Second Hand Stores in Portland:
An Analysis of Consumer Values on Yelp

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BACKGROUND

The relationship between production and consumption is no longer restricted geographically within a globalized commodity chain. Material goods are produced and

distributed worldwide, with resources and materials sourced from multiple locations. The distribution of wealth produced by this global commodity chain is often skewed and growing disparities between those who produce and who consume are present.

Due to this complex and global consumer culture, many material goods are produced in excess or have increasingly shorter life spans. Today, disposable goods can be found more often; "even goods that were considered to be reusable goods just a few years back are now disposable goods" (McCollough 2007). This creates a larger scale waste problem both during production and after production. Some types of waste, such as used disposable goods, cannot be reused for their original purpose, while other commodities such as house ware, furniture, and clothing often are reusable even after their previous owners consider them to be "waste". Within our study, we will look at the manner in which the wastes of used goods (non-disposable) are circulated again into the commodity chain as a *second hand goods*. There are many forms of re-sourcing models in place to find a way to manage reusable waste. Excess goods can be collectively raised or individually donated to charitable causes that are lacking in these material goods. Informal and formal Sharing Communities are found both online, such as craigslist and ebay, and offline, such as garage sales and social clothing swaps, in an attempt to recirculate used commodities. Additionally, there are established organizations that resell used goods through their second hand stores; our study focuses on this last model.

One commodity of particular interest to us is clothing. While clothing is a reusable commodity, the trend of "fast fashion" that can now be seen has shifted clothing into becoming an increasingly disposable commodity. Fast fashion aims to produce more clothes for a cheaper price and at a lower quality, encouraging consumers to buy and dispose of clothing at a quicker pace; a "throwaway culture". Where clothing has the potential to be a reusable commodity, it is increasingly considered disposable. Additionally, "the relationship between fast fashion and increasing textile waste is now unmistakable" (Morgan 2009). Not only is clothing made more disposable, but in order to produce cost effectively, cotton is exported into countries with low labor costs (often a result of poor working conditions) to be made into textiles. The waste resulting from clothing production itself is not reusable and therefore absorbed by the countries who produce these fast fashion commodities (Claudio 2007).

Clothing as a commodity is also interesting because of the many ways in which used clothes are reused. While there are issues of excess clothing, this is largely found in developed nations. This has created an international situation where donated clothing is moved from First to Third World nations. As Meginnis discusses in her thesis, this global exchange of clothing speaks to larger issues of inequality and can has negative impacts on local textile makers. The real implications of this global donation cycle may not align with the charitable intentions of large organizations that collect and distribute used clothing (Meginnis 2012). Clothing is donated and reused on an individual scale, with second hand stores in Western societies becoming a prominent way in which this commodity is resold. However, this commodity is present on a global scale, with disposable fast fashion being produced overseas and reusable clothing "waste" then donated around the world.

The success of second hand clothing has a relationship to attitudes of consumers towards thrift in general. Thriftiness as a trend has been growing in popularity. There is an increase of consumers who turn to second hand stores during times of national economic instability. A case study in Jordan found that "in light of the recent economic hardship that Jordanians have faced due to the late alarming rise in most commodity prices, more people are turning to shopping at secondhand stores" (Na'amneh 2006). In the US, the most recent economic crisis created constraints for consumers, where thrift is "now as likely to be associated with trendy young people as with the generations who grew up during the Great Depression" (Podkalicka, 2014). A post recession consumer trend in the US that is currently advancing is discretionary thrift, where affluent consumers choose thrifty practices as they are viewed as more "fashionable". When engaging in discretionary thrift, consumers are choosing to buy second hand not based on their needs, but for a range of values, such as feeling displeased with excessive consumption (Flatters 2009). Even after coming out of the bad economy, this renewed appreciation for second hand stores is predicted to continue as different thrift store models gain momentum, making this a critical time to observe the implications of thriftiness as a growing trend (Apparel, 2012). Just as used clothing is largely donated worldwide from First to Third World nations, we found that overwhelmingly the literature on second hand stores reference North America, Canada, Europe, and Australia, suggesting to us that the popularity of second hand stores (charity shops, op

shops, thrift stores, consignment stores, etc…) is largely surrounding these Western societies.

