be considered to carve out a theoretical space for this research to reside. The first part of this chapter seeks to explain the position of the shoe repair industry as a residual and the customers/repairers as individuals in the context of Late modernity. This is important to understand because shoe repairers and customers construct selves that are defined in opposition to dominate beliefs/behaviors. While defining themselves in opposition to these dominant cultural forms, they utilize values of the past to construct selves that are more future oriented and less enamored with a parade of temporary objects/relationships.

This is followed by a discussion of theories relevant to the ways in which objects mediate human relations in terms of consumption, production, and reproduction. The object, the centerpiece of the shoe repair transaction, is an extension of both the customer and the shoe repairer. Repair of the object stabilizes shifting symbolic meanings associated with object. Repaired objects serve to embody the value system of the shoe repairer and act as symbolic representation of them to both the general public and other shoe repairers.

Shoe Repair as a Residual in Late Modernity

The shoe repair industry is a great example of a residual element of culture. A residual elements of culture are beliefs and practices that were once dominant perspectives but are now seen as antiquated and uncommon (though they still have an impact on dominant cultural forms (Williams 2010). Around 1946 (at the height of the shoe repair industry), regular shoe maintenance was far more common and could be considered a dominant cultural form. Due to changes discussed in chapter 2, a new approach toward objects has come to be the dominant force, but shoe repair persists despite this and defines itself in opposition to these dominant cultural forms. "A residual cultural element is usually at some distance from the effective dominant culture, but some part of it, some version of it-especially if the residual is from some major area of the past"(Williams 1994:605). In this way, residuals work within dominant cultural systems, yet remain distinct in terms of beliefs, values, and practices. Other examples may include long held religious beliefs of the past forming part of the contemporary church experience or persistence in the belief of female intellectual inferiority despite scientific evidence to the contrary.

Shoe repair as an occupation is among the dwindling line of jobs in America that is "non-proletarianized" (Jordan 2002:44). It is in a similar group of work cultures as Kaprow's firefighters (Kaprow 1999), Keller's blacksmiths (Keller and Keller 2008), and Kidder's bike messengers (Kidder 2006). Jordan's concept of "non-proletarianized" occupations may be operationalized as occupations that lack the

rationalization, homogenization, and deskilling qualities of modern occupations. Max Weber's famous *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* provides the metaphor of the "iron cage" to describe the increasing rationalization of social life in general (Weber 2002[1905]). He viewed the increasingly cold and calculating interactions of the business world as dehumanizing. Ritzer later updated Weber's thesis with the concept of "McDonaldization" which considers the popular fast food chain as a metaphor/model for the rationalization, homogenization, and dehumanizing tendencies of modernity (Ritzer 1997). Moving forward, when I use the term "modernity," I am referring to these rationalizing, homogenizing, clock-watching, dehumanizing qualities of European/American culture that have become prevalent since the industrial revolution.

While Ritzer's/Weber's portrayals of contemporary existence are logical and compelling, they have been challenged (and rightly so) by postmodern theorists. Baudrillard, taking inspiration from semiotics, noted that signs, signifiers, and referents (the signified) were far more complicated than previously imagined as signs become detached from their original referents and come to be considered referents in themselves (Baudrillard 1994[1981]). David Harvey extended these ideas into a wider context and posed that we currently live in a condition of postmodernity rather than modernity (Harvey 1991). "Postmodernism concerns for the signifier rather than the signified, the medium (money) rather than the message (social labour), the emphasis on fiction rather than function" (102). When considering the rationality of modernity, what is "rational" and "efficient" eventually become irrational and inefficient as signs

come to stand for the reality they originally represented. For example, government incarceration policy originally created to lower crime has the result of increasing crime in some areas, but is still treated by law enforcement as a way to combat crime (Rose and Clear 1998). Lastly, the concept of "postmodernity" has come under fire by critics such as Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, and Ulrich Beck. The term "late modernity" emerged as a term that keeps the critique of postmodern self-reference, but recognizes that the qualities associated with modernity still define our world today (Cools et al. 2010:88–90).

The individual actor in late modernity (including shoe repairers and their customers) are enveloped in a culture of constantly shifting signs and are indeed encouraged to consider all truths as true "until further notice" (Bauman 1993:17). In this period of intense preoccupation with the temporary, the self becomes a reflexive project that must be maintained (Giddens 1991). The maintaining of the self as an intentional processual project is called the "self-reflexivity project." Individuals accepting dominant cultural forms in the United States are in a state of processual growth and are defining themselves and their worlds by truths they choose to associate themselves with: the masks they choose to wear and parts they attempt to perform (Goffman 1959). Rather than an understanding of the self through family, caste, or stock, the individual is expected to discover a "self" that is individually their own (Curtis 2002; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001:22–41). As individuals in late modernity, they must associate themselves with a constantly shifting assortment of signs in order to play multiple roles. In a state of late modernity, objects become one

of the key ways in which individuals (including shoe repairers and their customers) associate with numerous temporary signs in order to practice their individual self-reflexivity projects.

The Value of Objects

With a few exceptions, occupations in the context of Late modernity are not engaging in a meaningful sense and do not play strong roles in the formation of identities (in other words, the self-reflexivity project) (Dubin 1992). Objects come to play incredibly important roles for the creation of the self where occupations fail to provide meaningful self-actualization. Veblen's tongue-in-cheek treatise *The Theory of the Leisure Class* was an early account of the use of objects for status acquisition (deemed *Conspicuous Consumption*) among the wealthy (Veblen 1899). These wealthy individuals were picking and choosing their "masks" in their own self-reflexivity projects and thus earned scorn from Veblen for being wasteful and extravagant. What Veblen failed to understand, or better yet did not want to understand, was that value is not inherent in objects but rather the quality of human judgment placed upon an object (Simmel and Frisby 2004[1907]:67–73). This is in stark contrast to how prominent philosophers had thought about the value of objects in the past. Adam Smith, the founder of "classical" economics, posed in *The Wealth of Nations* that the value of objects may be considered as a combination of *labor value* (i.e. the amount of labor it takes to produce an object) and *exchange value* (i.e. overall supply and demand of an object) (Smith 2003[1776]). Furthermore, individual

actors are interested in maximizing utility with every new object acquisition. However, as signs increasingly became detached from their referents, classical economic views on the value of objects and individual rational for exchange of those objects came under fire. From the marketing perspective, it was clear that consumers clearly were not maximizing utility or performing cost benefit analysis with every purchase. A split between *utilitarian* purchases (task oriented, cost benefit calculations, etc) and *hedonic* purchases (experiential, symbolic, personal preference) was born to explain the reality of how consumers value their objects (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). From the social sciences perspective, Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things* reformed Simmel's argument for an English speaking audience to consider the *social* value held in objects rather than solely focusing on supply and demand curves (Appadurai 1986). Since these influential works were published, there has been a flurry of research in the social sciences to understand the meaning that objects hold for the people who choose to associate with them.

Consumption

Prior to the 1980s, very little was written on objects as a serious topic of study in Anthropology; production and labor were the dominant paradigms associated with human-object relations as this was an era in academia largely concerned with Marxist theory and its offshoots (Miller 1995:142). Douglas and Isherwood's book *The World of Goods* was critical for establishing consumption of objects as a viable way to understand cultures and helped move consumption from an individual pursuit to an

activity that is fully engaged in the cultural (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Besides putting the term "Anthropology of Consumption" on the map, they were the first to consider a rudimentary definition of consumption. For these authors, consumption may be defined as freely chosen use of objects after those objects have left the realm of commerce (36–7). For the purposes of this thesis, I consider consumption to be the freely chosen association¹³ with objects or experiences¹⁴ that have left the realm of commerce.

Consumption involves a more intimate association with an object than mere possession with the intent to sell; an object in a state where "*its exchangeability (past present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature*"¹⁵ is considered an object in a commodity state (Appadurai 1986:13). An object that has moved out of the commodity state and is no longer "for sale" is said to be *singularized* (Kopytoff 1986). Thus, commodity and singularization may be considered as a continuum as an object may move back and forth between states during its lifetime. Fascinating work has been done elaborating on the complicated life histories of objects, for example, as they move from singularized family treasures through processes of recommodification (Epp and Price 2010).

¹³ "Association" rather than "use" or "possession" is more proper as not all cultures conceive of ownership in the same way and the term "use" implies a one way relationship between a person and their object or experience.

¹⁴ Later articles provide examples of the meaning held in association with crafted consumer experiences (see Creighton 1997).

¹⁵ Emphasis in original

Hedonic or experiential association with objects has been a major focus of the anthropology of consumption. The meanings that are socially held in objects provide ways for individuals or groups to practice their self-reflexivity projects. Indeed, objects are so much a part of our lives that they become "extensions of the self" and it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two (Miller 2009; Belk 1988; Tuan 1980). Shoes, the chief objects of concern for the shoe repair transaction, provide a fantastic representation of an object that moves from commodity to a singularized extension of the self. Russell Belk's *Shoes and Self* is an extraordinarily rich paper that it worth quoting at length to arrive at the meaning of shoes in our cultural context:

As with most aspects of consumption, relationships with shoes are not so much person-object relationships as person-person relationships mediated by objects, in this case shoes. Whether self image is changed by shoes because of actual feedback from others or because of the reactions we have learned to expect from wearing certain shoes in certain situations, donning shoes can be a self-transformative experience. Like Cinderella, part of the magic of shoes is in having something new and different on your feet. A part of the incentive for buying new shoes is in attempting to renew this magical newness (Belk 2003:30).

Though shoes provide the utilitarian function of shielding feet from the unforgiving hazards of the earth, Belk's account highlights the much more interesting symbol-laden hedonic meanings associated with these objects.

Objects play immense roles in crafting specific performances that conform to (or in some cases, challenge) cultural mores. Gender (Budgeon and Currie 1995), age

(Price, Arnould, and Folkman Curasi 2000), religious beliefs (Valora 2012), sexual orientation, or political orientation (Kate and Belk 2001) may be acted out through the medium of the object. They may connect populations to their perceptions of the future (Miller and Horst 2006) or their perceptions of the past (Gregson and Crewe 2003; Creighton 1997). Objects and experiences surrounding those objects help consumers live out nostalgic fantasies that may have no basis in reality (Halbwachs 1980[1950]; Appadurai 1996:77). Oftentimes these nostalgic forays into fantastic pasts have countercultural connotations. For example, "temporary consumptive enclaves" of "mountain men" meet in the Rocky Mountains of the United States to reenact the 1825–1840 fur-trade rendezvous that are believed to have been held there. They create "a primitive alternative reality within [a] bounded ritual space" that "offers a special opportunity for transformative play... while reinforcing a romanticized set of beliefs" (Belk and Costa 1998:218). These mostly white suburban males sought to find in the "primitive past" what they perceived to be lacking in the condition of late modernity: passion, self-sufficiency, freedom, and honor (Torgovnick 1998).

Keeping with the theme of consumption for resistance, consumers may simply refuse to consume at their culturally expected levels as a form of resistance against consumerism or rampant materialism. East German consumers, after the fall of the Berlin wall, initially rushed to buy western style consumer goods in an effort to enrich their lives and engage in the modern self-reflexivity project. Within a few years, these consumers became disillusioned with the temporality associated with

western goods and longed instead for goods of the past which were associated cognitively with simplicity, functionality, and quality (Albinsson, Wolf, and Kopf 2010). Other forms of consumer resistance are more radical such as "Voluntary Simplicity" which advocates owning as little as possible and stresses the holistic benefits such a state of living offers (Elgin 1998).

Production

While consumption has been the dominant paradigm for understanding objects recently, the production of objects certainly offers individuals or groups means through which to arrive at a more authentic self. Marx and Engels were among the most influential philosophers when it came to how humans use production to establish a concept of the self (Marx and Engels 1978). Under the capitalist mode of production, individuals become alienated from the outcome of their labor (and other people for that matter) and lose an important means for expression of the self. This is especially true for producers in factory conditions who are punished for deviating from pre-scripted designs for the creation of objects. Alienating forms of production have only increased since Marx and Engels wrote on the subject, but there have been efforts to regain control over the production of objects. One notable example is the "maker cultures" that attempt to create (rather than buy) their objects in an attempt to avoid consumption and fight the alienation that comes with living a modern existence (Breeding 2012).

Like consumption, production of objects should be considered for its ability to provide for the creator(s) a means through which to express the self. Dorothy Hosler has investigated Andean pottery crafting communities and found that "gender and status distinctions are manifest through technical practices" associated with the creation of the pottery (Hosler 1996:63). Depending on the production strategy, the objects created display signs that associate the producer with high or low status in the community. Richard Sennett continued this focus on the particular way that objects are created. He suggested that well-made objects have the capacity to bring people together and poorly made objects have the capacity to drive people apart (Sennett 2008). Indeed, with the increasingly prevalence of mass produced products, home productive labor enters the realm of the postmodern; creation of goods in the home becomes a part of the self-reflexivity project rather than a means to earn a living for family survival. Knitting, a laborious task once done out of necessity (for clothing was both scarce and costly), has been taken up by celebrities and everyday people alike as a respite from the demands of modern existence (Parkins 2004). The knitted scarf in the context of late modernity symbolizes everything that production is capable of in late modernity: self-expression, gender performance, status (they have the leisure time to knit), and solidarity formation through knitting circles.

Re-production

Repair has been understood in the social sciences as serving two main functions: increasing social order and/or as a means of resistance. In organizational

sociology, repair of objects in an organizational environment serves to perpetuate the status quo: until a thing is in need of repair, it goes unnoticed (Henke 2000; Denis and Pontille 2011). For these researchers, a focus on repair exposes the flaws associated with investigations of materiality that fail to see the instability of material objects. From the anthropological point of view, repair of an object is necessarily maintenance of a symbol or system of symbols. Julian Orr's Xerox copier technicians serve as an example of repair for symbol maintenance (Orr 1996). A well-functioning Xerox machine is a symbol of a healthy relationship between client and producer and the technician's job is to repair and troubleshoot the machines in order to maximize social cohesion. Graham and Thrift echo the general trend of repair as maintenance of social order, but add to the argument by suggesting that repair doesn't mean exact restoration and many times represents an evolutionary progression that meets the changing needs of the users (Graham and Thrift 2007:6).

The tendency for objects to be reproduced with added meanings through repair is an important final element to the shoe repair transaction. As "secondary production", dominant forms of objects are re-produced in ways that reflect the values of the shoe repairer and the owner of the object (Certeau 1984:xiii). Once repaired, objects may take on new meanings that are very different from the meanings intended by the producer or retailer of the object. With the increase of social media, manufacturers of goods are increasingly turning their brands over to consumers as they transform their objects through alteration (Zwick et al 2008). Formerly a more one-sided conversation, consumers are freer to engage in re-producing meanings in

the object through novel means of consumption thus blurring the boundaries between both production and consumption. It is at this complicated intersection between production and consumption that the act of shoe repair resides.

Conclusion

This thesis is overall concerned with the meanings and motivations associated with the shoe repair transaction as it exists in 2013. This review of literature has positioned the shoe repair industry as a residual set of behaviors and beliefs. It has also positioned shoe repairers and their customers as individuals in the condition of late modernity who utilize repaired objects to craft more authentic selves. Value was shown to exist outside objects rather than some inherent part of the object.

Individuals associate with objects to arrive at more authentic selves or refuse to associate with objects as a means of resistance. They may even produce their own objects for utilitarian purposes, for self-actualization, or to resist consumerist notions of human-object relationships. Lastly, individuals are free to re-produce objects in ways that restore the status quo or seek to change it. These various ways of understanding interactions between individuals and objects provides us with a robust framework for understanding the realm of possibilities for the outcome of shoe repair transactions.

