Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

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Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

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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)
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
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<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>unprotected</td>
<td>safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trendy</td>
<td>overly girly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unchanging</td>
<td>ephemeral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Bipolarity

Serious vs bad taste
Sporty vs identity-driven
Outgoing vs loose morals
Frivolous vs aggressive
Bouncy vs mincey
Lively vs self-confident
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lively vs self confident might become:

Lively vs lacks energy
Self-confident vs timid
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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
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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
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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.
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What can you say about your experiences today?