As thriftiness and second hand stores have become more popular, many avenues for buying and selling used-clothing have evolved. Second-hand retail includes thrift, consignment, and vintage shops. Methods of sourcing, distributing and sales differ slightly between these store models. For the purposes of this study, we will be focusing on *thrift* and *consignment* stores. We define thrift stores as organizations that sell donated used clothing. Consignment stores sell used clothing, but also buy used clothing from individuals and either provide store credit or cash back. With the sheer number of second-hand clothing stores, one must be aware of the multitude of factors that go into creating a thriving, used-clothing culture. There are nonprofit organizations, such as Goodwill, and there are for profit organizations, such as most smaller stores. Certain stores, like the Salvation Army, also have religious motivation for operating a thrift store. These all show different implications for how profit or surplus is accumulated and spent, as well as speak to the values and expectations of customers. The type and structure of a secondhand store must be considered, as well as the culture of the surrounding location and the values of the consumers.

Situated Context

When considering secondhand industry in relation various urban consumer cultures, Portland, Oregon, emerges as a unique case study. *Business Insider* is one among many media outlets that has praised the city of Portland for being "America's Greenest City" (Insider et al. 2016). Portland also happens to be popularly considered a haven for people who love to dig through thrift, consignment, and vintage stores (Dawn 2012). With 93 registered consignment and thrift stores, one of the highest per capita in the US, it is not difficult to see how Portland gained such a reputation ("Thrift Stores" 2016). These various stores cater to unique and overlapping consumer bases. Could the "green" mentality of Portland be linked to the successful secondhand economy? It is significant to note that Portland is also the most gentrified city in the United States and has a thriving urban poor population (Butz 2012). This spatial difference in wealth is demonstrated in the disproportionate amount of minorities and less affluent individuals

located in Eastern and Northeastern Portland. Beyond bringing into question different motivations for shopping at thrift stores, Portland's demographics indicate to us that individuals of different economic statuses and backgrounds may have varying access to thrift and consignment stores. For example, many vintage boutiques are located in downtown, whereas the Goodwill Outlet is located on the outskirts of Southeast Portland. Through the popularity of thrift shops, praise for sustainability, and defined gentrification, Portland is a critical location to consider the consumer values and experience with the rise of second-hand store popularity.

Existing Studies

Jinhee Han wrote a dissertation, "Understanding Second-Hand Retailing- A Resource Based Perspective" that outlines possible consumer motivations for shopping at thrift stores (Han 2013). The primary motivations of Second Hand Consumption are Economic (economic advantages of frugal shoppers as alternative to new clothes), Ethical consumerism (ecological and social awareness) and Hedonic shopping (nostalgia, need for uniqueness, treasure hunting, social Interaction). Han's outline of thrift motivations aligns with Brace-Govan & Binay's 2010 Study of consuming "disposed goods", which viewed thrift stores as complex sites of individual moral identity expression. Among other reasons, both Han and Brace-Govan et al. speculate that consumers choose to thrift for some ethical reason, whether it is social (aligning with charity etc.) or ecological (reducing overproduction and waste of clothing). Brace-Govan et al. goes on to claim that most thrifters "espoused a view of anti-consumption, which encompassed anti-corporatism" (2010).

Parallel to studies revealing ethical motivation for consumers within the thrifting economy, other research complicates individuals taking on this sort of economic activism. Johanna Moisander has researched the complexity of green consumerism using motivation as "an analytical tool". She argues that, "as a private lifestyle project of a single individual, 'green consumerism' is much too heavy a responsibility to bear", due to the moral complexity of socially conscious consumption. Many arguments problematizing ethical or ecological consumption are based on the assumption that

these more responsible commodities are a privilege to purchase due to their higher cost. Are thrift stores a sight for this notion to be subverted?