4. Methods.

Introduction

The following is a discussion of the methods employed in this thesis. Several methods were utilized in the field to collect data pertinent to answering the questions posed in the introduction section. The focal question of this thesis is "what are the meanings of the shoe repair transaction for shoe repairers and their customers?" I employed a mixed methods approach to answer this question as multiple approaches to the research question add depth, generalizability, and validity to the findings. For the shoe repairers, qualitative methods were chosen as the most appropriate methods for understanding their everyday experiences in the shop.¹⁶ For the customers, qualitative methods and quantitative methods were employed. After an elaboration of the fieldwork settings, detailed sections will make clear the rationale for the choice of methods, choice of participants, what constituted a participant, and how the data were gathered in general. The methods section will conclude with a limitations section setting the boundaries of the usefulness of my methods for collecting valid data.

Setting

Data were collected in a variety of sites separated both geographically and temporally. To summarize, the fieldwork may be considered across four zones: Dallas/Fort Worth shoe repair shops in 2010, the 106th annual Shoe Service Institute

¹⁶ Quantitative data were later extracted from the collective qualitative data.

of America convention in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 2010, one local shop in Linn County Oregon in 2012, and Seattle shoe repair shops in the summer of 2012.¹⁷

Dallas/Ft. Worth Shops

Eight shops were visited over a four month period in the summer of 2010. Snowball sampling was employed that made use of the already existing relationships between shops (Neuman 2009:268–9). The initial shop that began the snowball process was the shop that originally inspired the study. Shops were several miles apart, but could easily be reached by driving between the shops. The average distance to travel between each shop was roughly 20 minutes by car. Shops were usually located in highly visible areas such as strip mall fronts or main street shop fronts. To recruit participants for the study, I entered shoe repair shops during normal business hours and approached the counter as a customer would. I asked if the owner of the shop was available; if they weren't in the shop I would attempt to return when they would be in. If they were present, I asked to speak with them. I introduced myself as a student from the University of North Texas who was doing a research study to learn more about the shoe repair industry because no one had ever done such a study. I would mention that they had been referred if another shoe repairer had referred me to them. After explaining what participating in the study would entail, IRB signatures were obtained and preferred days were scheduled for shop visits. Eight shops agreed to participate in the study while two declined by means of not returning

¹⁷ One of the Dallas/Ft. Worth shops was returned to during the 2012 field work in Seattle so that the survey might be employed across all regions in which participant observation was completed.

calls/communications. Overall, contact was made with 22 shoe repairers for shops in Dallas/Fort Worth for the summer of 2010.

106th Annual Shoe Service Institute of America (SSIA) Convention

The 2010 Shoe Service Institute of America convention took place in the summer of 2010 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The Shoe Service Institute of America is the largest trade association that represents the shoe repair industry. The organization represents shoe repairers, suppliers, and wholesalers and meets on an annual basis to inform shoe repairers of the latest in materials or technological advances and to discuss the industry in general. These conventions draw shoe repairers from all over the nation (even some internationally) and represents a gathering of recognized masters of the industry. The convention is an opportunity for shoe repairers to exchange information and experiences to those outside their local scenes. I attended this convention and conducted 16 structured interviews with shoe repairers and 11 unstructured interviews with peripheries to the industry (suppliers, international repairmen, retired repairers). A combination of convenience sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used to gather participants for interview at the convention (Neuman 2009:267). I interviewed important figures such as the historian and the president of the SSIA, but I also interviewed many shoe repairers that were walking between the various product booths or were forming informal conversation groups.

The aggregate number of shoe repairers interviewed for the 2010 project (Dallas/Ft. Worth and SSIA convention) was 38 shoe repairers and 11 peripheries to the industry.

Linn County Oregon (2012)

In anticipation of 2012 fieldwork in Seattle, Washington, new semi-structured interview and survey questions were pilot tested in early 2012 (Jan-April) at a local shop in Linn County Oregon. Linn County is located between the larger urban centers of Salem and Eugene Oregon and neighbor Benton County which is home to Oregon State University. There are two shoe repair shops located in Linn County; the selection of this shop may be considered a convenience sampling technique as the shop was in a convenient location and they were willing to talk to me (Bernard 2011:147). After bringing in an object to be repaired, I formed a relationship with the owners of the Linn County shop. After explaining that I was a student studying the shoe repair industry they were happy to have me come behind the counter to observe them at work; they even allowed me to learn to shine/repair shoes. Seven shoe repairers were administered semi-structured and unstructured interviews at the Linn county shop.

Seattle WA Field Experience (2012)

After analysis of the data for the 2010 field season and a pilot study at the shop in Linn County, Seattle was chosen as the optimal site to pursue the research

questions laid out in the introduction. Seattle represents the largest grouping of shoe repair establishments in a restricted geographic area in the Pacific Northwest. At least eight shoe repair shops are located within a 1.5 mile radius from Seattle's downtown area. The sampling strategy employed for the investigation of Seattle's shoe repair shops was a purposeful sampling strategy. The recruiting strategy for 2012 mimicked the successful strategy employed in 2010. I entered the shops during business hours, introduced myself as a student attempted to learn more about the shoe repair industry and the customers who use their services, explained the study and obtained signatures. 21 shoe repairers from eight shops were administered semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Participant observation of six shops added to the rich field notes collected while in Seattle.¹⁸

Two semi-structured interviews were set up with important peripheries to the shoe repair industry: the owner of the largest local supplier for leather goods in Seattle and a recently retired shoe repairman who still maintained ties to the community. In terms of shop locations, Seattle offered a much more urban setup with many shops being in walking distance from each other. Shops were still positioned in highly visible areas within view of walking pedestrians. I utilized both bus and foot transportation to reach the various shops visited in the Seattle area.

Data Collection

¹⁸ Two shops out of the eight did not allow participant observation but only allowed interviews.

The five methods of data collection employed in this ethnographic investigation of the shoe repair industry of the United States were participant observation, unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews, and short surveys. Multiple methods of inquiry were necessary to gather information on the topic of study as there was no literature concerning the group under study. Each method employed will be highlighted and the rationale for each method employed will be offered.

Participant Observation

In gathering the data for this thesis, hundreds of hours were spent in close quarters with shoe repairers and their customers. Participant observation involves "going out and staying out" and "experiencing the lives of the people you are studying as much as you can" (Bernard 2011:258). Shoe repairers were for the most part very comfortable having me come "behind the counter" to observe them at work. I fluctuated between taking notes and photos from a short distance while the machines roared, and audio recording for interviews while the machines were off. I learned to anticipate their movements by understanding which stage of work their projects were in. Depending on the shop I found various ways of helping around the shop either by making calls, sweeping, or locating shoes. At the local shop in Linn County, I would maintain my own projects as I learned to polish, grind, and sew shoes. Learning to control the machines and identify which parts were appropriate for which shoe was a useful way to understand the work of my informants while simultaneously amusing

the shoe repairers by my amateur skills (I only started one fire). Due to my behind-the-counter access, I often had the ability to take notes on conversations between customers and shoe repairers about the objects that needed repair. Participant observation aided in the creation of rich narratives in the form of field notes that would later be analyzed to generate the themes that would characterize the findings/results of the research project.

Unstructured/Semi-structured Interview

Participant observation, while providing useful data in-and-of itself, was also useful in generating meaningful questions for open-ended interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to set a general topic of interest but to allow the conversation to flow to other topics that are important to the informant (Bernard 2011:157–8). While many of the conversations that took place during participant observation could be considered "unstructured interviews," I always maintained an evolving set of questions that I would ask shoe repairers between their various projects (See Appendix A for interview guide). Semi-structured interviews were given priority over unstructured interviews (especially in the 2012 field season) because my informants were nearly always under pressure to complete orders by a set time and appreciated the directness of inquiries over more (seemingly) arbitrary conversations. Once the semi-structured questions were concluded, more informal interviewing often took place during normal participant observation. Semi-structured interviews would start and stop as time became available to answer questions.

Typically, I would stay at a shop long enough to interview everyone who worked there at that time. Semi-structured interviews were completed on an individual basis as I didn't want other members influencing the responses of those who were being questioned. However, unstructured interview moments granted me the opportunity for more collective interviewing techniques so that I could see in real time group consensus being constructed. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews were audio recorded for both the 2010 and 2012 field seasons as were the interviews in the Linn County Shop. These recordings would prove indispensable to the transcription process that enabled me to collect more accurate quotes from my informants than jottings could otherwise provide.

Structured Interview

Depending on the context of my interview, I employed a structured format to benefit from the particular advantages of the interview style. I used structured interviews on two occasions: 16 times during the SSIA convention and twice during the 2012 field season for sit-down interviews with important people periphery to the industry.

While the SSIA convention brought over 100 shoe repairers to a central location, it was not possible to collect interviews from all of them. The semi-structured interviews I had been using were inappropriate for this setting because I wanted to get the maximum number of responses in the shortest amount of time (as the convention lasted only two days). These twenty interviews, while brief (none

exceeded 15 minutes) yielded very useful data on shoe repairers that were more representative of the industry on a national level than the more local repair shops I had access to.

The structured interviews with the owner of a leather wholesale company and a recently retired repairman in Seattle were very structured and very profitable. The owner of the wholesale company had intimate knowledge of the history of the shoe repair industry for the area that I had covered in Seattle. Likewise, the interview with the retired shoe repairman (which was held in a Starbucks) was useful for examining the evolution of narratives of work after exiting the industry. Both interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for addition to the collection of field notes.

Customer Survey

The previous paragraphs of the methods section have focused largely on the shoe repairers themselves. My research questions concern two groups of participants which required two different strategies of data collection. While interviews worked well for the shoe repairers, such a strategy would have met with mixed results with customers of the shoe repair industry. Short survey was the chief strategy employed to gather data from the customers of the shoe repair industry because a customer's time inside a shoe repair shop is typically very brief. There are numerous reasons for this: shoe repairers often cannot afford to hire help to work the front counter so they must stop their work to assist the customers as they come in. This can be tedious and disorienting when a deadline for a project approaches. The shops themselves are very

small and any more than 3 customers in a shop would be considered crowded for many shops. Lastly, customers often have little to do in the shops besides drop off an object, pick up an object, pay for a service, or ask for a retail product.¹⁹ I was sensitive to the constraints of time and space and fashioned the 2010 survey (Appendix B) to take less than two minutes while the 2012 survey (Appendix C) took less than four minutes. Participants were given the option to fill out the one page survey themselves or to have me read it to them and help them fill it out.

Due to my survey design, not every customer who entered a shop was suitable for survey. I sought participants who were visiting a shoe repair shop with the business of having an object repaired. I was not concerned with the customers who were coming in to buy retail products (these were rare anyways) or individuals who were there to ask for directions or to chat with the shoe repairers. Customers who were disgruntled, had very poor English, or who mentioned they were in a rush to leave were not surveyed. A real effort was made to prevent store crowding. If crowding occurred I didn't attempt to survey but rather used my time to try to help locate the object of the customers who were waiting. I did not survey customers if they were repairing for another person as they wouldn't have been able to answer pertinent questions about the object with as much accuracy.

The 2010 survey was largely exploratory as I was testing to see how viable survey testing would be when attempted in the shops. I would approach the customers

¹⁹ Those customers who found themselves waiting while their object finished being repaired were engaged in unstructured interview to supplement the responses I obtained from the survey.

after business had concluded (or sometimes if they were in line) and introduce myself as a student trying to figure out why people repaired their shoes. The surveys in the 2010 field season were collected haphazardly and were given less priority than other methods such as participant observation (Neuman 2009:242). Overall, 41 surveys were collected from the eight shops that participated in the study. The intended purpose of the 2010 survey was to gather enough qualitative data from open-ended responses to craft a more quantitative survey for the next field season.

The 2012 survey reflects a more mature survey that took into consideration the data collected in 2010. The survey was employed across three research sites: a Linn County Oregon shop, the Seattle shops, and one revisited shop in Tarrant county, Ft. Worth. The survey was administered across three states (OR, WA, and TX) so that my data on customers of the industry might be more representative and generalizable. A quota sampling strategy was employed so that there would be equal representation across shops. I attempted to survey anyone who entered the shop that met the specifications I was looking for and stopped distributing surveys at 25 customers for each shop.²⁰ In total, 25 surveys were collected at the Linn County shop, 154 from the Seattle shops, and 26 from the shop I revisited in Texas.

Methods of Analysis

Inductive Analysis

²⁰ On five occasions customers began filling out surveys and I wasn't aware they didn't meet specifications until the surveys were turned in. These surveys still yield useful data concerning demographics, but are less useful for other tests.

My data collection process could most accurately be described as qualitative, therefore an inductive strategy of analysis was called for. My goal was to "explain the ways that culture constructs and is constructed by the behaviors and experiences of its members" (Goulding 2005:299). A grounded theory approach was utilized to analyze the data gained from the participant observation, open survey questions, unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews (Neuman 2009:70–71). The following section will divide the survey from the participant observation and the interviews for the purposes of showing how the different types of data were analyzed.

Participant observation/interviews

The aim in grounded theory is to build theory by observing patterns in participant behavior. This requires spending expensive amounts of time in the field with participants. While at the field site, jottings were taken to record what I witnessed in the shops so that I might write up what I had experienced. Many of the interviews were audio recorded so I could accurately quote the participants and situate events properly in time. These field notes contain rich narratives, memos to follow up on with particular questions, photos, and general descriptions of the shops that I had access to. All field notes were written within 3 days of the occurrences recorded in the field notes. These field notes were loaded into Atlas.TI, a qualitative analysis software, in order to open code the data (Muhr 2012). These "open" codes were considered in the context of other codes generated and abstracted to the level of theory (i.e. themes) upon completion (Bernard 2011:429–438). These themes were

considered in the context of other research in the social sciences to come to a meaningful understanding of shoe repair industry and its customers. I tried to stick "closely" to my data when coding to stay true to the narratives I had collected from my participants (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). This same exercise was performed for the 2010 survey as well as it was largely open-ended. The 2012 survey, however, was analyzed in a different fashion.

Deductive Analysis

Following the field work of 2010 I was in a better position to understand the reasons why customers may choose to repair their objects. The inductive strategy taken towards recognizing the reasons why people repaired their objects in 2010 generated theory that proved fruitful for the 2012 survey (See Appendix B and C for transition). Measures were crafted from the 2010 fieldwork phase to evaluate the variables of customer age, sex, income, education, object price, repair frequency, presence of specific motivating factors/ideologies, and emotional attachment to their repaired object or shoe repair shop. Chapter 5 will elaborate on the specific tests run in addition to outcomes in the form of frequency tables, cross tabulations, and T-Tests. Lastly, nominal data gathered from the 2012 survey were coded and considered part of the qualitative data collected during the 2012 field work season.

Limitations

There is no research project that is not without limitations. My own positionality as a young (22 and 24 at the points of field work) Caucasian male surely affected the responses I received from the shoe repairers and their customers in ways that I cannot predict. Additionally, I wasn't able to survey non-English speaking customers as I wasn't prepared to translate between the dozens of possible languages I might encounter (although there was only one case of a non-English speaking customer).

This research purports to examine “the shoe repair industry” but in reality examines only one section of the shoe repair industry (albeit the most populated segment). This research cannot make claims about “in-house shoe repairers” for shoe manufacturers. I did not interact with these shoe repairers who work in factory environments and receive solely shoes from a specific manufacturer for non-public repair. As for the public artisanal shoe repairers, I couldn't gain access to the non-English speaking shops (such as the "Korean" shops my participants often alluded to) due to language barriers. Though it would be difficult, further examination of both of these cloistered populations would provide useful insight into the characteristics of the North American shoe repairer industry.

While I aimed from the beginning to make my work as generalizable²¹ as possible by collecting data from shoe repairers from all around the nation, I was unable to gather data from rural shoe repairers; the entirety of my data are derived from urban shoe repairers. At first glance this might appear a damning limitation, but due to cultural changes discussed in chapter two it has become increasingly difficult for rural shoe repairers to eke out a living plying their trade. As the urban shoe repairer comes to represent the "average" repairer, it becomes less problematic to focus solely on urban shoe repair businesses. One regretful limitation was that I could not obtain participant observation data from shoe repairers on the eastern coast of the United States. I did gain their perspectives from semi-structured interviews at the SSIA convention however.

