

Men hate it, Women love it?

A Critical Examination of Shopping as a Gendered Activity

**Submitted by Ivonne Hoeger, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology, November 2nd, 2009**

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I. Hoeger

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to investigate whether shopping is still a gendered activity in the 21st century. Past research in a number of social science disciplines with a focus on consumer affairs indicated that traditionally shopping was part of the woman's domain and therefore it was seen as an activity only women engaged in. More current research has however suggested that shopping is no longer just a female activity, and asked for more research to be conducted into both male and female consumer behaviour. The present thesis focuses on recreational shopping and attempts to address the issue of male and female consumer behaviour by means of a multi-method approach. Chapter 1 summarises the background literature and provides the rationale for the research conducted in this thesis. Chapter 2 focuses on the methodological issues relating to the present studies provides a justification of each methodological approach used. Chapters 3 to 6 present the empirical work carried out for this thesis and Chapter 7 presents the conclusions drawn from the research carried out.

In Chapter 3 we present an investigation of participants' (27 men and 71 women) written accounts of past (good and bad) and ideal shopping experiences using thematic analysis. The findings show that women report higher overall shopping enjoyment than men, which is in agreement with previous research results. However, men and women describe similar obstacles and negative experiences that deter them from participating or wanting to participate in shopping activities, and they exhibit similar motivations when thinking about shopping. In contrast, all descriptions of ideal shopping experiences were highly idiosyncratic.

The study presented in Chapter 4 explores the relationship between product involvement and shopping enjoyment. One hundred and seventy-four participants

(69 men and 102 women) responded to an online questionnaire, which measured attitudes towards shopping in general and shopping in a high involvement situation. As in the previous study, the results showed that overall women reported much higher general shopping enjoyment than men. But when product involvement was high men reported a more positive attitude toward shopping than when just rating shopping in general. This suggests that the issue of gender differences in shopping enjoyment needed to be investigated further and that a more fine-grained approach to research in this area was required to explore the differences and similarities in the way that men and women approach this activity.

In Chapter 5 we investigate potential differences and similarities in men and women's conceptions of shopping. The first study in this chapter asked participants to list types of shopping or shopping activities as they came to mind and the second study utilised a free-sort task. Surprisingly, the results from the Chi-Square analysis of Study 3 and EXTREE and INDSCAL analysis of Study 4 showed that there are very few significant differences in how men and women view shopping. Thus, it seems both sexes appear to think about shopping in very similar (if not the same) ways.

In order to address this question in more depth, the study presented in Chapter 6 took a different methodological approach. Here, a focus group study was carried out to explore what lies behind men and women's conceptions of shopping. Three groups ($N=19$) of first year undergraduate students participated in focus groups and discussed what they thought and felt about shopping. Results showed that perceptions of what shopping is are very strong even amongst this group of young consumers. Finally, the results are reviewed in Chapter 7 together with their implications, limitations of the present research and possible future directions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Abstract | 3 |
| Table of contents | 5 |
| List of Figures and Tables | 8 |
| Acknowledgements | 9 |
| CHAPTER 1 | 11 |
| <i>Previous research</i> | 14 |
| Shopper Typologies | 15 |
| Shopping Motivations | 20 |
| Experiential aspects of consumption | 22 |
| Hedonic vs. utilitarian shopping value | 23 |
| Sex differences literature | 26 |
| Sex differences in shopping | 28 |
| <i>Summary and overview of the current research</i> | 31 |
| Chapter 2 | 34 |
| <i>Qualitative versus quantitative approaches in consumer behaviour research</i> | 34 |
| <i>Conducting research online</i> | 38 |
| <i>Strengths of Thematic Analysis</i> | 42 |
| <i>Ethical issues</i> | 43 |
| CHAPTER 3 | 44 |
| <i>Method</i> | 47 |
| Participants and Recruitment | 47 |
| Design and Procedure | 48 |
| Qualitative Analysis | 49 |
| <i>Results and Discussion</i> | 50 |
| Quantitative Results | 50 |
| Qualitative results | 50 |
| <i>Part 1: Participants best and worst shopping experiences</i> | 51 |
| Theme 1: Shopping under pressure | 51 |
| Theme 2: External factors: Service Quality and Personnel | 53 |
| Theme 3: Internal Factors – self-perceptions | 57 |
| Body image issues | 57 |
| Regret | 58 |
| Memorable experiences in the past | 59 |
| <i>Part 2: Participants ideal shopping experiences</i> | 61 |
| Theme 4: Needs versus Wants | 61 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> | 64 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Chapter 4 | 67 |
| <i>Method</i> | 71 |
| Participants | 71 |
| Design and Procedure | 71 |
| Treatment of data | 73 |
| <i>Results</i> | 74 |
| Manipulation check | 74 |
| <i>Discussion</i> | 76 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> | 81 |
| Chapter 5 | 83 |
| STUDY 3 | 86 |
| <i>Method</i> | 87 |
| Participants and Recruitment | 87 |
| Materials | 87 |
| Procedure | 88 |
| Analysis | 88 |
| <i>Results</i> | 92 |
| <i>Discussion</i> | 93 |
| STUDY 4 | 96 |
| <i>Method</i> | 97 |
| Participants | 97 |
| Materials | 97 |
| Design and Procedure | 98 |
| Treatment of data | 99 |
| <i>Results</i> | 101 |
| INDSCAL solution | 101 |
| EXTREE solution | 105 |
| <i>Discussion</i> | 109 |
| <i>General Discussion</i> | 111 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> | 112 |
| Chapter 6 | 114 |
| <i>Method</i> | 117 |
| Participants and Recruitment | 117 |
| Materials | 118 |
| Design and Procedure | 118 |
| Treatment of Data | 120 |
| Method of Analysis | 120 |
| <i>Results and Discussion</i> | 121 |
| Theme 1: The image of the shopper | 123 |
| Theme 2. The participants' view of shopping | 130 |
| <i>Conclusions</i> | 137 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Chapter 7 | 141 |
| <i>Overview of the Research Questions</i> | 141 |
| <i>Summary of the Findings</i> | 142 |
| The Shopping Experience | 142 |
| Product Involvement | 144 |
| The Concept of Shopping | 145 |
| Perceptions of Shopping | 146 |
| <i>Implications of the Findings</i> | 147 |
| Consumer Education | 147 |
| Compulsive Shopping Behaviour | 150 |
| Marketing and Retailing Industry | 151 |
| <i>Limitations</i> | 152 |
| <i>Future Research Directions</i> | 154 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> | 156 |
| References | 159 |
| Appendixes | 169 |