Podkalicka & Tang argue that literature on thrifting is either conducted from the top-down, "focusing on models, patterns and ideological trajectories of thriftiness" or it is studied from the bottom-up, "privileging context-based, fine-grained analysis of specific, differentiated experiences and manifestations of thriftiness." They argue that both are valuable and "propose an approach that involves actively integrating the macro and micro strands as well as work focusing on different aspects, or spheres, of thrift practice" (Podkalicka 2014). Our research aims to focus on a top-down approach of considering macro trends of a global economy while assessing the specific stories and values of customers.

In light of the recent popularity of the thrifting industry, and the trendiness and social acceptance of second-hand shopping, looking more deeply into the motivations of consumers and as well as the larger changes in the industry is important. As thrifting has become a trend, gaps remain in research about how the industry may be changing to tailor this trendiness, and whose benefit is and isn't considered in the process. Han prompts, "For future studies, the following recommendations are provided: (1) each specialized type of second-hand retailer's business practices can be examined to reveal more detailed information, (2) consumers' perceptions towards second-hand business practices can be examined from consumers' perspectives . . ." (Han 2013).

With this background of secondhand stores in mind, the following questions are those that guide our research:

Framing Question

Within a globalized economy, what forces drive individuals towards socially and environmentally conscious actions?

Focus Question

What values do consumers in Portland express regarding their decision to purchase clothing from second hand stores?

METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand the needs and values of Thrift Store customers, we conducted framework analysis of Yelp Reviews for second hand stores in Portland. From Han's dissertation, we gathered our a priori, theoretical frameworks for possible consumer motivations for second hand consumption (2013). These frameworks are:

1. Economic (financial advantages of frugal shoppers getting cheaper alternatives)
2. Ethical consumerism (awareness of ecological and social impacts)
3. Hedonic/Recreational Shopping
   a. Nostalgia
   b. Need for Uniqueness
   c. Treasure hunting
   d. Social Interaction (Han 2013)

We then did a systematic random sampling of stores to gather data from their reviews to test any correspondence with the values Han proposes. In order to test our sampling method and potentially add frameworks that emerge from the data, we conducted a pilot study where each of our three team members analyzed five reviews for three stores. From our pilot study we formulated additional themes to code for, as well as finalized the following sampling technique:

We typed "thrift stores" in the Yelp Search bar and then filtered our results to show shops only with the labels "thrift stores" and "used, vintage, consignment" because without this specification non-second hand stores showed in our results. We did not exclude or separate "Vintage" categorization because it appeared to be used as an adjective to describe both thrift and consignment stores. We also applied a search filter that limited the location to only be in "Portland, OR" to keep our data focused on the city specifically and not nearby towns. This filtering process took us from 251 stores to 93. From the 93 stores, each team member analyzed 10 stores, roughly a third of the original sample. We segmented the stores into blocks of 30, and then each member selected every third store from their designated block (1-30, 31-60, 61-93). If we come across a store that couldn't be a part of the sample (i.e. not in Portland by Yelp's sorting

error, not primarily clothing, or less than 5 reviews) we selected the store that came just before the rejected one.

Through this sampling, once we each had our ten stores, we took down basic information from each shop's Yelp page to form a store profile in a Google Spreadsheet (Name of store, Type of store, Shop Location, Price bracket on Yelp, Payment Methods available, Parking available, Wheelchair Accessibility, Number of Stars, Number of Reviews, and Any "other" relevant characteristics). We coded the "type of store" as either "consignment" if customers can both buy and sell clothing, or "thrift" if clothing can only be bought. The price bracket was indicated by the number of dollar signs a store was attributed.