Both my surveys had limitations as well. The 2010 survey, while yielding useful data for the construction of the better 2012 survey, was not sampled in a way that was representative equally across shops in Dallas and Fort Worth. Some of the measures on the 2012 survey were not supported in the literature regarding consumer behavior as I aimed to collect data in such a way that would not make my participants (both repairers and customers) uncomfortable which led to collection of income data in cohort fashion rather than asking direct numbers. Lastly, customers were assumed to be a member of the county the shoe repair shop was located in.

²¹Regional differences always exist but according to participants certain elements of the industry do not seem to change over geography.

Summary

Over the three years I have been collecting data on the shoe repair industry of America, I have used multiple methods to gain an understanding of this occupational community. Broadly, these methods can be summarized as participant observation, unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews, and short customer survey. Findings will show how the themes generated from the codes and the data gathered from the customer surveys work together to highlight the meanings of the shoe repair transaction for both customer and shoe repairer.

5. Results.

Introduction

While the research was conducted in a qualitative fashion that became more quantitative over time, the results are reported from the quantitative perspective first and the qualitative perspective second. The quantitative aspects of this research serve to provide a broad picture of both shoe repairers and their customers. The qualitative data collected adds depth and meaning after the quantitative base is established.

A thorough understanding of the shoe repair transaction cannot be reached without an examination of both shoe repairers and customers of the shoe repair industry. The first section of this chapter lays out quantitative data regarding shoe repairers as a whole and adds qualitative data to arrive at a more complete understanding of a shoe repairer's lived experience. The second section of this chapter considers quantitative data gathered from the 2012 customer survey and utilizes qualitative data gathered from experiences interacting with customers in the shops they frequent.

Shoe Repairer Quantitative Analysis

Table 1. Shoe repairer participant pool summary

Name	Age	Sex	Shop Size	# Years in SR	Gen	Education	State
Alyssa	20	F	Medium	16	∞	Bachelors (in progress)	WA
Phillip	21	M	Large	2	1	High School	TX
Clinton	24	M	Small	12	2	Associates	AR
Kurt	24	M	Small	5	2	High School	AR
Jessica	25	F	Medium	2	1	Bachelors (in progress)	WA
Ralph	30	M	Large	7	5	Bachelors	TX
Earl	33	M	Large	10	5	Some College	TX
Bill	34	M	Medium	13	1	Some College	TX
Janet	37	F	Medium	4	1	Masters	OR
Lance	37	M	Small	20	3	High School	TN
Gary	39	M	Medium	0	1	High School	OR
Jamie	40	M	Medium	6	1	Some College	NE
Charles	40	M	Medium	1	1	High School	OR
Petey	41	M	Medium	3	2	High School	OR
Mark	42	M	Large	13	1	Some College	TX
Vince	43	M	Medium	24	1	Some High School	WA
Jessie	44	M	Medium	12	2	High School	AL
Martin	45	M	Small	30	3	Trade School	FL
Hugh	45	M	Small	15	1	Some College	MI
Billy	45	M	Small	30	3	High School	TX
Bart	46	M	Small	2	1	Missing	OK
Bernard	47	M	Small	22	1	Trade School	WA
Tom	47	M	Medium	25	1	Some College	WA
Javier	48	M	Large	32	1	Missing	Euro
Bart	50	M	Small	18	3	Trade School	OK
Blake	50	M	Large	26	2	Bachelors	TX
Pearl	50	M	Small	2	1	Associates	TX
Darlene	50	F	Medium	28	3	Some College	WA
Ziggy	50	M	Medium	35	1	Trade school	WA
Bert	51	M	Missing	40	3	Associates	MO
Harold	53	M	Medium	40	∞	Some High School	WA
Neil	54	M	None	35	3	Trade school	NY
Landon	55	M	Medium	22	2	High School	OR

(Table 1 continued)

Name	Age	Sex	Shop Size	# Years in SR	Gen	Education	State
Grace	55	F	Medium	27	1	Bachelors	TX
Gregory	55	M	Medium	35	3	High School	WA
Willard	55	M	Medium	27	1	Some College	WA
Roger	56	M	Large	41	4	High School	TX
Clayton	57	M	Small	39	1	High School	OK
David	57	M	Medium	22	1	Missing	WA
Ted	58	M	Medium	24	1	High School	TX
Walter	58	M	Medium	42	2	GED	WA
Gilbert	59	M	Medium	40	3	Bachelors	TX
Edward	59	M	Small	30	1	Bachelors	TX
Nathan	59	M	Medium	31	1	Masters	TX
Theodore	60	M	Small	22	1	Some High School	TX
Guy	63	M	Small	42	2	Some College	MT
Darius	64	M	Small	19	3	Bachelors	WA
Erik	65	M	Small	54	1	High School	NY
Terry	66	M	Medium	8	1	Bachelors	OR
Henry	66	M	Medium	38	3	High School	TX
Chad	67	M	Small	50	3	Some High School	TX
Brock	68	M	Small	40	3	High School	TX
Ian	68	M	Closed	20	2	Bachelors	WA
Mildred	69	M	Small	36	1	High School	WA
Everett	70	M	Small	55	3	Some College	WA
Duke	73	M	Large	40	1	PhD	WA
Alice	74	F	Medium	4	1	Associates	OR
Eugene	82	M	Small	63	1	High School	OH

Table 1 represents the 58 shoe repairers who chose to participate in this study in a substantial way. The table is arranged by age to highlight the intergenerational aspect of the shoe repair industry. Ages range from the 20 year-old daughter of a shoe repairman to an 82 year-old shoe repairman who attends SSIA conventions to continue learning about his trade. The mean age of the shoe repairer participants was 51 years old with a median age of 50 which suggests a more normal distribution. Likewise, the mean and median number of years spent doing shoe repair were identical at 24 years in the industry. The number of years worked in shoe repair ranged from witnessing a repairman's first day on the job to speaking with a repairman with 63 years of experience in the field. Many shoe repairers boast about how many years they have been in the industry and even more are likely to boast if shoe repair has been passed down in their families for generations. Figure 6 is a frequency chart of generational affiliation for the shoe repairer participants.

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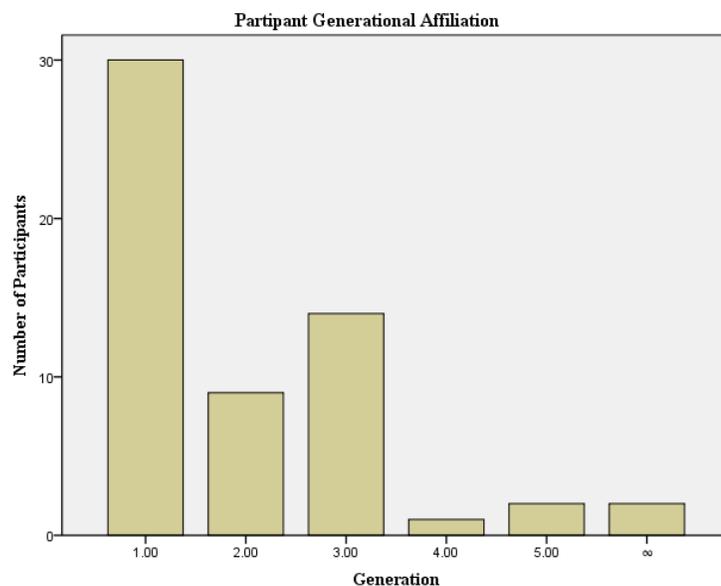


Figure 6. Frequency graph of generational affiliation of shoe repairer participants

Generational affiliation is important because for many shoe repairers, one's credibility for quality work can be established by citing a family history of association with the trade. The further back one can trace this knowledge, the better. This might explain the two participants who claim shoe repair has been in their family line further back than written records can attest to (denoted by the ∞ sign). One weakness of Figure 6 is that there is no consensus on what is considered a familial intergenerational passing of knowledge. Many shoe repairers learn from their extended kinship networks (cousins, uncles, etc) and still take the "1st generation" label while others argue that those individuals should be counted as "2nd generation." For the purposes of this research, I opted for the participant's emic descriptions of their own generational status. The primary information to be gleaned from this figure is that about 50% of shoe repairers cited that their family has a history of working in the trade

A quick glance down the "sex" column of Table 1 reveals that males are vastly overrepresented in terms of the participant population. There are just six females compared to 52 males. This did not occur by chance; the average shoe repairer is more likely to be male rather than female for reasons that are beyond the aims of this study. While there was little evidence of discrimination by sex in terms of employment (i.e. most shop owners have a difficult time finding females *or* males who possess the correct skills), females and males often fall in different roles in the shop. Four out of the six females interviewed maintained peripheral positions in the shop (assisting customers at the counter or shining shoes) while only two worked

sewing machines (which are considered periphery to the heavy grinding and finishing machinery). Though most shoe repairers are male, I choose to use neutral pronouns to describe shoe repairers because I value the perspectives of all shoe repairers and write to represent as many perspectives as possible.

In terms of educational achievement, the population remains diverse with participants who span the educational spectrum. The least educated shoe repairer had a third grade education while the highest educated shoe repairer held a PhD in American History. Figure 7 is a visual representation of the formal education of the shoe repairers who chose to participate in this study.

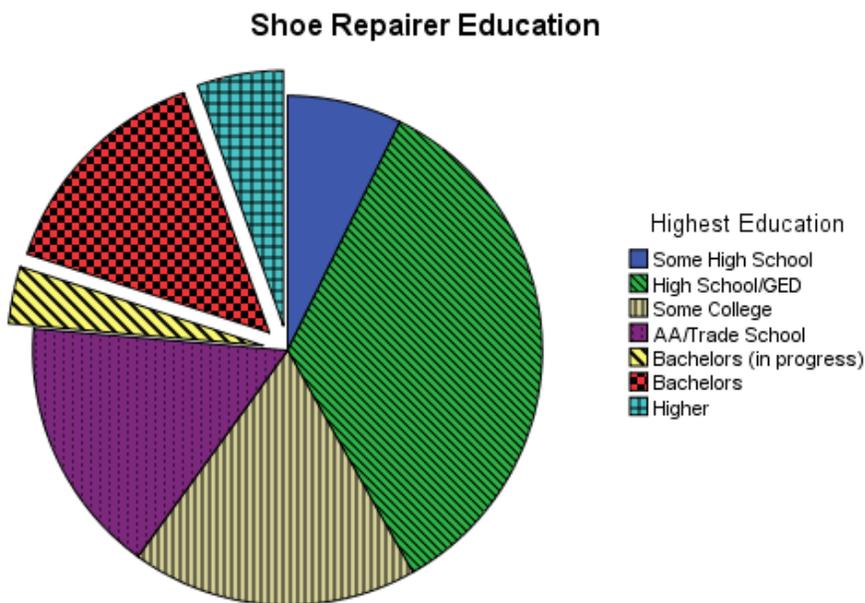


Figure 7. Formal education of shoe repairer participants

Fewer than 25% of participants held a bachelor's level of formal education. For these individuals, engineering was the most common major seconded by accounting.²² There does not appear to be a relationship between what "generation" a shoe repairer is and what level of education they hold. Additionally, no such relationship exists between education and shop size.²³

Shoe Repairer Qualitative Analysis

From the first day of fieldwork, shoe repairers were quick to point out what makes a "real" shoe repairer. Most participants could name a shoe repairer in their local area who was simply an amateur and was someone I should avoid talking to because they would give me misinformation. It became clear that there were three main qualities that defined the archetypal shoe repairer. A shoe repairer should focus on "doing quality," fostering a business setting that is centered on people rather than profits, and this shoe repairer should have clear connections to the historical past.²⁴ Figure 8 visualizes the congruence of these three themes. The following sections are dedicated to expanding on each theme and offering narratives that support these research findings.

²² More elaborate educational descriptions cannot be reported without sacrificing anonymity.

²³ Shop size is calculated via a subjective consideration of the intersection between the number of individuals who work at a shop, average sales, traffic, and physical size.

²⁴ This is not to say that profits do not matter, but profits should be gained by helping others rather than exploiting them.



Figure 8. Themes generated from qualitative analysis of shoe repairers

Quality

For shoe repairers, quality is defined as the ability to maintain integrity over time; the longer a piece of work holds over time the higher quality it is.²⁵ For shoe repairers, quality is considered absolutely paramount to success in their small business. Quality encompasses both the materials they use to repair the shoes and how they do their work. As one shoe repairer put it, "we try to *do* quality." Outputs in the form of repaired goods reflect upon both the craftsman themselves and the industry as a whole. Shoe repairers who cheat and use inferior (non-quality) materials

²⁵ For the purposes of shoe repair competitions, quality implies an artistic element as well (style, method, etc)

risk the failure of their business or shoe repair as a whole. This is plainly illustrated in the Shoe Service Industry of America's 100th anniversary video when the narrator blames the decline of the shoe repair industry on “less experienced craftsmen [who] worked with inferior, cheaper materials enabling them to undercut the competitors' prices while passing off their work as one of quality and craftsmanship” (Hicks & Durning, 2004). In this way, the discourse of quality is incredibly useful internally for explaining the decline in the number of shoe repair shops over time.

Many shoe repairers believe that if they fail to achieve the quality ideal, or use cheap materials for their work, their customer base will erode and their small business will fail. A shop owner named Gilbert highlighted the difference between low quality *fluffy* heels and high quality German leather (See Figure 9). The following field note excerpt shows how “quality” can have real consequences beyond the individual level:



Figure 9. Low quality leather (left), High quality leather (right)

Gilbert continues with talk about [business] competition and he says that quality will separate shops from one another and determine whether they will succeed. ‘The cream will rise to the top,’ Gilbert says, implying that he is the cream. Gilbert adds that ‘return customers are golden’ and that he's had customers come in for 20 years whose children now come in.

The quality product of the shoe repairer comes to be a symbol for the shoe repairer themselves. During the process of repair, layers of meaning are added to the object as the shoe repairer combines their labor with the object. The modifications

that are made speak to the artistic ability of the repairer and express something of their character. In the shoe repair industry, it is common for shoe repairers from the same geographic region to recognize each other's work when the customer brings a shoe in for repair. They may criticize or praise another's work through the medium of the object. Shoe repairers may even make character judgments based on a repair job from out of the area. In this way, the reputations of the repairers are constantly made and remade because each object they repair serves to reflect them personally.

At the intersection of quality and historical connection, shoe repairers perceive that in the past quality was ubiquitous. An important first informant, Bill, puts this into perspective:

'Shoes are not... made the way they were even 10 years ago. Everything is different with almost no exception. Years ago you could take a pair of ladies shoes...' and Bill proceeds to find a pair of ladies shoes for example. Bill says that back then you could use regular cement on the plastic heels and use nails to fix it on. Bill adds that some shops didn't even have to use nails because they 'had good, hard, solid plastic that you nailed into and good, hard, solid rubber that would hold that nail. The shops that did it right glued them and nailed them. Now there are two things: you can't peel them off, you have to grind them off and the ones you can peel off have plastic that is so different that regular glue doesn't stick to it so you have to use super glue, and there aren't enough people who know how to use the damned superglue.'

The quality shoes of the past, which are easier to repair because they are made in layers that lend themselves to repair, are becoming increasingly rare. Shoe repairers want to do a "quality" job, but when presented with "plastic shoes" it is difficult. Grace, a no-nonsense shoe repairer from Texas, said "You can't put quality on crap!" when talking about trying to work with traditionally non-repairable shoes

and maintaining quality standards. Additionally, there was no shortage of stories of shoe repair establishments shutting down because they refused to work on "non-quality" shoes and learn to use superglue. They would not compromise their values and thought it better to close shop rather than work with non-quality footwear.

Interestingly, the only ex-shoe repairer I got the opportunity to interview blamed economic realities and bodily stress on his exit from the industry rather than changing standards of quality in commonly sold footwear.

