

# Reciprocity in a Modern Day Re-sale Shop

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to look into the complex social relationships that are formed during the trading process in a modern day re-sale shop (Trendy's Re-sale). Non-probability, purposive sampling was chosen in order to gain specialized knowledge from a few individuals. Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews and participant observation to better understand the complex socio-economic relationships between re-sale shop workers and customers over a three-month period.

The research has yielded numerous factors that contribute to these socio-economic relationships such as variance in income, gender roles, and the level of experience in the trading process at Trendy's Resale Shop. This study's findings are important to understand the thriving and newly emergent re-sale economy in the southeastern United States. It reveals the constant social and economic interactions that take place between clients, who act as both the customer and the supplier, and shop employees, who act as the trusted intermediary between shop owners and clients. Through this research, new characteristics of reciprocity, or the informal exchange of goods and services, are shown to be linked to the formal market economy.

### Methodology

Qualitative, non-purposive sampling was used in order to conduct an in-depth study of a few select individuals within a relatively small amount of time. Both male and female individuals (18 and older) were sampled that had at least three years of experience in the buying and selling of goods at the resale shop. Data collection through three semi-structured interviews (2 employees, 1 customer) and six sessions of participant observation was done over a three month period (January-March 2012). Participant Observation consisted of both observing and recording interactions among customers and employees, as well as participating in both the selling and buying of clothing at Trendy's Re-sale Shop. Interviews were conducted in locales convenient to the interviewee. These settings helped the interviewee feel comfortable and enabled them to answer questions in an honest manner. Locales consisted of the break room at Trendy's Re-sale as well as Starbucks Coffee. Below is an example of the type of interview questions that were asked during these one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

- What groups of people tend to be more open to the trade process?
- What would you consider to be the most important aspect of the trading process?
- What are some examples from your experience, of a positive trade relationship?



**Figure 1: Clothing that has been sold to Trendy's Resale.**



**Figure 2: A customer filling out paper work to sell clothes.**



**Figure 3: The Buy counter where the clothing is sorted.**



**Figure 4: The medium of exchange is cash.**

***"I feel like girls sell stuff way more because they care about what they wear."* -Lacey**

### CONCLUSION

The re-sale shop business is thriving and appears to only be getting more successful. This research points to some of the complex issues surrounding drawing distinctions between formality and informality in the trade relationship. In understanding these trade relationships, we can better understand the modern day characteristics of reciprocity and how they are becoming entrenched in the formal market economy.

### Results

Reciprocal exchange or gift giving is a traditional idea that has been modified to create wealth in today's market economy. These shops target the savvy shopper who is looking to save money as well as the person looking to turn their goods back into cash (Figures 2 & 4). Through this research, four main socio-economic themes emerged including gender, level of income, amount of re-sale experience, and ageism.

1. Gender - Women and men vary drastically in the selling process. Females tend to sell more frequently and larger quantities of clothing. Since the fashion trends for women change every season, females have a high clothing turnover rate. Since the fashion trends for men change more gradually and many men tend to not prioritize fashion, clothing is often held for years. As a result, the men's clothing that comes in for trading is frequently too worn for re-sale.

2. Level of Income - People of all income levels (lower, middle, upper-middle, high) shop and trade. People in the lower and high income levels tend to have the most generalized behaviors. Generally, people of lower income trade clothing when they need money, therefore often accepting any amount offered. People of higher incomes on the other hand frequently bring in "designer" items and expect a large amount of money. Often these customers negotiate more vigorously.

*"Being in a college area helps our business because well college kids need money so they get rid of stuff."* -Lacey

3. Re-sale Experience - Another determining factor is the amount of re-sale experience that a client has. Often new clients expect to make a profit off of their items. This is not a reality, therefore they often decline the offer made by the shop. Regular clients (three or more visits) know what to expect, and are in return not disappointed with the experience. *"The worst people think we are going to give them exactly what they paid for their freaking expensive jeans. That's just not happenin."*

-Lizzie

4. Ageism - Trendy's is geared towards a teen/college audience. Often many clients come in thinking the shop takes anything. If a client who looks over the age of 40 comes to trade clothes, the buyer often has a preconceived notion that nothing will be buyable. This is commonly false. Frequently people of all ages bring in "trendy" clothes or they are often selling their children's or grandchildren's clothing.

*"I hate when I am told my clothes are too mature. So basically I have old people clothes?"* -Sandra

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\*References are available upon request.

\*\*Names of the field site and interviewees were changed to maintain confidentiality.