After filling out the Store Profile information for each selected shop, we sampled reviews from these stores. We chose stores that had over five reviews and coded up to ten of the reviews. We stratified the reviews in order of newest to oldest and worked our way down in order to have the most recent and relevant data to current thrift store popularity. Once our 5-10 newest reviews were selected, we noted distinguishing information down in the store's own spreadsheet (date of review, number of stars given) and then conducted our framework analysis by labeling values and motivations to lines of text from the reviews. We coded Han's values of "Economic", "Ethical" (separated into "Ecological" and "Social"), and "Hedonic". We then also coded for themes that emerged in our pilot study: "quality of clothing", "service", and "store organization".

In order to code reviews according to these value frameworks, we discussed as a group keywords that would indicate a value. For example, references to name brands, "trendiness" or "treasure" hunting were all coded as hedonic motivation. We decided that specific comments or phrases could be coded multiple times if they displayed multiple values. For example, the comment "I found Doc Marten shoes for a price I could finally afford!", would be coded as values that are both hedonic (because of the name brand) and economic. Whenever we encountered a review or phrase that we were uncertain about how to code, we highlighted it in the spreadsheet and debriefed with each other in person to maximize our cohesion and credibility.

Once we had all of this textual information organized, we quantified our results by tallying the number of times each value appeared in each store's reviews and charted our results in a spreadsheet. We put these numbers into percentage-based graphs to see

if we noticed any trends in the proportions of values for all second hand shoppers, consignment shoppers, and thrift shoppers (See figures 1-3). To complement this quantitative visual aid, we also made a "word cloud" by entering all of the phrases we coded from the reviews into worditout.com (See Figure 4). This image makes the most frequently used words larger, allowing us to visually assess which words and phrases are present and popular in the reviews, aiding us in assessing the numbers we generated in the percentage graphs.

RESULTS

After charting the tallied values of second hand shoppers, we noticed some differences in the values the shoppers expressed at Consignment stores compared to Thrift stores. The top three values of Consignment shoppers are, in order: Hedonic, Service, and Economic (see Figure 2). The top three values of Thrift shoppers are, in order: Economic, Hedonic, and Organizational (See Figure 3). Consignment shoppers' voiced 20.1% of their reviews with economic value, while Thrift shoppers' expressed 25.9%. The word clouds generated from our coded Yelp reviews for both Consignment and Thrift stores show that "prices" was one of the most frequently used words, indicating price was a central value for both types of shoppers (See Figure 4). Clearly, economic factors are important to both of these shoppers, but are the number one priority for those choosing thrift stores. A value that has more of a significant difference between the two types of stores is service. 25% of values expressed in consignment reviews had to with the quality of employee service, while only 12% of Thrift reviews commented on service. All second hand shoppers expressed quality of clothing, social/ethical values, and ecological values the least frequently (see Figure 1). Ecological value was expressed the least for both Consignment and Thrift stores, infact out of the 748 times a value was expressed in the total of the reviews, only four were coded as ecological motivation for choosing to shop second hand.
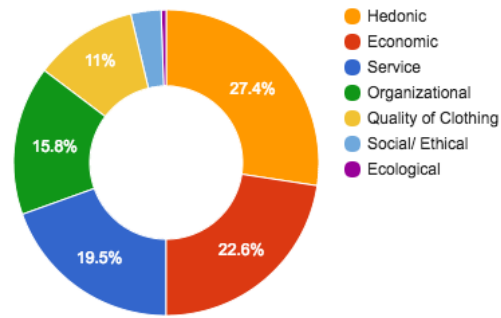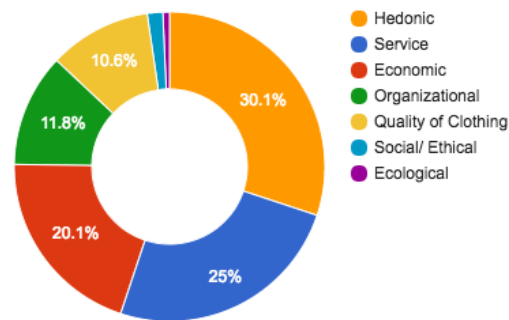
Figure 1: Values Expressed by Secondhand Shoppers