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

| | |
|---|----------|
| Table 1. <i>Summary of scales used with means, standard deviations and alpha levels</i> | Page 73 |
| Table 2. <i>Paired samples t-tests for attitudes toward shopping on the high street, online and a desired product by gender</i> | Page 75 |
| Table 3. <i>Items listed overall for types of shopping and shopping activities in order of frequency</i> | Page 89 |
| Figure 1. <i>Proportions of men and women who mentioned top seven types of shopping</i> | Page 90 |
| Figure 2. <i>Proportions of men and women who mentioned top seven shopping activities</i> | Page 91 |
| Table 4. <i>Mentions of top types of shopping among male and female participants</i> | Page 92 |
| Table 5. <i>Top seven shopping activities among male and female participants</i> | Page 93 |
| Table 6. <i>Final 30 exemplars used in free-sorting task</i> | Page 98 |
| Table 7. <i>Illustration of data treatment for free-sort analysis</i> | Page 100 |
| Figure 3. <i>Two-dimensional INDSCAL solution for female free-sort data</i> | Page 103 |
| Figure 4. <i>Two-dimensional INDSCAL solution for male free-sort data</i> | Page 104 |
| Figure 5. <i>EXTREE solution for female free-sort data</i> | Page 106 |
| Figure 6. <i>EXTREE solution for male free-sort data</i> | Page 108 |
| Figure 7. <i>Image of the Shopper diagram</i> | Page 122 |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I would like to thank for their help and support throughout my time as a PhD student here in the School of Psychology at the University of Exeter. First and foremost I want to thank my main PhD supervisor Dr. Carole Burgoyne; without your continuous encouragement and support this thesis would never have been possible. Thank you for continuing to be my supervisor for the past year. I've really enjoyed working with you in this second half of my PhD! I also want to thank my second supervisor Professor Jonathan Schroeder from the Business School here at the University of Exeter for the support over the past few years, and Dr. Brian Young for supporting me during the beginning stages of my PhD and for staying involved even after retiring from University work. Next I want to thank Dr. David Routh for his input into the work for Chapter 5, as well as Dr. Joanne Smith for the useful comments and feedback provided.

I also want to thank my friends for putting up with me and my moods and all the support over the past 4 years. Very special thanks go to Dr. Kristen Jule and Dr. Dimitrios Tsivrikos for being the best friends and most amazing office mates anyone could ask for. You guys were always (and still are!) there for me when I needed someone to moan about PhD related things and also to celebrate and share good news. I hope we can continue this in the future! I also want to thank Dr. Laura Smith, Andrea Day and Dr. Aisling O'Donnell, as well as Dr. Ilka Gleibs and David Crelley for their friendship and support throughout the years; Aisling deserves special thanks for making sure we kept *The Collective* alive for another year with long lunches, dinners at the Taj and Starbucks coffees. Furthermore, I want to thank Michele Harrigan-Thangaraj and Dr. Arlene Stillwell for always believing in me and not letting me give up. I seriously couldn't have done it without any of you guys!

Last but not least I want to thank my parents for the financial and emotional support over the past 31 years of my life. No-one has believed in me as much as the two of you. Mama und Papa, dafür ist das hier für euch!