People Centered

The ideal shoe repairer should care more about people than profits; deceiving the public, harming the community, or exploiting workers are traits that shoe repairers reserve for other types of businesses. Their values are set in stark contrast to the modern corporation. The modern corporation is perceived as cold, emotionless, and unstable. Two repairmen, Edward and Billy, make this very clear in their accounts of their past experiences working for large corporations:

[People] move jobs today one job to the next job to the next job...used to you [could] work in a factory and you worked there for your whole life and you got a pension (simultaneously, Billy says "and went on down the road and retired") but that's not the way it works anymore! You don't see very many employees that have worked somewhere for a long, long, time. And you know the employers on the other hand are the same way! They don't give a crap about... that guy working in the back over there; he's number 487 ("Blockbuster!" Billy says) ...[when the] project's over with, you might be out of a job. They don't care! Used to [be], the employer was glad to have you and he took care of you and it was more of a family, but today with these big companies you're just a number, that's all you are.

Edward and Billy's conversation intersects with the final theme of connecting to the past. In the past, it is perceived these big businesses were honest and cared about people more than they did profits. The shoe repair industry is said to carry on those values that are deemed to have been lost. Their conversation also touches on the reasons why many shoe repairers prefer their work over more modern "corporate" positions. When asked, "What do you like about shoe repair?" shoe repairers overwhelmingly focused on two themes: working with their hands and maintaining autonomy over their production. When a shoe repairer named Terry was asked the question, "What do you like about shoe repair?" he smiled and with swift confidence replied "I can use my hands and see the results of my labor." This hands-on production and worker autonomy is juxtaposed to our post-industrial service based economy that separates consumer from producer and alienates workers from results of their labor (Marx and Engels 1988). Shoe repairers most certainly do not reject capitalism, but they find in their work something that is missing in modern occupations. They describe their work as more fulfilling and with less "clockwatching" than the typical office job. Repetition is not a word that shoe repairers use to describe their work; "every job is different."

The ideal shoe repair shop remains small, local, and community oriented and forms a network of relationships with other businesses.²⁶ The ideal shop is not ruthlessly competitive with other shops; many shoe repairers often recommend the

²⁶ Small is defined as less than 50 employees in business terms, but for shoe repairers the ideal is less than 20.

services of other shops or share employees or machinery between shops. A repairman named Blake sums up the industry's positions succinctly; "our competition is not other shoe repair shops... there's no competition... our competition is replacing that shoe new." In this precarious position, they are not attempting to extract as much capital as possible from their customers (as they perceive big businesses to do). In my hundreds of hours in shoe repair shops, I have seen many jobs provided to customers free of charge. One shoe repairer in Oregon referred these acts of reciprocity as "planting seeds." Prices are also not prominently displayed in most shoe repair shops as it is assumed the price will be fair as people come first.

To many shoe repairers, there is something offensive about a business pushing a product or service on a customer that they either don't need or is directly against their interests. A common denigration of other shoe repair shops is that they try to "upsell" their customers on products or services they do not need. Bill explains what he perceives is the experience at a local shoe repair shop that fails to achieve the "people centered" theme:

'Michael goes into Corporate Shoe Repair²⁷ and says I want my shoes repaired. They give you a Burger King size menu board to pick from. It's your first time, you have no idea what you're fucking getting done so then they sell you a bunch of shit you don't need. We're going to sell you full soles and you don't want regular leather, you want the best leather available don't you?? Well yeah of course I do! We're going to charge you more for that... you don't want regular rubber heel do you?? ... You want the high gloss one year shine, don't you??' Bill concludes by saying that by the time I leave there, my \$45 job has turned into an \$80 job.

²⁷ This passage represents a critique of a local shoe repair shop that did not represent the ideals of the industry. The name has been changed to protect the informant.

Historical Connection

The more connection a shoe repair shop has to the past, the more they are seen as a legitimate repair establishment. By using the same tools, in the same spaces, with the same methods on similar objects, shoe repairers draw on a legacy of tradition that connects them to their ancestors. As the quantitative section made clear, many shoe repairers are actually second, third, or fourth generation (traced through the father) and can recall the historical trajectory that explains why they repair today. This legitimizes them as shoe repairers because they have a direct connection to a past; shoe repairers proudly wear their tradition as a badge of honor. Connection to the past grants a shoe repairer status in the industry and there is a tacit assumption that families/shops that have longer histories must do quality work because they would have gone out of business long ago if they did poor work. Most shops are adorned with antiques, historical photos, and are often situated in downtown walking strips adjacent to other businesses that are trying to match their image (old time barber shops are common). Mall locations are among the least desirable and assumed to be a façade that turns out low quality work for as much money as they can convince unsuspecting customers to give them.

In contrast with the modern corporation, the cultural ideal for the shoe repair shop is literally a "mom and pop" store with children or extended kin helping around the shop. As the previous quantitative section highlighted, only the larger shops typically meet this cultural ideal as females are rare in the shoe repair industry and

larger volume shops are able to sustain full time counter work/shoe shines/sewing for a female shoe repairer. If shops cannot meet the "mom and pop" ideal, they improvise. Gregory and Darlene manage a successful shoe repair shop in Seattle and they are often mistaken for husband and wife; they are siblings that took over the shop from their father after he passed away. In an Oregon shop, Charles has been "adopted" by the store owners and plays the role of a son while the shop owner's own son is overseas. In many shoe repair shops, it is common to see a crib or children being raised in the shop and "cutting their teeth" on leather scraps. If children aren't present, shop pets are adopted and live out their lives as attachments to their respective shops.

Bringing it All Together

The three major themes often overlapped with each other as shoe repairers performed the ideal shoe repairer role. The following narrative by Alyssa, a 20 year old woman who grew up in the shop, speaks to the three themes as a cohesive whole:

'I grew up in a family full of cobblers so I heard stories of California, Oregon... there used to be 20 or 30 shops in the greater Seattle area. Now, you have maybe 10, I'm not counting the shifty mall places that slap a heel on, I'm talking real cobblers who take real pride in their work. 10 might even be pushing it.' I say, 'It's interesting that you draw a distinction between different kinds of shops.' She responds, 'Yep, to me, if you're going to be a craftsman, it's your craft, you do a good job at it, you don't half-ass it; Take pride in what you do. I'm just a shoe shiner, but I want this shine to be the best job it can be. I want it to look good and if it doesn't look good I go to [the shop owner] and ask how it can look better.' I asked her if this difference of quality and caring about your work is the difference between the mall shops and good shops. She responds, 'They are quantity over quality. They want

the money 'yeah, I'll get that heel on today because I want that 20 dollars' versus where we want a week with their shoe making sure it fits and looks good and is even and shined. Following logically, I ask her 'Do you believe that an increase in quality will increase your quantity [of orders]?' She responds quickly, and with a nod, 'Yeah, I really do.'

Alyssa is quick to note her family history in the trade and distinguish her shop/work as "real" compared to the "shifty mall places" that do not use quality materials/methods or have their customers' best interests at heart. It is perceived that over time fewer and fewer businesses have their customer's best interests at heart. Businesses that care for their employees as real people would not abandon their employees to move operations overseas nor would they intentionally sell a shoddy product/service to a customer to extract more money from them. The loss of values like people over money and true quality are used as a tool to explain what is wrong with society. A shoe repairer from Seattle laments:

I asked Henry what he thinks for the future of shoe repair. Stopping his work, and leaning on the jack [shoe anvil], he says 'I think there'll be some shops that will survive. If shoe prices continue to be so cheap I don't see how shoe repair can survive. When you can buy a shoe for 20 bucks... how do we re-educate America to buy the right shoes?'

For Henry, the average person in America has lost the value of quality when it comes to footwear and needs to be "re-educated". Many repairers attribute the lack of care for quality (quality implies repairable) products to changes in manufacturing both domestic and abroad:

At this point, Terry launches into talking about quality. 'You know, cars and shoes used to be made well in this country. The producers thought 'I make them well so that the customer knows they are repairable and want my product rather than something that will break down.' He continues, 'The Chinese were really the first to start the built-in obsolescence factor... they were trying to get into the market and couldn't make anything good so they made a bunch of inferior goods to undercut the competition. American companies saw that people were actually buying it and now we do it too.'

His sentiments are echoed by many shoe repairers. The following is an excerpt from my field notes from visiting a successful Texas shoe repairer:

I ask him how shoe repair has changed over time. Blake talks very quickly and passionately about this; he brings up the influx of Chinese made shoes in the 1970s and says that they [the Chinese] were able to sell in America because now we 'move fast' and 'throw away' everything without much thought to it. After this, I ask him what he thought about the future of shoe repair. He tells me they 'will all close down' and we won't have any 'mom and pop' stores anymore. He offers a caveat saying 'this will occur unless society can change' perhaps to ease his own doubts about the future.

Repairmen and customers conclude that in the past "people knew what shoe repair was" and that people need to change to value shoe repair (and what it stands for) again. Aligning with these values has even been offered as a solution for the recent economic woes from the recent economic crisis of 2008.

Quantitative Analysis of Shoe Repair Customers

While the previous section focused on the "why" of the shoe repairer half of the shoe repair transaction, this section shifts focus to consider what generalizations can be made about the people who utilize the services of the shoe repair industry. The 2010 fieldwork season included a short survey asking why customers used the shoe

repair industry. While informative for building the 2012 survey, it wasn't scientific in the sense that shops were not equally represented and no efforts were made to attempt to generalize about the industry as a whole. The 2012 survey data were collected across three states (TX, OR, &WA) which allows for a comparison between states and increases the ability to generalize these findings. Table 2 is a cross-tabulation summarizing findings relating to why customers used shoe repair.

Table 2. Multiple state comparison of customer reasons for repair

Parameters	Texas	Washington	Oregon	Total
Reason to Repair				
Sentimental attachment	73.1%	80.5%	76.0%	79.0%
Saving money is Important	84.6%	69.9%	72.0%	69.8%
Repairs to help local business	73.1%	63.6%	80.0%	66.8%
Can't find object in stores	53.8%	60.4%	40.0%	57.1%
Old objects more comfortable	53.8%	47.9%	Not tested	48.8%
Repair due to tradition	30.8%	42.2%	52.0%	42.0%
Repairs to help Environment	34.6%	41.6%	32.0%	39.5%
Repairs to personalize object	15.4%	18.2%	12.0%	17.1%
Repair for medical reasons	7.7%	5.2%	8.0%	5.9%
Guilt felt for using another shop				
High Guilt	20.8%	26.4%	36.0%	26.9%
Low/No Guilt	79.2%	73.6%	64.0%	73.1%

Sentimental value for objects ranked fairly high for Washington and Oregon, but slightly lower for Texas. Instead, the second highest value (saving money) was ranked as more important there. Still, saving money is a very important reason to repair (as will be shown in later paragraphs). The question related to repairing to help local businesses is interesting, but may be related to a general ideal that customers

aspire to rather than being a deciding factor in making a repair. Fourth most important was being unable to find the object in stores anymore. When the consumer market fails, customers choose to repair as an alternative. While it is tempting to end with this list as the reasons why people repair their shoes, other data collected complicate these findings and allow us to better understand the realities of this economic transaction.

Sentimental Repairs vs Economic Repairs

Table 2 revealed that sentimental feelings and saving money (economic factors) played the two largest roles in choosing to repair an object. Other data collected, like estimated original cost of the repaired object and sentimental status of the repaired object, seem to tell a different story. For example, just 31% of objects brought in for repair were tagged "has sentimental value."

When considering the choice to repair an object, customers considered many factors, but one primary consideration appeared to be the estimated original cost of the object. It seemed irrational to customers to pay more to repair an object than they originally paid for it (which was often used as a measure for what it would cost to replace the object new). The shoe repair industry is well aware of this; Blake, an ambitious and business-oriented shoe repairer, said "the standard for the price of repair is one third the cost of a new shoe." Anymore than that and it is thought that customers will refuse to repair and will opt to buy a new object. Thinking somewhat like neoclassical economists, shoe repairers assume the customers are acting irrational

or "crazy" if they pay more to repair than they would to buy a new one. The usual explanation given for such behavior was that the object must have had some "emotional" or "sentimental" value to the customer. While stories of these "crazy" customers were many, actual cases were quite few; just 4.4% of cases involved customers who spent more on the repairs than their shoes originally cost. In most cases, the object was received for free or it was obtained for a low cost on the second hand market (for a detailed examination, see Appendix table D). Because it is very rare for a customer to spend more to repair a shoe than it does for them to buy it new, the data suggests that economic factors take primacy for customers.

Continuing on the theme of trying to understand what leads a person to move beyond looking at cost-benefit alone, a sub-research question was formulated which asked: "would people be willing to pay more to repair their *sentimental* objects as compared to their standard *non-sentimental* objects?" If this was the case, one could expect to find a lower cost-benefit ratio (the estimated original cost of their object minus the cost to repair the object) for sentimental objects than for standard objects. After removing cases with incomplete data, 183 total cases were left to analyze to come to an understanding about the differences, if any, between sentimental and non-sentimental objects. Table 3 is the result of the analysis.

Table 3. Sentimental Objects vs Non-sentimental Objects

Factors	Total Objects (n=183)		Sentimental Objects (n=56)		Standard Objects (n=127)	
	Mean	Median	Mean2	Median2	Mean3	Median3
Original Price (A)	\$131	\$100	\$177	\$150	\$111	\$100
Cost of Repair (B)	\$28	\$20	\$33	\$25	\$26	\$20
Cost-Benefit Ratio (B/A*100)	21%	20%	18.6%	16.7%	23.4%	20%

Considering all 183 complete cases, the mean original price of a customer's object that they agreed to pay to have repaired was \$131. Median averages trend lower due to a few pricy pieces of medical footwear. The average cost benefit savings for the total group is \$103. In terms of percents, customers spent about 1/5 of the original cost to repair their objects: well below the industry's standard of repair costs of 1/3 original cost.

After breaking the total group down into a group that repaired objects with sentimental value (31%) and a "standard group" that repaired objects with no sentimental value (69%), a clear difference was revealed between the two groups. Shockingly, it appeared as if customers were willing to pay slightly more to have their *non sentimental* objects repaired than their *sentimental* objects. This was the direct opposite of what shoe repairers thought would occur. Logically, sentimental feelings toward an object should add value and lead to customers willing to repair at a higher fraction of their original cost. Rather than come to the conclusion that sentimental value leads people to not want to repair their objects, a more accurate conclusion was reached. Judging by the cost of mean/median cost of repair and

original price, objects in the sentimental group have higher original prices which explains the higher rates of cost-benefit savings. It was the registered higher cost associated with sentimental objects, and the relatively inflexible repair costs, that led to lower cost-benefit ratings for the sentimental group.

Though no evidence was found to support a connection between sentimentality for objects and higher cost-benefit ratios, the results were interesting enough to report. Instead, a connection was found between the original stated cost of an object and the likelihood it was to have sentimental value (which translates into lower cost-benefit ratios). Further study is needed to understand if customers are more likely to develop emotional ties to pricier objects than to cheaper objects, or if they simply report higher estimated original costs because participants value their sentimental objects at a higher level than non-sentimental objects.

Class Based Repair

Table 3 reveals that the mean average price for a pair of shoes that is repaired is \$131. The average price of a shoe sold in the United States is \$31 (Harkavy 2007). Considering the high percentage of customers who are repairing to save money, it is clear that pricier shoes are being brought in to repair because they would be costly to replace new each time. What generalizations can be made about the type of person who spends \$100 more on average for their footwear? Much anecdotal evidence exists from participant accounts in the field that customers of the shoe repair industry appear to be of a higher "class" than the average population. Shoe repairers would

comment that many of their customers are doctors, lawyers, "well-to-do", and that their addresses on checks come from "the nicer part of town." The survey intended to test this hypothesis by quantitatively measuring class among customers and comparing this against data collected by the 2010 U.S. census. In the sociological literature, class has been a notoriously hard concept to quantify but it is generally agreed upon that income, education, and occupation help paint a picture of a group's ability to call upon resources to aid them in times of need (Krieger, Williams, and Moss 1997). For the purpose of this analysis, education and income serve as a proxy for class or socioeconomic position.