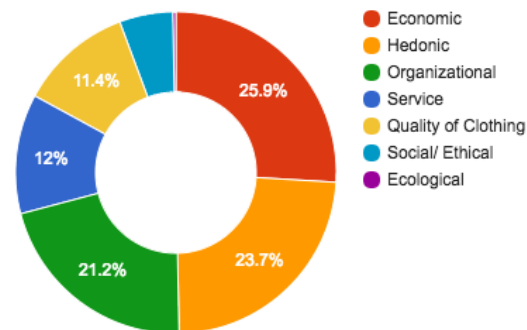Figure 2: Values Expressed by Consignment Store Shoppers

Figure 3: Values Expressed by Thrift Store Shoppers

Figure 4: Word Cloud of Commonly Used Words

DISCUSSION

The results from our Yelp coding analysis show the proportions of consumer motivations and values for second hand shopping. We include the percentages for second hand shoppers as a whole, but also breakdown our results between consignment and thrift stores to be accountable for some differences in data, such as the top value of Consignment shoppers being "hedonic" and the top value of Thrift shoppers being "economic". The value that has a significantly large difference between the two types of stores is "service". 25% of values expressed in consignment reviews had to with the quality of employee service, while only 12% of Thrift reviews commented on service. We hypothesize that because shoppers are both buying and selling at consignment stores, there is more opportunity for in-depth interaction with employees, which would lead Yelp reviews to comment more on their interactions with the staff.

It's also interesting to note which values are consistent between the two types of stores. The word clouds generated from our coded Yelp reviews for both Consignment and Thrift stores show that "prices" was one of the most frequently used words, indicating price was a central value for both types of shoppers. Clearly, economic factors are important to both of these shoppers. Hedonic values were also primary for second hand shoppers at both types of stores. Figure 4 shows words such as "cute", "treasure", "vintage", "fun", and "brands" that reflect shoppers engaging with the second hand

economy for recreation. This prominence across both types of stores may reflect the increasing popularity and fashionability of thrift stores that Flatters calls discretionary thrift (2009).

All second hand shoppers expressed quality of clothing, social/ethical values, and ecological values the least frequently. Ecological value was expressed the least for both Consignment and Thrift stores; infact, out of the 748 times a value was expressed in the total of the reviews, only four were coded as ecological motivation for choosing to shop second hand. Initially we were surprised to find that so few reviews mentioned social or ecological motivation for shopping at secondhand stores, primarily because many of these businesses, Goodwill as a prime example, often advertise themselves by highlighting their non-profit and charity roots. Simultaneously, trends like the "reduce, reuse, recycle" mantra contribute to framing second hand shopping as a "green" alternative to overproduction, excess consumption, and unnecessary waste of clothing. So, what does it mean that so few Yelp reviews touched on social and ecological motivation?

The orientation of reviewers towards primarily hedonic and economic values may have to do with the specific affordances of Yelp. For example, Yelp asks reviewers to tally a number of money symbols, similar to star ratings, to evaluate how expensive they perceive the store to be. This feature of money rating prompts Yelp reviewers to focus on the economic value of the store, which may promote an explanation or continuation of this value in the written portion of their review. Additionally, the established social practices and culture of Yelp could generally promote a space where recreational or hedonic values are primarily expressed, regardless of the business type being reviewed. Yelp is known to have popularity amongst "trendsetters and lucrative demographics" and arguably has a "consumerist orientation" that limits expression of more civic or political material (Kuehn 2011). Kuehn argues that " . . . Yelpers ultimately work to reproduce hegemonic discourses of consumption" (2011). But what happens when the business model being reproduced is one that potentially challenges traditional capitalist motivations?

