University of Huddersfield Repository

Burr, Vivien and King, Nigel

Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

Original Citation


This version is available at http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/7959/

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/
Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

EPCA Conference
Belgrade, 2010

Viv Burr and Nigel King
Centre for Applied Psychological Research
University of Huddersfield, UK
Background

Shoes and personal identity

Pilot study- role construct repertory tests and interviews with four women

Revealed important identity issues
Method

Women worked in pairs as co-investigators
Used 12 images of shoes

Asked to choose 6 liked and 6 disliked to work with

In second workshop, women also supplied some of their own shoes as potential elements
Method

Used triads and dyads to elicit constructs.

Completed grid using ticks (preferred) and crosses (non-preferred).
Nigel King and Viv Burr  
XVIII International Congress on Personal Construct Psychology, Venice 2009  
Workshop: Exploring Personal Identities through Constructions of Footwear

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Preferred pole</th>
<th>Non-preferred pole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preferred pole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image7" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image8" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image9" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image10" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image11" alt="Image of a table" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shoe code →
Method

the woman I am
the woman I fear I might be
the woman I’d like to be (ref)
Participants

31 women from the UK, Italy, Australia, USA, Cyprus and Sri Lanka.

age range: 26 to 64,
Findings

The women produced 215 constructs in total.
Most women produced between 4 and 10.
Average was 6 to 7.

Content analysis of construct dimensions
14 categories, accounting for 162 (75%) of the constructs.
Findings

Comfortable (14)
Practical (13)
Elegance and class (14)
Femininity (9)
Boring and plain (26)
Age (4)
Sexuality (14)
Conformity and individuality (13)
Fashionable (9)
Exhibitionism and being noticed (15)
Aesthetics (15)
Safety (7)
Freedom and constraint (5)
Fun and frivolity (10)
Findings

Comfortable vs uncomfortable

For what do women feel they sacrifice comfort?
Findings

Elegance and class

non-preferred, contrast poles:
Vulgar
Common
Cheap
Trashy
Findings

Femininity

Contrast poles:

Sexless
Aggressive
Masculine
Butch
Neutral
All-rounder
pretending to play a role
Practical
Brazen/predatory
Findings

Practical

Contrast poles included:

Impractical
Flimsy
Frivolous
Entertaining
Feminine

Psycho-logic vs formal logic
Findings

Boring and Plain

Contrast poles suggest a desire for fun and frivolity, glamour and excitement, creativity and expressiveness, interest and vibrancy.
Findings

Sexuality

Preferred pole included:

- Sexy vs missionary
- Sexy vs frumpy
- Seductive vs off-putting
- Proud to be a sexy woman vs conservative
Findings

Outgoing vs loose morals
Individual personality vs stereotype woman of the street
Free spirit vs sexualised (empty headed)
Wonderfully ridiculous vs tarty
Stylish vs tarty
Someone whose sexuality is more refined vs tarty, letting men know they’re up for it!
Findings

The narrow path?:

Classically sexy vs slutty
Findings

The woman I am
and the woman I’d like to be
common vs elegant
all-rounder vs feminine
unfashionable vs trendy
elegant vs comfortable
Drab vs sexy
Boring vs interesting
Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The woman I am</th>
<th>The woman I’d like to be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accommodating</td>
<td>hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normal</td>
<td>wacky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fashion victim</td>
<td>in style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unprotective</td>
<td>safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trendy</td>
<td>overly girly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unchanging</td>
<td>ephemeral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

Bipolarity

Serious vs bad taste
Sporty vs identity-driven
Outgoing vs loose morals
Frivolous vs aggressive
Bouncy vs mincey
Lively vs self-confident
Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

lively vs self confident might become:

Lively vs lacks energy
Self-confident vs timid
Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

Range of convenience

Heels vs flat
Uniform neutral colour vs not harmonious in colour
Delicate vs sturdy
Soft vs hard (give blisters)
Summer (no socks) vs covered up, enclosed
Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

- Feeling in control vs not having my own mind
- Happy vs sad
- Open mind vs closed mind
- Who is liked vs scared
- Serious vs stupid
- Benign vs dangerous
Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

Summary

- Using shoes seems to be an engaging and productive way of enquiring about sense of self.
- Sometimes further probing is needed to tease out ‘nests’ of constructs.
- Issues prominent for women include comfort and practicality, but also a desire for elegance and the ability to express sexuality and femininity.
- What women want is not straightforward. There is a narrow path to walk between being sexy and being a tart.
Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

What can you say about your experiences today?