The 2010 fieldwork showed that both customers and shoe repairer owners were hesitant about discussing income. The shoe repairers thought the question too sensitive to ask and customers were hesitant to provide that information. A cohort income measure was used that was agreeable to all shoe repairers in the 2012 field season and netted a much higher response rate. Figures 10, 11 and 12 are visuals of the income distribution for individuals in specific counties in Texas, Washington, and Oregon. For each figure, the expected county income averages were lower than the responses received in the survey (averages from U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Such findings are not surprising considering the higher than average price of footwear for the customers.

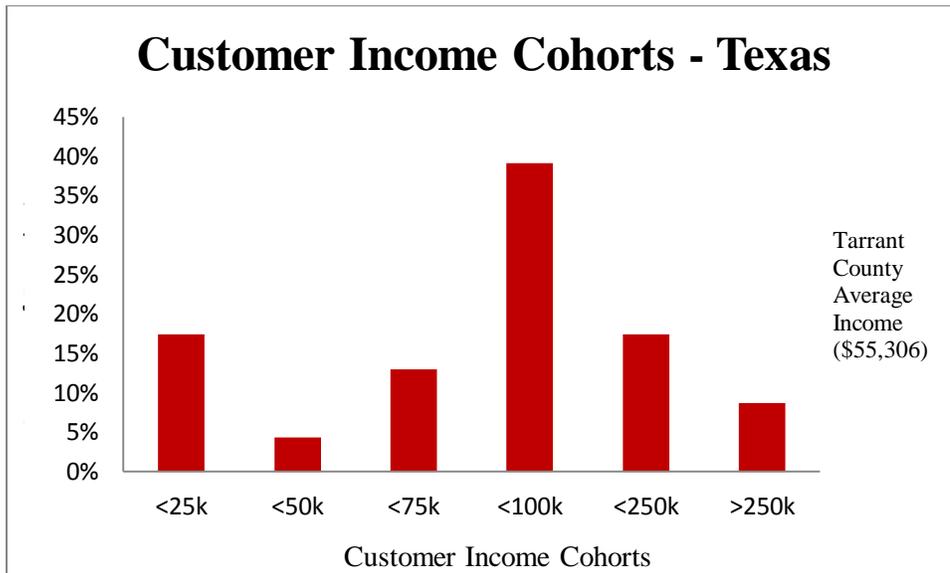


Figure 10. Customer income cohorts for the Texas shop

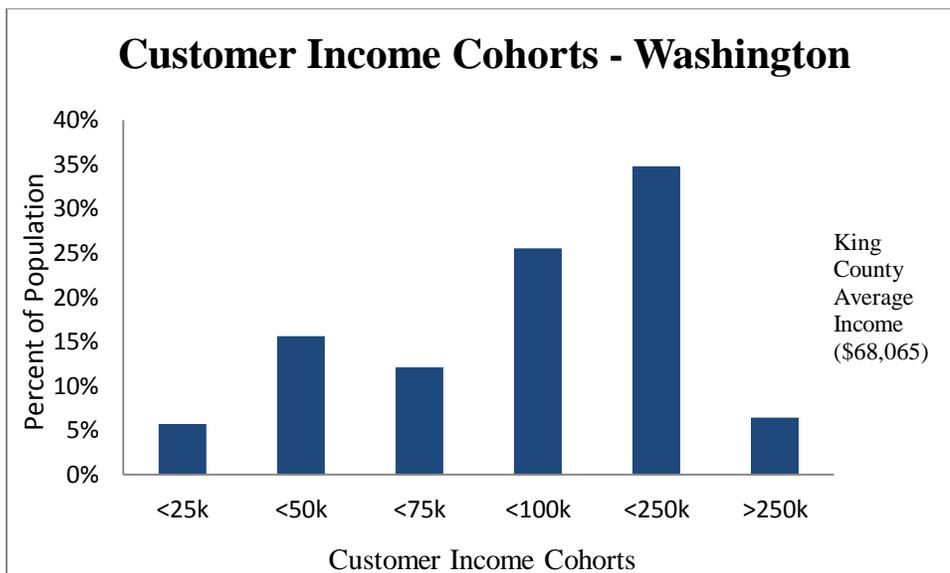


Figure 11. Customer income cohort for the Washington shops

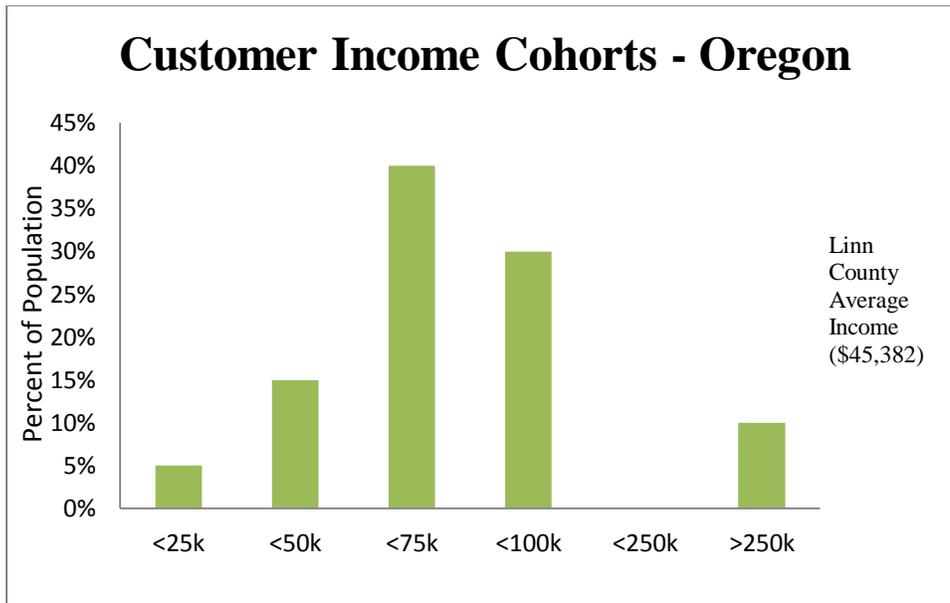


Figure 12. Customer income cohorts for the Oregon shop

Analysis of the data collected regarding education revealed that customers of the shoe repair industry are more educated than others from their respective counties thus providing evidence for what shoe repairers have suspected all along.

The results of three non-parametric one sample t tests revealed significant differences between the educational levels of the customers of the shoe repair industry and the educational levels of the county average for each respective county (averages from U.S. Census Bureau 2010). A one sample two-tailed binomial test for the Texas shop indicated that we may reject the null hypothesis ($t= 1.13$; $df 24$; $p < .001$). This means that there is less than a 1 in 1000 chance that the results could have been by chance. The same test was run for the Oregon and Seattle shops and found that the null hypothesis may be rejected in both cases as well (Oregon $t=2.4$; $df = 20$;

$p < .004$) (Seattle $t = 14.72$; $df = 152$; $P < .001$). Figure 13 provides a visualization of the expected vs the actual educational percentages for all three states.

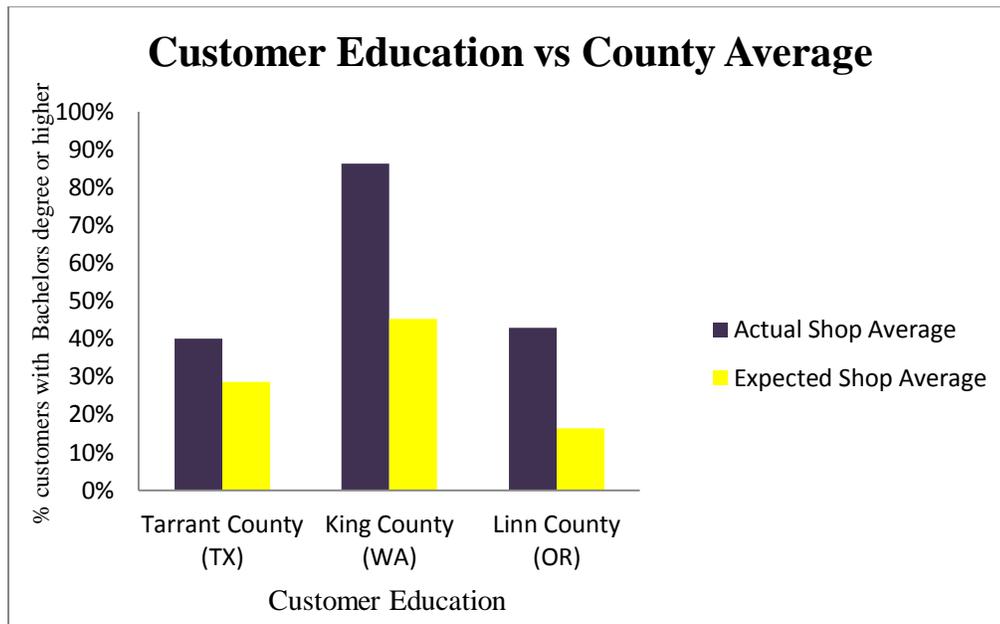


Figure 13. Educational levels across states v. county averages

Heavy Users

Shoe repair, like any business, is deeply concerned with meeting the needs of its heavy users. The 80/20 rule states that 80% of business comes from just 20% of the consumers. For the purposes of this research, customers who made more than 6 repairs a year (19.6% of respondents) were considered "heavy users". How did they differ from the general population of customers? Table 4 illuminates the differences between the most frequent users of the shoe repair industry and less frequent users.

Table 4. Light user vs Heavy User Crosstab

Parameters	Light Users	Heavy Users	Total users
Reasons to Repair			
Saving Money is Important	70.4%	67.5%	69.8%
Can't find object in stores	53.1%	70.0%*	56.4%
Sentimental attachment	75.9%	90.0%*	78.7%
Repair due to tradition	36.4%	62.5%*	41.6%
Repairs to help local business	63.6%	77.5%	66.3%
Repairs to help Environment	39.5%	37.5%	39.1%
Repairs to personalize object	13.6%	25.0%	15.8%
Old objects more comfortable	50.8%	42.9%	49.1%
Repair for medical reasons	5.6%	5.0%	5.4%
Guilt			
High Guilt	22.2%	40.5%*	25.8%
Low/ No Guilt	77.8%	59.5%	74.2%
Sex			
Female	56.3%	75.0%*	60.0%
Male	43.8%	25.0%*	40.0%
Education			
Below Bachelors	26.9%	15.0%	24.5%
Bachelors or Higher	73.1%	85.0%	75.5%

* Notable differences between heavy users and light users

The analysis suggests that heavy users are more likely to be female than male. This is unsurprising considering that females purchase more pairs of shoes than their male counterparts: 12 pairs for men annually and 17 pairs for women respectively (Freeman 2011; Belk 2003). Heavy users were also more likely to repair because they

couldn't find their object in stores anymore and for sentimental reasons²⁸.

Unsurprisingly, heavy users were more likely than less frequent users to express feelings of guilt for repairing at a different repair shop.

Though related, guilt and frequency of repair (heavy/light use status) are two different categories. High guilt individuals (those 26.9% who rated 3 or lower on a nine point likert scale) have slightly different concerns than the average shoe repair user. Table 5 highlights the differences between these two groups:

Table 5. High Guilt vs Low Guilt Cross-tabulation

Parameters	Low/No Guilt	High Guilt	Total
Reasons to Repair			
Saving Money is Important	68.1%	75.0%	69.9%
Can't find object in stores	54.6%	57.7%	55.4%
Sentimental attachment	78.0%	82.7%	79.3%
Repair due to tradition	35.5%	59.6%*	42.0%
Repairs to help local business	60.3%	82.7%*	66.3%
Repairs to help Environment	34.8%	48.1%*	38.3%
Repairs to personalize object	16.3%	21.2%	17.6%
Old objects more comfortable	51.8%	42.5%	49.4%
Repair for medical reasons	4.3%	9.6%	5.7%
Sex			
Female	59.3%	58.8%	59.2%
Male	40.7%	41.2%	40.8%
Education			
Below Bachelors	23.7%	26.9%	24.6%
Bachelors or Higher	76.3%	73.1%	75.4%

²⁸ Further analysis concluded that the sentimental aspect of repair (tagging objects sentimental or not) was not due to gender as both males and females were similar (females 32%, males 29.7%) for tagging objects as sentimental.

Those who rated high guilt for choosing to use another shoe repairer rather than the shoe repairer they usually use repaired for reasons of tradition more so than those without feelings of guilt. These findings are unsurprising and make logical sense considering the nature of guilt, patronage, and commitment. Interestingly, these "guilty" users were more likely to note repairing for ideological reasons such as helping local businesses or helping the environment. These feelings of guilt will be discussed further in the next section on the qualitative analysis for customers of the shoe repair industry.

Qualitative Analysis of Shoe Repair Customers

The results of the qualitative analysis echo the findings of the quantitative analysis but add depth to the findings that go beyond what numbers can tell us. Three main themes seem to explain the meaning and rationale of the shoe repair transaction for customers of the shoe repair industry. Customers are managing investments, expressing personal values, and being driven by sentimental attachment to objects. Figure 14 visualizes the congruence of these three themes and their unequal natures. Considering the totality of why customers repair their objects, roughly 70% repair for investment management, 50% for personal values, and 30% for sentimental value.²⁹ The following sections are dedicated to expanding on each theme and offering narratives that support these research findings.

²⁹ These percentages are based on a combination of the quantitative assessment and qualitative analyses. Note that these reasons for repair are not mutually exclusive.

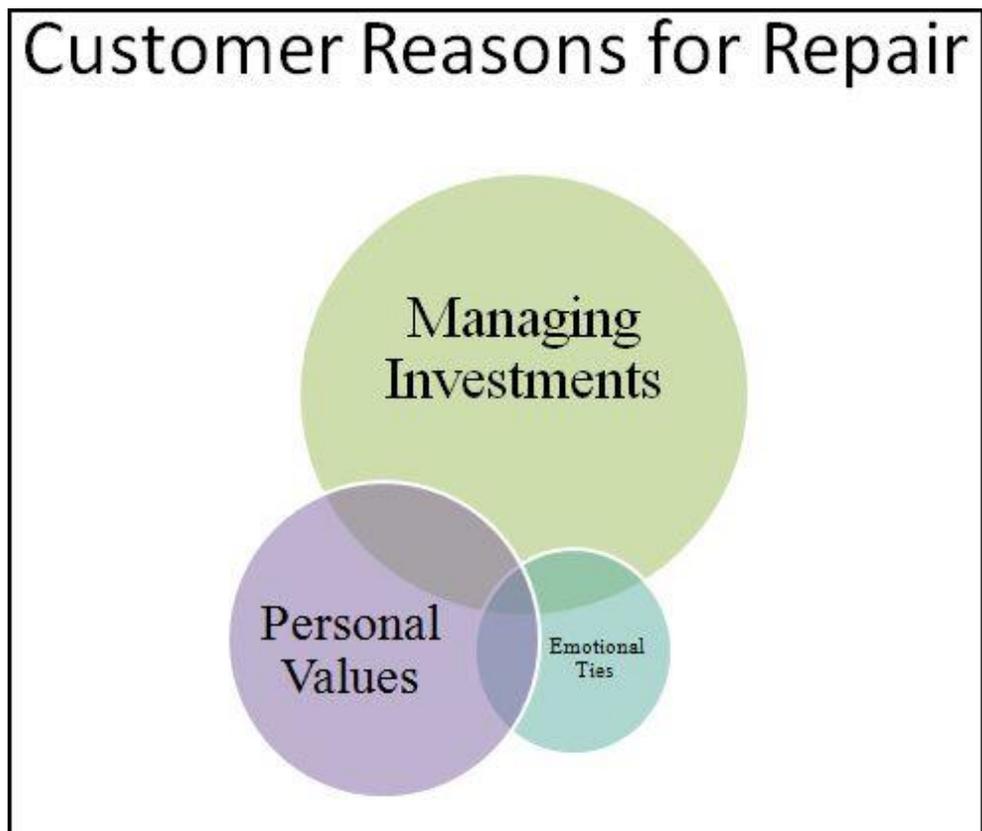


Figure 14. Themes derived from Qualitative analysis of customer interactions.