Although our research does not investigate the efficacy of the second hand economy's ability to address social and ecological problems, it is evident that purchasing used items is an alternative form of consumption that supports re-commodification

rather than additional production (Chattoe 2000; Brace-Govan and Binay 2009). Working with the possibility that the second hand economy can provide a solution to issues of overproduction and waste of resources and energy, positive social change may still occur whether or not consumers are motivated for that reason or not. Although individuals, for whatever reason, did not express social or ecological motivation for shopping at secondhand stores, they are part of a larger trend that may be addressing these issues.

Scholars like Johanna Moisander and Michael Maniates problematize individualized approaches to addressing environmental issues, such as consumer-driven change (Moisander 2007; Maniates 2001). Yet our results point us in an interesting direction to reconsider individual consumerism as part of larger trends of social change. This shows the potential for capitalizing on pleasurable activities within systems that have additional and broader social benefits. However, the scale of these benefits may not be comparable to other forms of more conscious action, and negative repercussions of this sort of "ethical consumerism" must also be accounted for, as we elaborate on in further social implications within our conclusion.

CONCLUSION

This study seeks to understand a piece of the second hand industry through looking at the consumer values of used clothing at thrift and consignment stores. The excess production of clothing results in textile waste that is dealt with in a variety of ways. After being accumulated and distributed internationally, "waste" clothing is once again distributed globally, however, maybe not as an equitable ideal. We bring attention to a sliver of this entire cycle. However, the consumers of secondhand store goods are active players in the relationship between used goods and who they are distributed to.

Through this study of values, we can see how incremental change, in this case, is incentivized through separate factors from the change being advocated for. Hedonic and economic values seem to be important in incentivizing people to support goods that are advertised and thought of as having ecological and social benefits. Our conclusions do not lead us to advocate for individualistic and consumeristic solutions to global issues, but instead have allowed us to consider more complicated dimensions of social change.

These sort of unintended potential benefits important to consider in relation to activism and creating momentum for public movements. However, whether or not this leads to large scale changes is still left for debate. The values we identified were expressed on the unique online platform Yelp, which has the potential for organizations and consumers to interact. The trends found in consumer reviews on Yelp may influence the model of secondhand stores to prioritize hedonic values *if* the organizations are actively responding to their reviews. This may alter if and how they market second hand clothing, however our current study cannot confirm this.

Larger Implications and Further Research

Our methodology allowed for us to code many reviews for key words and phrases that indicated to us their values. Because of the nature of this method, we did not fully conduct qualitative analysis of particular reviews. We found that certain reviews made by consumers had the potential to speak to larger issues that this particular study did not go into. They were selected as "noteworthy comments" which could be further analyzed in a qualitative study. There were particular reviews which we could identify clear themes and consumer concerns, including several instances of racist and agist discrimination. For example, Susan W. wrote a review for Heart's Decor Consignment about how she was not given a first-time customer discount when two white women were offered the deal. She explains,

> "I told [the employee] I was hurt she did not treat me the same as the two white ladies and politely said I would come back....maybe I will go back and explain to her that living black...living as a disable senior...living under the radar as poort... is a challenge for me everyday...and that her biases and acts of discrimination against me and other dark-skinned citizens is embedded in her subconsciousness"

In addition, Heather S. wrote a review for Red Light Clothing Exchange where she was discriminated against when pushing a stroller. She explains,

> "I went to the red light on Sunday around 2pm in hopes to help my 14yr old find some great vintage pieces and upon entering the store with my stroller I was told by a tall male "our store is too busy for you to be pushing that thing around" I was

completely appalled! I couldn't believe I was being Discriminated against because I am a mother!"

