



# University of HUDDERSFIELD

## University of Huddersfield Repository

Burr, Vivien and King, Nigel

Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

### Original Citation

Burr, Vivien and King, Nigel (2010) Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear. In: 10th European Personal Construct Association (EPCA) Conference on Personal Construct Psychology, 9-12 April 2010, Belgrade, Serbia. (Unpublished)

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/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](mailto: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)





# 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

## The woman I am

accommodating

normal

fashion victim

unprotective

trendy

unchanging

## The woman I'd like to be

hard work

wacky

in style

safe

overly girly

ephemeral

# 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?