Managing Investments

The quantitative analysis provided evidence that suggested economic primacy when considering the choice to repair. It should come as no surprise that customers were quick to relay the "logic" of their choice to repair. "*I wouldn't buy a new car just cause the tires are worn or the windshield is cracked!!*" said one customer on why she chose to repair rather than replace. The most common word used to describe their objects was "investment."

I bought them for \$300!! I want to keep my investment

Shoes are an investment, boots cost \$1500 sometimes... my shoes aren't disposable.

Once they are comfortable, I keep. [It's an] investment.

Other similar explanations appealed to cost-effectiveness, being economical, cheaper, or saving money. The word "investment" was chosen for this theme because it underscores the economic impetrative of the transactions, the time investment of "breaking in" a shoe to a suitable comfort level, and is naturally used by customers and repairers to describe the objects that are being repaired.

The word "investment" is also suitable for the class based aspects of repair suggested by the quantitative component of the analysis. The following narrative from a customer after completing the survey (and providing his income) supports the "class based" aspect of shoe repair and the investment theme in general:

An interesting man I met today was a customer who bought his shoes at Goodwill and had to repair them before wearing. He was a tall,

burly, 'All-American' type of man with a crew cut. After he took the survey, he said 'I'd like to make a bet with you about what you'll find on the survey.' I said, "What do you think I'll find?" He said 'I'm willing to make a bet that people who repair have higher incomes.' I asked him why he thought that and he said 'people who have higher incomes are smarter with their investments. Lower income people do not budget.'

Customers would routinely consider how much their shoes cost and perform an internal or verbal calculation of whether it was "worth it" to repair. Shoe repairers understand this and regularly assume these calculations when they say "I don't think it is *worth it* to repair these shoes." Both customers and shoe repairers routinely thought it irrational to pay more for repair than was paid to buy the object.

Personal Values

The second largest theme of the shoe repair transaction for customers are the personal values that are reflected in their decision to repair. Many customers approach their objects with a "Depression era mentality" or a "waste not, want not" mantra:

I was raised by Depression era parents. You know the old saying, 'Use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without'.

Why would I buy new shoes? Waste not, want not!

There was a certain conservative countercultural aspect to the choice to repair. Many customers knew that repairing their objects was uncommon today and blamed the fact that we have been "sold" a consumption mentality or that we have forgotten the ways of the past. By losing these once common approaches to objects, it is perceived that

environmental degradation, the loss of local businesses and a decline in quality of goods has followed. When asked "why do you repair rather than replace new?" responses similar to the following occurred fairly frequently:

If I like my product and it can be repaired, I'd rather maintain it and keep it. Cheaper to repair than replace. Things aren't made like they used to be.

I like my shoes (The customer's face crumples empathetically)! I don't believe in throwing stuff away, I invest in good shoes. We are brought up to be wasteful, it's Madison Avenue!

Because Chinese manufacturing is cheap and terrible

In shoe repair, consumers find respite from short-sighted consumerist mentalities. They find a piece of history and tradition on their city's main street strips. There is comfort in knowing that a local shoe repair shop has been there for 50 years and because they are a family shop, it is likely they will be there in 50 years for the customer's children as well. Many times, customers are nostalgic for shoe repair as they remember coming in with their parents to have repairs done. They remember the smell of the shop and when they walk into the shop as adults the scent hits them and it takes them back to simpler times. Shoe repairers are often willing to engage in these nostalgic trips into the past as they answer questions about what the community used to be like in the 1950s or the music and cars of bygone eras. In shoe repair, customers find an uncommon experience with people who understand them and share their values.

Emotional Ties

"I repair my favorite items – they are broken in and have history/sentimental value for me. Giving them new life with repairs saves/relieves me from the (emotional) loss of having to trash good shoes/items."

Emotional attachment to specific shoe repairers or to their objects plays a role in the choice to repair and the meaning that is given to the act itself. As part of the shoe repairer's "people over money" mentality, shoe repairers often express sincere care for their customers to the point where customers are seen as more than just a means to earning profit.

Customers experience this, and respond in kind. Customers come to care about *their* local "shoe guy" more than they

would their internet service provider or pizza delivery driver. Customers pray for the health of their shoe repairer, attend the same churches, stop in just to say hello, and bring them food as a surprise. Figure 15 is a Christmas card that says, " We wish you

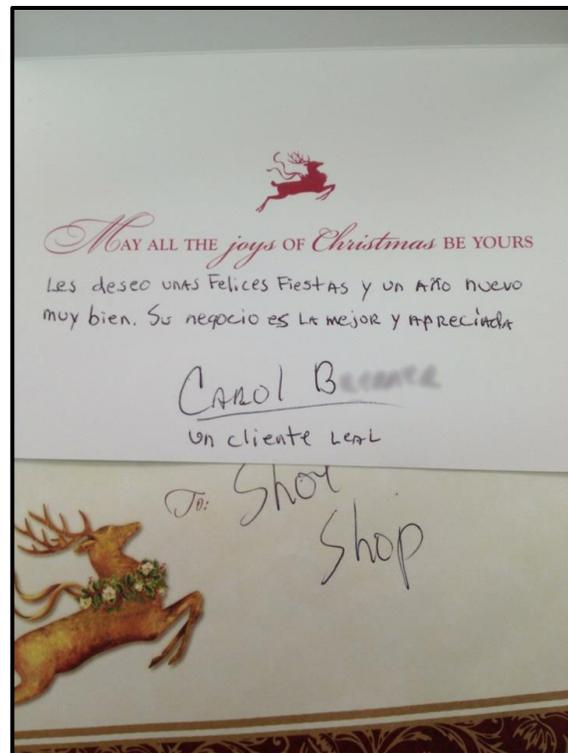


Figure 15. Christmas card from a customer to their shoe repairer

happy holidays and a great new year. Your business is the best and appreciated. Carol B, a loyal customer."³⁰

At some level, gifts of free jobs from the shoe repairer or food/cards/gifts from the customers are a way of establishing and maintaining trust between the parties. Customers occasionally grow attached to their objects to the point where the objects are not replaceable. Understandably, a customer needs to trust that the shoe repairer is going to do a "quality" job lest they damage the object and it is lost forever. Exchange of gifts works to ensure that both parties have each other's interests in mind. Once this trust is established, customers cite feeling guilty for choosing to use another shoe repair shop because it might harm the relationship they have fostered at their usual shop. The 26.9% of customers who felt a high amount of guilt for using the services of another shoe repair shop were quick to use the word "love" to describe both the work they receive from their usual shoe repairer and the relationship they have established with their repairer.³¹

These sentimental attachments to objects can be quite strong. Children's baseball gloves, ballet slippers, wedding shoes, adult sports gear... these are powerful examples of the types of objects shoe repairers work with about 30% of the time. The objects are personified and are said to be "dead" when they can no longer be fixed and "brought back to life" after they have been repaired. Customers are put in the position of deciding when to end the life of an object. A common reason cited for

³⁰ Translation by the shoe repairer that received the card.

³¹ While this love is certainly different than romantic love, it is still a sign of high positive affect for their shoe repairer

repair was "the shoes still have life in them." While no customer literally believes their shoes are living, there is a consideration of what the object "wants" and what would be the most just course of action to take regarding the future of that object.

Tough Choices at the Register

Qualitative research provided me with the chance to witness hundreds of customer/repairer interactions over the counter (or at the register). During the actual transaction itself, the three themes just discussed come together in sometimes competing ways. The most fascinating intersection to me as an economic anthropologist was the battle between economic primacy and emotional connection to an object. How do customers put a price tag on memories they have made with their object? How do they "kill" an object that just moments before they considered "good?" Put simply, it is an ugly internal battle that often requires cutting the object away from themselves in a way that leaves customers saddened by the whole experience:

A female customer came into the shop and produced a shoe from a brown bag. She said, 'This shoe belongs to my daughter, and I want to know if it can be repaired. She really loves it and it's her favorite shoe.' David looked at the shoe and said, 'It's not typically repairable, but it's not impossible. We can tear off this entire bottom part and put a new sole on there but it will be 60 bucks total for that.' The mother looked distraught and said, 'this shoe only cost \$29... is there a way to do just part of it?' She was frowning by this point and the shoe repairman said that the best he could do was \$40 to just replace the heel because it would need a complete rebuild because it was a molded sole design. Continuing, he gives her the option of buying heel plates for \$4 but cautions that it isn't a good idea because she'll walk

funny on them. The woman said she would need to make a call to her daughter to see what to do.

As she is standing there in deep thought about what to do with the shoe, I talk with her and tell her that I'm a student who studies shoe repair and that I have seen this again and again. The lady seems genuinely saddened by having to make this choice and is not angry at the shoe repairman because he seemed sympathetic. She said, 'She really likes them... but that's too much... I'm going to have to call her and see what she says.' I tell her, 'She's not going to be happy' and the customer says 'I know.' The customer puts the shoes back in the bag and slowly walks away from the shop. She does not return.

Though this customer clearly had emotional connections with the object through her daughter, in the end she decided not to repair the shoe because economically it didn't make sense. The shoe cost \$29 and that original price played a factor in the decision to reject the \$40 price point for repair. While the repairman offered her the \$4 heel plates, he gave her frank advice that the boots wouldn't be comfortable if they installed heel plates in this situation; he cared about her enough to sacrifice profit on the heel plates. In the end, the customer wasn't angry with the shoe repairer for his inability to repair it at a lower cost, but was disappointed that she couldn't control the object/situation. As Belk highlighted, relationships may be mediated through objects such as footwear (Belk 2003). Without the ability to repair the shoes, she cannot maintain the object that has grown their relationship since the day she bought them for her daughter and she fell in love with them. Instead, her mother must break the news to her daughter that her time with her favorite shoes has come to an end.

A major factor in the previous scenario was the low original cost of the footwear. The manufacturing process of modern footwear works against customers who find themselves in the situations like the one in the previous paragraph. There is

often no clear way to tell if an object is repairable as manufacturers would rather have customers buy another than fix the one they have. When customers realize they have bought a shoe that is so difficult to repair that it isn't worth the cost, many react with anger towards the manufacturers rather than the repairer and express feelings of betrayal and sadness. The shoe that is still "good" in their eyes must now die. Many cannot bear to do this, so rather than doing it themselves they leave it with the shoe repairer so it can be "recycled" for parts. It is likely these shoes will be thrown away, but shoe repairers understand the "waste not, want not" attitude and accept the shoes. In the following scene, I accept the shoes and swear to carry on the message:

I look up to see a male customer at the front counter [Figure 16]. 'I don't know if these can be fixed, but I want you to look at them.' He produces a large boot from a brown paper sack and Darlene turns the shoe over and sees where the back heel has come off the bottom of his hiking boot. The customer says, 'I don't ever wear these... I wanna know what the hell happened to where they get like that.' Gregory comes over to investigate what could be a potentially angry customer, handles the shoe, and tells the man that it can't be repaired. The man says, holding the other shoe, 'Why not?' Gregory explains that the back part of the sole came off because the shoe rotted from the inside and that they can't repair it because it is a molded sole design and lacks a midsole. The man says, "But I've had the shoes for 12 years and I've probably worn them half a dozen times. I took really good care



Figure 16. Depiction of the exchange between Darlene and the customer

of them, so how did they deteriorate?’ Gregory explains that the shoe was designed with a ‘shelf- life’ and would fall apart by itself whether he wears it or not. The man slowly realizes that he’s not going to be able to keep his shoes. At this point he’s looking for empathy from us.

Darlene, Gregory, and I listen to him tell us that he called the company (Georgia Boots) and asked them what happened. They said that he had owned them for 12 years so they wouldn’t repair or replace them. I ask him, ‘If you would have known these shoes were going to deteriorate, would you have bought them?’ He quickly says ‘No!’ I ask him how he feels and he says, ‘I feel betrayed because I took such good care of them and my reward is this.’ I told him that I’m a researcher who is trying to figure out why people repair their shoes and that I’ve seen customers like him before. He looks at his shoes, then looks at Darlene, then turns back to me and asks me if I want to keep the shoe ‘so that others would know.’ I agree to take his shoes and tell him that I’ll use them in presentations. While he doesn’t shed a tear, I can sense his sadness. He expresses gratitude that local experts exist who can empathize with him and explain the situation to him honestly in a way that the Georgia Boot Company failed to do when he called them. After he hands me his boots, he leaves the shop without making a repair.

Despite this customer's best efforts, he has been forced to part with a shoe he cared for. The betrayal is especially harsh because he was certain he had bought "quality" only to learn that he had been tricked by a large business that didn't care about him. His investment in ruins, he provided us with an emotional eulogy of the life of the shoe then passed it on to me so that I might tell others and so that the shoe's death would not be in vain. He was acting out his "waste not, want not" values as a way of coming to terms with his loss.

Conclusion

This lengthy chapter laid out a detailed series of perspectives regarding the shoe repair transaction as it occurs in shoe repair shops all over the United States. Quantitative and qualitative perspectives made clear the cultural ideals of the shoe repair industry. These ideals are embodied in their work and come to be expected by

customers who are considering multiple factors when making the choice to repair. Quantitative and qualitative analysis highlighted why customers repaired and the depth of meaning that repair has for some customers. While this chapter hinted at connections between the shoe repairer ideal and the personal values of the customer, the following chapter brings these findings together and positions them in a period of late modernity to arrive at the broader significance of the shoe repair transaction.

6. Discussion.

Introduction

If the meanings of the shoe repair transaction are visualized as a tree, the results presented in the previous chapter may be thought of as the twisting roots of that tree. While the themes generated from the qualitative analyses and the graphs/cross-tabulations generated from the quantitative analyses were considered separate for shoe repairers and their customers, this chapter brings these findings together to create a holistic vision of the meanings of the shoe repair transaction. In this vision, we find answers to the research questions posed in the introduction: Why is it that 10% of Americans choose to repair rather than replace their objects? What are the values of shoe repairers and their customers and how are these values reflected in the repaired object? The answers to these questions are very important and may be applied beyond shoe repair to understand how objects are used to generate/maintain authentic selves in the condition of late modernity.

While the findings of the previous chapter are interesting, they take on further significance when the themes revealed for each group are considered as part of the purposeful generation of more authentic selves in a condition of late modernity. After a brief statement establishing the cultural context of the shoe repair transaction, I will show how the results of the previous chapter are part of symbol maintenance for the self-reflexivity projects of shoe repairers and their customers. Following this, the shoe

repairers and their customers' self-reflexivity projects will be considered as ways of leveraging past values systems to tactfully generate stability in an era of symbolic flux. Lastly, I will elaborate on how repaired shoes are subtle rejections of dominant approaches toward objects because they mimic the dominant performances while clandestinely utilizing older residual cultural forms.

Modern to Late Modern Ways of Life

Since the industrial revolution in the United States and the invention of the McKay sewing machine for shoe manufacturing, it has been said that we are in the "modern" age. Modernity is typically characterized by monotony and repetition in work, time synchronization, and a general deskilling of the labor force. With the rise of consumer capitalism in the early to mid-20th century, short term profit maximization gained increasing importance which led to rationalization, homogenization, and a characterization of humans as consumers (Harvey 1991). Rapid industry growth and commercialization occurred which has led to the populist idea that corporations care more about profit margins than they do people. McDonalds has been said to be the epitome all these tendencies of modernity (Ritzer 1997).

Late modernity adds a new layer to discussions of modernity. Late modernity may be considered modernity in a state of self-referring (Cools et al. 2010:88–90). This means that signs established in the modern age have shifted from their original referents. For example, A big house and an expensive foreign car may have been

reliable indicators of wealth in the modern age, today those same signs cannot reliably be used to predict real net wealth because one only needs a line of credit to have those possessions. The meaning of those original signs has shifted. This tendency for signs to shift is not limited to objects, but to people as well. In this state of constantly shifting signs, the self must be made and remade with intention; the self becomes a project that must be maintained (Giddens 1991). Rather than understanding the self through family, caste, or stock, the individual is expected to discover a "self" that is individually their own (Curtis 2002; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001:22–41). Occupations, personal relationships, and objects become temporary parts of a performance that an individual enacts (Goffman 1959).