These instances of discrimination point to the question of equitable access to thrift and consignment stores. Thrift stores may provide a solution to overconsumption, affordable clothing options, and fashion finds, but these benefits may be optimized for certain populations. Race, age, and income seem to be determining factors in who second hand stores are serving as based on comments in Yelp reviews. In order to approach issues of equitable access, we executed a pilot study in which we utilized a Geographic Information System (GIS) to spatially analyze the locations of the Portland second hand clothing stores analyzed previously with Yelp. We mapped the thirty consignment and thrift store locations (with different sized location points based on price of store) on a map of the City of Portland. We then made different versions of this map, overlaying different demographic information: percent of population unemployed, percent of population who identify as African American, percent of population with income under $25,000, and percent of population between ages of 18-34.
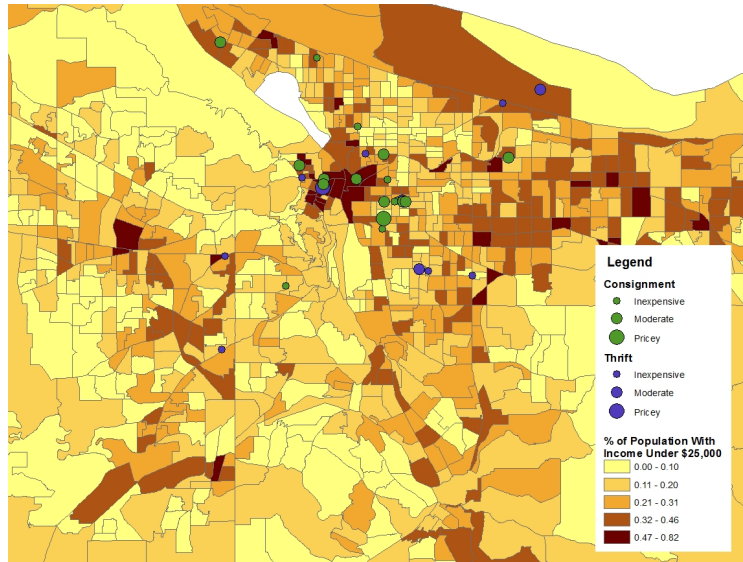

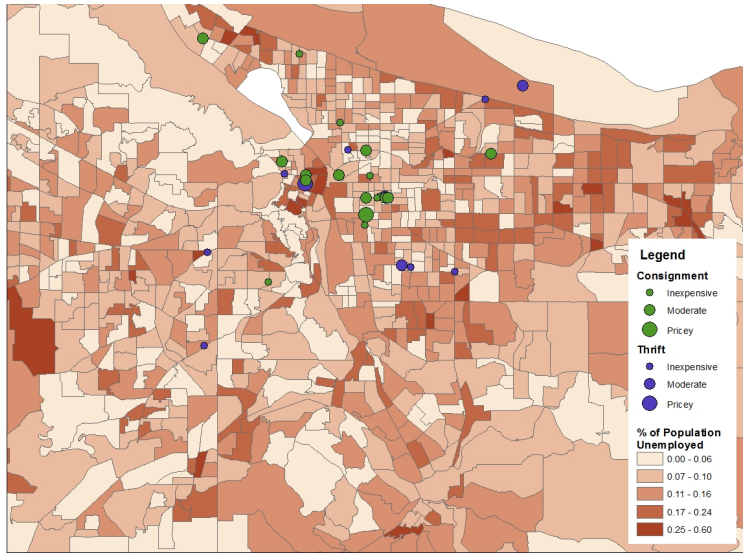Figure 5: Map of Secondhand Stores and Population With Income Under $25,000

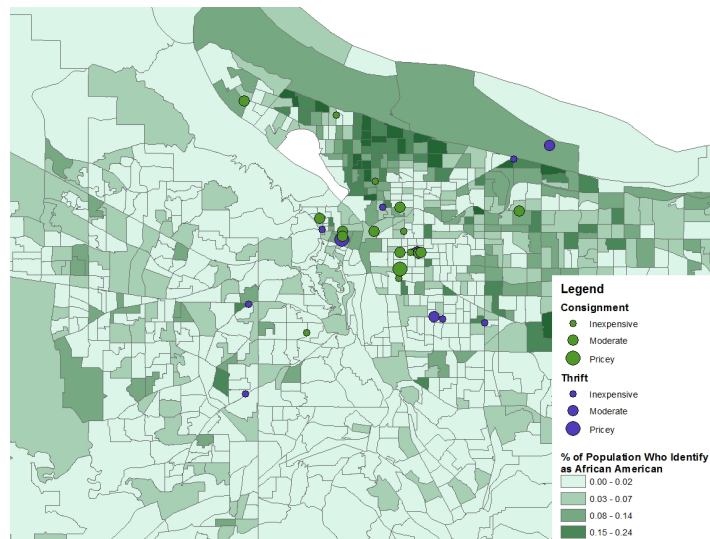Figure 6: Map of Secondhand Stores and Unemployment