While many individuals willingly participate in maintaining a life of shifting signs, not all approach late modernity with such enthusiasm. The findings suggest that shoe repairers and the 10% of Americans that use their services form identities defined in opposition to elements of modernity and late modernity. Shoe repairers and their customers construct a self based on values of the residual past that offer them more stability than other value systems would offer them. These values offer common-sense future-oriented approaches to people and objects that offer stability but are still within the confines of the late modern self-reflexivity project. The following two sections consider the results of the previous chapter and how these values of the past serve as ways to increase stability in an unstable world.

The Craftsman's Tradition

Quality

The ideal shoe repairer cares very much about maintaining quality work and using quality materials. The longer an object can maintain its integrity over time, the higher quality the object. Shoe repairers are attempting to maximize object stability in a repair. Repair may even be considered an attack on the ephemerality of objects as most shoe repairers believe that an object will last longer after it has been to a repair shop at least once. This focus on maintaining objects in a state of stability is believed to create stable relationships with their clients. These long-term customers (who are often intergenerational) are considered "quality" customers and are valued higher than the temporary customer.

Shoe repairers overwhelmingly expressed a desire to continue working with what they considered "quality" shoes. Footwear produced in a period of late modernity is often created with the assumption that individuals will have a temporary relationship with the object. Reflecting that assumption, planned obsolescence of objects is practiced to intentionally shorten of the use-life of an object (Slade 2006; Adamson 2005; Bulow 1986:729). Shoe repairers dislike working with these types of footwear, but are increasingly forced to, due to changes in global shoe manufacturing. As part of modern short-term profit maximization, many manufacturers build their shoes to resist repair to enforce ephemerality and increase the likelihood of a

subsequent purchase. Shoe repairers oppose the creation of objects that are intended to reflect the late modernity trend of worship of the temporary. When they are forced by economic necessity to repair these objects, they express regret for many reasons. Repairing the object rather than rejecting it encourages customers to keep purchasing low-quality footwear, it often causes damage to machinery because the object was not meant to be repaired, and the job has a much higher chance to fall apart in the short term because the object is made to resist traditional methods of bonding.

Turning away low quality footwear for repair damages relationships between the shoe repairers and their clientele who trust them to be able to fix their problems. Rather than repair these objects, many shoe repairers choose to refuse them and ultimately close their shop for good because they are unable to earn a living unless they repair shoes that were never meant to be repaired. To the bitter end, shoe repairers resist what these objects of late modernity symbolize.

People Centered Business

Shoe repair as an occupation is among the dwindling line of jobs in America that is "non-proletarianized" (Jordan 2002:44) and repairers are very aware of it. The shoe repair trade, and other occupations similar to it, lack the rationalization, homogenization, and deskilling qualities of modern occupations. It is skilled work and it is human work. For example, shoe repairers work hard to foster relationships with their customers based on trust and general reciprocity. Shoe repairers strongly dislike the idea of utilizing customers for quick monetary gains by using low quality

leather to maximize their profits. Much like Orr's Xerox technicians, the relationship between them and their clients is preserved through the medium of the object they repair (Orr 1996). Similarly, as Russell Belk showed that "relationships with shoes are... person-person relationships mediated by objects" (Belk 2003:30). Shoe repairers must maintain these relationships in a people-centered fashion, which means caring and respecting the object as if it were the customer themselves.

Participants defined their work in terms of opposition to what they perceived to be the "modern job." These jobs were characterized as "soul-sucking" ventures that make one dread going to work; a place where one watches the clock until the moment they are freed from their prison of repetition. Shoe repair is different. Shoe repairers overwhelmingly reported liking their jobs and appreciated the level of autonomy and agency their work gives them. In their work, they control the entire process and produce objects on their own terms with their own machines. The shoe repairer is less alienated from the results of their labor. This kind of increased autonomy for the laborer works to decrease the alienation the laborer faces as the objects they produce are used in ways that are in line with how the shoe repairer intended them to be used (Marx and Engels 1978).

While on the job, shoe repairers (myself included) report varied and challenging work rather than repetitive boredom. A skilled shoe repairer works himself or herself into an elegant dance from job to job and maintains many jobs at once. Many shoe repairers would forget to eat and had to be reminded by their wives

to eat. They experience far less "clock watching" and repetition during their workday unlike the perceived modern occupation.

Lastly, because they control the means of production, their job is as temporary as they want it to be. Rather than participate in the expected series of temporary careers prevalent in the condition of late modernity, shoe repairers maintain their careers for an average of 24 years and often pass that career on to their offspring or other related kin. Shoe repairers refer to their jobs as "stable" which by association stabilizes their own life in ways that most other modern occupations cannot.

Historical Connections

Continuing with the point made in the previous paragraph, shoe repairers maintain their same occupation for a substantial part of their lives. They are fully aware of the possibilities for career transition, yet they choose to define themselves by tradition rather than constant change. The ideal shoe repairer is connected to the past in terms of methods, place, machinery, and kin.

As a residual industry of a bygone past, shoe repairers are aware that their long term approach to objects and relationships is not the dominant prevailing social norm, but they choose to align themselves with these values for the stabilizing benefits associated with ways of the past. Still, many shoe repairers are confronted with new shoe designs that are anti-repair and are forced to change their methods to accommodate them. They must adopt newer adhesives and take in objects their ancestors would have never taken in for repair. Shoe repairers wish to work with

older shoe designs that were more popular in the past that were built to be repaired rather than thrown away. They want to work on those objects in the same spaces with the same machinery and in the same communities if possible as well. Shoe repairers do not wish to appear "temporary," but rather want to present the appearance of stability and tradition. This, among other reasons, is why shops do not tend to change locations and older machinery is repaired rather than replaced with new machinery. To be temporary is to be "modern" and most shoe repairers do not care to be "modern." Shops are given faux old English names with words like "olde" and "shoppe" to establish a connection to the past. This is done because it is believed that the past was a better time where one could expect quality work from an accountable, local, and friendly shoe repair family. A streamlined "McDonaldized" shoe repair franchise where the objects are shipped to a central processing facility for repair would be a mockery of the values of the shoe repair industry. The future of the shoe repair industry lies in the past and the values that are perceived to have been prevalent in that past.

Building Stability through Objects

Like their shoe repairer counterparts, customers of the shoe repair industry are looking for ways to stabilize elements of their lives that are otherwise pressured to change by planned obsolescence and the discontinuation of product lines³². Because

³² I tactfully use the term "elements of their lives" to emphasize the fact that this transaction is but a snapshot of a customer's life. Perhaps in other aspects of a customer's life, they embrace change and adopt new fashions or relationships. It is simply beyond the capacity of this study to know how customers react outside the shoe repair transaction, but if their investment and tradition values carry

this is a non-dominant cultural form, it is rare for consumers in the United States to take these approaches to their objects. Only 10% of Americans choose to repair, and a large part of this research was to discover what it was about these 10% that led them to reject the cultural expectation of that objects be treated as solely as temporary relationships (Dun & Bradstreet 2001; Harkavy 2007).

Investing in the Future

Quantitative and qualitative analysis converged on evidence that suggested that individuals who utilized the shoe repair industry were of a higher "class" as determined by the intersection of income and education. As discussed famously by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), individuals of different standing have different guiding values that they use to approach problems in life. This case is no different. Many customers of the shoe repair industry spent more on their objects and considered them "investments" in terms of the money spent on them (which was about \$100 more than the national average) and the time it took to wear in the object. These "well heeled" customers reject the idea that a constant stream of temporary associations with objects is the preferred way to approach object relations. The logic requires a shift in time perspective to consider if the choice to toss and replace is efficient in the long run. To many of these customers, buying a pricier object and paying a small amount to maintain it over time as an investment was more cost efficient than making repeated small purchases of objects that are unable to be repaired. A main criticism of the

(continued from page 99) outside the shoe repair transaction, it is reasonable to assume that customers prefer stability over the temporary.

"throw away" society was that it was too short sighted and that it would be "smarter" if everyone simply spent more on quality goods that didn't break or on goods that could be repaired when they did break. Considering these customers' class position, recent research in economics has suggested that conspicuous consumption is usually associated with individuals of lower economic standing (Charles, Hurst, and Roussanov 2009). As individuals who are more likely to have higher incomes and levels of education, customers of the shoe repair industry are less enthused by the idea of repeated consumption of goods to increase their social standing. The cultural expectation that they embrace the temporary appears foolish in terms of long term investments because the costs associated with living a life of temporary relationships are higher than a life of predictable planned stability³³. They prefer to maintain an object as an investment rather than discarding it.

Personal Values

Customers of the shoe repair industry not only reject temporary object association on economic grounds, but on moral ones as well. Using the *in-vivo* term "depression mentality," many customers expressed a strong desire to avoid "wasting" an object if it still had "life" in it. When an object wears out, as they are often designed to do, customers of the shoe repair industry think "Can this be repaired?" before they think "where can I buy a replacement?" 92% of customers reported repairing objects in other aspects of their lives which seems to suggest a repair

³³ This point is even more interesting when the cost of changing occupations, changing personal relationships (divorce), and changing locations is taken into consideration.

mentality rather than a consumptive mentality. For these customers, choosing to toss "good" objects just because one found a similar object they prefer is nonsensical.

Many customers understand shoe repair as a tradition (and one that is usually learned from parents or other guardians while growing up). There is comfort in tradition as there is comfort in old objects. Individuals who follow the behavioral expectations of late modernity willingly discard tradition in favor of new truths of the world and new perspectives of the self. This is seen as short sighted by participants, because when objects become temporary a cascading series of events is put into place. It is perceived by customers and repairers alike that increasing environmental degradation is the result of an insatiable parade of temporary objects. Furthermore, it is perceived by participants that local artisans like shoe repairers will go out of business if society continues to support rampant consumerism. By investing in objects for the long term, customers act out their values and secure the stability that they seek.

Emotional Ties

The customers of the shoe repair industry fundamentally disagree with how marketers expect them to understand their objects. When their objects wear out, they do not wish to part with them; it is something that all shoe repair customers have in common. The customer survey revealed 79% have repaired before for sentimental reasons and about 30% of customers had sentimental feelings towards the objects they brought in for repair. They wish to continue a relationship with the object past

the point of obsolescence. Many of these customers consider the object more like an old friend than a tool (Miller 1998). Older objects that have spent time with you and have shaped themselves to the contours of your body are to be loved. Marketers understand objects as commodities, but for customers these objects have come to be singularized (Kopytoff 1986). Memories and experiences with objects can't be replaced by simply buying a similar object. When a customer is forced to try to put a price tag on emotional attachment to an object, they experience a range of emotions from anger to despair (see narratives in chapter 5). As a person grows attached to their object, the boundaries between them and their object start to blur (especially as the object takes on the contours of the human body and vice-versa) and the object becomes an extension of the self (Belk 1988). By choosing to repair, a customer is rejecting the idea that they must be in a constant process of change when it comes to their objects. Shoe repair is used as a way to ground the self in representations that have been established in the past and protect the self against future change with the promise of further repairs when the object wears out.

Craft the Shoe, Craft the Self

After a shoe goes through the process of repair, old meanings are restored/modified and new meaning is added. As Belk noted, shoes are both an extension of the self and used to mediate relationships between people. Both shoe repairers and their customers desire more stable representations of themselves and their objects. The condition of late modernity and the cultural expectation of rapid,

meaningless consumption is in stark contrast to the self-reflexivity projects of shoe repairers and their customers. Customers like those in the vignettes from chapter 5 were distraught that they had invested in objects only to have the relationship be temporary in nature. Recall the vignette from Greg and Darlene's shop regarding the man whose shoes deteriorated despite very infrequent use. As a way to move past the injustice of having purchased temporary shoes, I and the shoe repairers convinced him that the story of his shoes would be immortalized (i.e. not temporary) and live on in writing. Recall the vignette from chapter 5 of the woman who performed a cost-benefit calculation and could not justify repairing her daughter's favorite boots. She was clearly distraught because the object she was utilizing to mediate a relationship with a loved one turned out to be temporary in nature. The temporariness of the object was incongruent with how she saw her relationship with her daughter. Customers of the shoe repair industry find in shoe repair (and quality footwear/objects) the stability that they seek for their lives/self-reflexivity projects.

It is no coincidence that customers find these values in the shoe repair industry as shoe repairers craft with intent self-reflexivity projects that align with their customer's values. Shoe repairers were quick to define the ideal shoe repairer as being located at the intersection of quality, historical connection, and people centeredness. Shoe repairers are eager to note their connections to the past through their ancient machinery, faux old English shop names, their "generation," or their historical continuity of space in the community. They attempt to craft a "family" image in their shops by having kin (or "adoptive" kin) work in the shop, raising

children in the shop, or adopting shop pets. This and other behavior are part of a performance based on a residual past that is perceived to have superior values to the present.

When a customer uses the services of a shoe repairer, they recognize that it is a different experience than simply buying a new shoe, despite the outcome of the repair being a shoe that "looks new." In addition to stabilizing the self or interpersonal relationships,



Figure 17: An object's repair history written directly onto a customer's boot.

the newly repaired shoe has added symbolic meaning associated with the local stable relationship they have with "their shoe guy." The repaired object serves as a constant reminder of the relationship with their shoe repairer. Figure 17 shows an example of an object serving as a record of a relationship with a specific shoe repairer over time through the inscribing of repair dates on the inside of the boot. The repair of treasured objects may spark reciprocal gift exchanges of food and shoe repair work between customer and client (in stark contrast to modern services).

Lastly, through repair, shoe repairers take a global object laden with meaning and symbols and appropriate it through secondary production to ascribe new meanings to it (Certeau 1984). In addition to the already mentioned meanings, the

newly repaired object connects shoe repairers to their ancestors, represents a line of tradition that may extend hundreds of years, and seemingly "lost" business values such as quality, people over money, and family. Through re-production, shoe repairers create a physical manifestation of their value systems; customers are literally walking on their ideologies.

The Shifting Signs of the Repaired Shoe

The actors associated with the shoe repair transaction may be considered as working from both within and against elements of late modernity and modernity. They craft self-reflexive projects with intention, yet they reject being forced to change those representations. Customers refuse to change when their objects inevitably break down and shoe repairers refuse to "modernize" their industry or approach and discard the values they hold dear. Keeping in line with this idea that customers and repairers are only partially accepting of elements of modernity/late modernity, the object produced from the shoe repair functions well as an object of postmodernity. A postmodern sign has shifted from its original signifier and takes on new meaning. The dominant cultural value is to be enamored with the temporary; new objects are a sign that one follows the dominant approach to object relations. The repaired shoe is purposefully crafted to *look new*. The shoe is truly a symbol of rejection of the temporary, but to the unknowing public, it appears to be in line with dominant approaches to object relations. Repaired objects are subtle rejections of

dominant approaches toward objects because they mimic the dominant performances while clandestinely utilizing older residual cultural forms.

This subtle shift in object relations can be compared to the shift that occurred that Veblen wrote about in 1899 (Veblen 1899). Prior to this period, *patina* (wear use patterns) on objects represented status/intergenerational wealth. As luxuries such as imported goods became commonplace, fashion replaced patina as a sign of material wealth and owning new objects was held in higher esteem (McCracken 1990). The resulting "leisure class" had an approach toward object relations that was at first non-dominant, but grew to be accepted as the dominant approach to object relations today as the burgeoning middle class sought to emulate the status displays of the upper class (Simmel 1904). The findings of this research fit nicely with the findings of Charles et al who found that lower class individuals appear to appreciate temporary objects relations (or conspicuous consumption) more than their higher income/educated counterparts (Charles, Hurst, and Roussanov 2009). The services of the shoe repair industry provide an effective way for the upper class to appear to align with dominant values of conspicuous consumption while in fact supporting residual values of long term stability in objects and relationships.