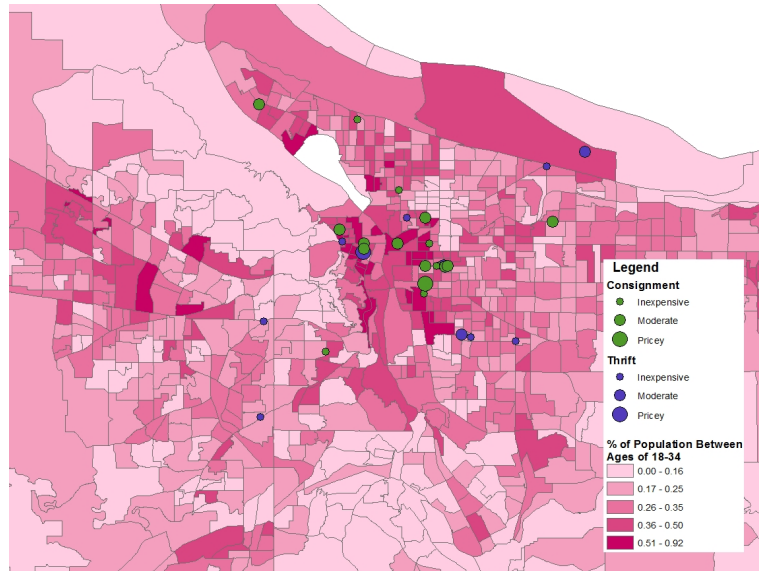Figure 7: Map of Secondhand Stores and African American Population

Figure 8: Map of Secondhand Stores and Population Age 18-34

The GIS maps show several key trends on the distribution of thrift and consignment shops. Firstly, most of the shops, especially the more expensive and consignment type shops, were centered around downtown Portland and the Hawthorne district. Very few are located on the periphery of the city, where we found mostly inexpensive and thrift type shops. Spatially, people located farther away from the center of the city have fewer closeby thrift store options. We also found noticeable trends in the lack of second hand stores in neighborhoods with high instances of people making under $25,000 a year and African Americans. Conversely, the there are high instances of second hand stores located in areas with larger 18-34 year old population, showing these type of stores to be prominent surrounding younger communities.

Further research can expand on this preliminary spatial analysis by providing an in-depth look into the location of all second hand stores in Portland with relation to transportation routes. Tracking the location of second hand stores over time would also contribute to a better understanding of the trends and how thriftiness has or has not changed with the demographic shifts in Portland. It would also be beneficial to survey the consumers at thrift and consignment stores in order to see if who is actually shopping at and benefitting from these stores. This could be analyzed in Portland to complement our research, or in another city where thriftiness less ingrained in the culture to provide a different context for comparison.

Additional research could also expand on the idea of second hand stores as a situated object by looking through different perspectives. For instance, one could study how second hand store owners perceive their own values and if they see themselves as purveyors of incremental change for a social or ecological benefit. This could be contrasted with consumer values that we found. It could also be beneficial to research the effect, or lackthereof, that second hand stores have on the economy to see how much of an effect the used economy actually holds in preventing overconsumption. The second hand economy can also be analyzed through a different context than clothing though used cars, construction materials, etc. Finally, further research could be conducted into Yelp as a platform and how its biases toward certain values may play a role in the development of socially and environmentally conscious businesses.

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