Repair as Cultural Capital

An alternative way to understand this behavior by the customers of the shoe repair industry is to consider it as a class specific behavior. The repair of shoes, while once popular in America, may be a form of cultural capital that is not considered

heuristically for most lower income American consumers (Bourdieu 1986). The visible object itself may or may not serve as a status marker (depending on the shoe itself), but the knowledge of which shoes can be repaired and how to go about getting a shoe repaired from a trustworthy source may be knowledge that is confined to upper income individuals who are in need of such services in the first place. This may explain young people who lack the proper cultural capital fail to consider shoe repair when their objects fall into disrepair.³⁴

The close relationships formed between shoe repairer and customer suggests in many cases a “service” role for the repairers reminiscent of feudal lords and their attached shoe repairers. Knowing someone at a personal level who can solve problems to regulate important markers of social status (like shoes) is a form of power. I tentatively approach the subject in this fashion because the shoe repairer customer relationship isn’t defined by unequal power “master/servant-like” roles. Most customers who approach shoe repairers with a problem are quite humble and understand if a shoe repairer cannot fix their shoe for a reasonable price. In cases where customers make unreasonable demands, such as demanding a faster repair because they have a business trip the next day, many shoe repairers deny customers their services even though it is entirely possible that the shoe could be repaired within

³⁴ In addition to cultural capital associated with class, qualitative evidence showed that young people who were associated with groups that regularly repaired (such as ballet dancers or loggers) repaired due to their connections to these groups. Though interesting, their numbers were too small to draw definite conclusions on the subject.

a day.³⁵ Power flows both ways as shoe repairers are known to chastise their customers regularly for not bringing in their shoes to be repaired earlier. Such confrontations are met with apologies and shame reminiscent of a visit to the dentist's office for a person who fails to floss regularly.

The layer of cultural capital surrounding the use of the shoe repair industry certainly explains many customers of the shoe repair industry, but not every customer. Middle class and lower class individuals use the services of the shoe repair industry as well thus the status/cultural capital model cannot fully explain the behavior of the customers of the industry. The forming and maintenance of self-reflexivity projects is the primary framework for describing this behavior by consumers. Whether a person is attaching a pair of \$3 heel plates, repairing because of traditions established during childhood, or to maintain the status associated with a pair of Louboutins, Customers in these moments of their lives are staying with what they know rather than choosing something new and unfamiliar.

Conclusion

After thoroughly explaining "modernity" and "late modernity," the findings from the previous chapter were considered from the vantage point of shoe repairers and their customers forming self-reflexivity projects in a period of late modernity. While the dominant approach to in late modernity is to form self-reflexive projects on

³⁵ In this case, many shoe repairers would perceive that the customer did not establish a good working relationship with the repairer before making special requests. Such a request would be granted to a customer who was a regular customer without special demands a majority of the time.

the basis of numerous temporary relationships, shoe repairers and their customers craft selves that seek stability rather than change. This handily explains why the shoe repair industry, a residual of the past, pursues stability in the integrity of their work, their relationships with their customers, and their continuity with the past. This is why customers of the industry see their objects as "investments" of time or money. Additionally, customers value objects for their power to mediate relationships and seek the services of the shoe repair industry to create stability in their personal lives.

The self-reflexivity projects of the customers and the shoe repairers leverage past values systems (residuals) to tactfully generate stability in an age dominated by shifting signs and shifting relationships to people, places, and objects. For the customers of the industry, repaired shoes function as symbols of residual value systems, yet take the appearance of new objects through the act of repair. As behavior associated with cultural capital of the upper class, the "well heeled" mimic the dominant performances of conspicuous consumption while clandestinely utilizing older residual cultural forms.

7. Conclusion.

The reason that the rich were so rich, Vimes reasoned, was because they managed to spend less money.

Take boots, for example. He earned thirty-eight dollars a month plus allowances. A really good pair of leather boots cost fifty dollars. But an affordable pair of boots, which were sort of OK for a season or two and then leaked like hell when the cardboard gave out, cost about ten dollars. Those were the kind of boots Vimes always bought, and wore until the soles were so thin that he could tell where he was in Ankh-Morpork on a foggy night by the feel of the cobbles.

But the thing was that good boots lasted for years and years. A man who could afford fifty dollars had a pair of boots that'd still be keeping his feet dry in ten years' time, while the poor man who could only afford cheap boots would have spent a hundred dollars on boots in the same time and would still have wet feet.

This was the Captain Samuel Vimes 'Boots' theory of socioeconomic unfairness.

— Terry Pratchett, *Men at Arms: The Play* (1993)

The opening quote to this concluding chapter is an example of the kind of ideology that brings shoe repairers and the customers together in the act of shoe repair. It is a conservative, future-oriented ideology that values object stability over the dominant appreciation of objects as goods to be simply consumed and tossed. It is the same ideology that was expressed by the customer in chapter 5 (p. 82) who said "I'm willing to make a bet that people who repair have higher incomes... people who have higher incomes are smarter with their investments. Lower income people do not budget." What matters with statements and ideology like this is less their basis in reality and more the outcomes associated by performing these ideologies as self-reflexive projects. This research has shown how shoe repairers and customers come

together through the act of repair to reject elements of modernity and late modernity that they find objectionable.

Coming to this conclusion took years of research on the subject and countless hours in shoe repair shops interacting with shoe repairers and their customers. It took extensive research into an industry that has been ignored by academic researchers. When it comes to relatively unknown topics such as the shoe repair industry, basic Anthropological qualitative methods are truly effective for establishing baseline questions for further research. My 2010 field season in Ft. Worth TX and the SSIA convention provided clear directions to approach my 2012 field season across Oregon, Washington, and Texas. The more mixed methods approach of 2012 provided rich data on many topics that I was not able to investigate during my first season. Chief among these was following up on the class based aspects of the clientele of the shoe repair industry. Collecting survey data across three states regarding income, education, and stated reasons for repair for participants and collecting information regarding the nature of the objects repaired helped to provide a clearer picture of what was going on in this uncommon economic transaction.

Quantitative and qualitative data regarding shoe repairers converged on three traits that define the values system of the shoe repairer: Quality, historical connection, and people-centeredness. Shoe repairers actively construct self-reflexivity projects around these traits to attract a customer base who share an appreciation for these

traits.³⁶ Qualitative and quantitative data regarding customers and their objects confirmed that customers of the industry are higher educated and higher income than their respective country averages. Findings showed that repair jobs were largely economical in nature and less sentimental. About 70% reported repairing to save money, 50% reported personal ideological reasons for repair (waste not, want not mentality, helping local businesses, environmental reasons, etc) and 30% had a sentimental attachment to the object that they were repairing. Largely, the choice to repair an object came down to the choice to continue the life of an object as an "investment" they had previously made.

One of the most fascinating elements of the research was the symbolism surrounding the act of repair. Shoes are both *ordinary* and *extraordinary*. At the same time that they are mundane and ubiquitous, "Shoe are also richly memory-laden consumption goods that are seldom disposed of with impunity...shoes move from being identity prosthetics and props for self presentation to being seen as inseparable parts of our extended selves" (Belk 2003:32). They are extensions of a customer's and a shoe repairer's self-reflexivity projects and they are used to mediate relationships between each other and for their own interpersonal relationships. For customers, a shoe may be part of a system of symbols that must be maintained for personal (e.g. memories) or social reasons (e.g. dancing shoes, work shoes, shared memories, etc). For shoe repairers, meaning is added to the shoe by imbuing it with generations of

³⁶ While shoe repairers do construct these images of themselves and their shops, I believe that most shoe repairers are sincere in their self-portrayals and indeed live these values because they believe in them at a personal level and see them as good business sense.

collected family knowledge of the trade and by adding their own personal touches, guided by their values of quality, that serve as signs to other shoe repairers that speak to the reputation of his work. Together, like Orr's repaired Xerox machines, an object in good working condition means a healthy relationship between customer and repairer (Orr 1996). These relationships may even blossom into reciprocal relationships with exchanges of food and free repair work between parties that have respect for each other.

This really gets at the meaning behind the shoe repair transaction as it exists in the 21st century United States of America. It is about a group of 5000 or so craftsmen who are committed to values of a residual past coming together with a small percentage of U.S. consumers who align with those values to form something wholly uncommon in the consumer landscape of McDonalds and Wal-mart and the economic landscape of huge corporate mergers and increasing occupational mobility. They are both chasing something that is perceived to have been lost somewhere along the way, but through their shared effort perhaps they can get it back.

Future Research

If it were possible, I would never cease study on this fascinating group of people. Though tied together well across the entirety of this thesis, there are several "loose ends" that I would like to see taken up by someone in the future. The following is a list of future research to be done on this topic:

1. For the secondary research component of this thesis, I reviewed many news articles regarding the shoe repair industry. Many repairers who I spoke with in the field most immediately related me to news crews who come through to do a story on shoe repair. Participants noted that these news interviews made use of extensive editing to present a certain image to the public. They often had to change their outfits or read from scripts. Why are these changes made before shoe repairers may have a voice before the public? How accurate is the common news media claim that shoe repair increases during periods of recession?

I posed this question while in the field and found very mixed results. One shoe repairer made an astute comment regarding the subject. He said that during recessions the hyper-rich who were previously throwing away their objects bring them in for repair and the middle class who previously repaired their objects lose their jobs and do not need shoe repair or simply buy disposable shoes that cannot be repaired to save money in the short term. One group replaces the other and the only possible uptick comes from the free media advertising when the 6:00 news comes to interview shoe repairers during recessions. The relationship between the shoe repair industry and the media is certainly one with many layers that would prove fascinating for future research. The methods for such research would include finding interviews that have taken place within the last five years and contacting shoe repairers to discuss how they were represented versus how they preferred to

be represented. The results would pair nicely with the following suggestion for future research.

2. Due to lack of funds and the necessity of inductive research, I could not expand the research participants to the general public outside the shoe repair industry. I would like to understand how the general public perceives of the shoe repair industry and what can be done to target possible customers who share the "waste not, want not" attitude of the industry and its current customers. I am imagining a largely quantitative approach to answer this research question.
3. The shoe repair industry is ripe for an investigation of the gendered nature of work in American craft. While the few women I had the opportunity to interview seemed happy in their roles in shoe repair, I met at least one who expressed frustration against customers who wished to "speak with a man" about their problems because they assumed she couldn't handle it (she in fact had owned several shops at one point and was more than capable). There is a tendency for females in the trade to do periphery work such as front counter work and light sewing (rips). The core shoe repair work, (grinding, finishing, and applying soles/tips) is largely men's work. An enterprising scholar of the feminist/gender studies persuasion could find a fascinating project along this topic. Such work would fit nicely in recent academic work on craft and gender (See Bix 2009).

4. A shoe repairer's livelihood depends on being able to have quick access to a series of potentially dangerous solvents/bonding agents. As small shops operating on low budgets, many shops have poor ventilation systems coupled with chemical compounds that are known to cause nasal cancer among other horrible outcomes (Bonneterre et al. 2007; Uuksulainen et al. 2002). A medical anthropologist interested in the intersection of work, health, and risk would find an intriguing set of research questions related to how shoe repairers manage risk and understand/interpret the system of laws put in place to inform them of the risks associated with working with these chemicals.
5. It would be fascinating to understand the true environmental effects of the shoe repair industry. While the shoe repair industry and the customers assume that repair is “better for the environment,” is there any evidence to back up those claims? Accurate life cycle analysis of commonly repaired footwear compared to the environmental costs associated with repairing objects would answer such a question. Because no research has been done in this arena, shoe repair might be less environmentally sound than tossing old shoes and buying new ones.

I would be overjoyed if any researcher took an interest to any of these research questions and, providing that it doesn't violate IRB rules, would allow the use of my field notes to further investigate these topics of interest.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Name _____ Age _____ Years in SR _____ State _____ # in shop _____

1. How did you get into the business of shoe repair? Other jobs?
2. What generation are you (if it applies)?
3. What is your official level of education?
4. What do you like about shoe repair?
5. What don't you like about shoe repair?
6. Do you have any kids? (Probes: How old and what do they do? How many in the business?)
7. Are you married? Does your spouse help run the business?
8. What do you see for the future of shoe repair?
9. Do most people repair? If not, why?
10. Why do you think people choose to repair their shoes?
11. Have you ever taught someone shoe repair? (Probes: Have you thought about it? How did it go?)
12. What does "quality" mean to you?
13. Tell me about quality when it comes to shoes. (Probes: What isn't quality?)
14. What effect, if any, has the recession had on the shoe repair industry?
15. Why and how do you mend shoes?
16. How has the shoe repair business changed over time?
17. How many other people work in this shop and what do they do?
18. How have changing shoe styles impacted your business?
19. What can you tell about a person by the object they need repaired?
20. What can you tell about a repairer by the job he/she does?
21. Is there anything else you can tell me that would help me understand the shoe repair industry that I haven't asked?

Appendix B: 2010 Customer Survey**Customer Research Survey 2010**

Age: (Circle one) 18-19 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-70 Over 70

1) Estimate the dollar value of the item brought in:

2) What is the most you would pay for repair?

3) Why do you repair instead of buy new?

4) How do you decide where to repair?

5) Does the item hold any sentimental value?

6) What is your official Education level

7) What is your Income? _____

Appendix C: 2012 Customer Survey

Customer Survey 2012

1. Estimate the original dollar value of the item brought in (if you have more than 1, please list separately):

2. How many objects do you bring in to repair/alter annually?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10+

3. In your own words, why do you repair instead of buying new?

4. Please check any of the following that apply:

I use shoe repair to save money

I use shoe repair to repair an object stores no longer sell

I use shoe repair to repair an object I am personally attached to

I use shoe repair because it is something I've always done

I use shoe repair to support local businesses

I use shoe repair to help the environment

I use shoe repair to personalize my shoes

I use shoe repair because old shoes are more comfortable

I use shoe repair for medical reasons

Other (Fill in your own) _____

5. Would you feel guilty if you went to another shoe repair shop to have your work done? Rank on a scale of 1-9 where 1 = "I'd feel very guilty" and 9 = "No guilt whatsoever"

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

6. Does the object you brought in today have sentimental value? Yes No Other

7. Do you repair, rather than replace, objects in other aspects of your life? Yes No

Appendix C: (Continued)**Demographic Information: (Skip any you feel uncomfortable answering)**

- 1) Male Female Prefer not to say
- 2) Age 18-19 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70+
- 3) Education Level (circle): Some High School High school Some College Associates
Bachelors Higher
- 4) Annual income: Less than 25k, Less than 50k, Less than 75k, Less than 100k, Less
than 250k, 250k+

This information will not be shared with your repairman. It will be used to figure out the type of person who uses shoe repair. The outcome of the data will be used to inform the shoe repair industry as a whole of who their customers are.

Appendix D: All cases of orders where repair cost exceeded estimated original cost

Table 6. All cases of orders where repair cost exceeded estimated original cost

Original Price	Repair Cost	Cost Benefit	Sentimental	Notes
\$4	\$22	-18.5	No	Bought second hand and was unsure she could help me because she didn't buy it full price
\$0	\$15	-15	No	Sandal was a gift. Her written reason for repairing said "economics"
\$3	\$17	-14	Missing	Stated reason was "there's a lot of life still left in them."
\$30	\$44	-14	No	Stated that he repaired based on quality: the price on this one happened to be lower
\$14	\$28	-14	Yes	Bought second hand and repaired because it was "quality"
\$12	\$20	-8	No	Can't find the sandal anywhere else.
\$0	\$8	-8	No	Customer works a shoe store and gets free damaged shoes
\$13	\$18	-5	Yes	Believed her purse was worth far more than she paid (it was a fake designer brand)
\$20	\$25	-5	Yes	Bought second hand and is repaired "because the shoe is quality."
\$18	\$20	-2	No	Stated reason was "I don't like to throw things out that are still useful"