



# *University of* **HUDDERSFIELD**

## **University of Huddersfield Repository**

Burr, Vivien and King, Nigel

In these shoes? Exploring women's identities through footwear.

### **Original Citation**

Burr, Vivien and King, Nigel (2009) In these shoes? Exploring women's identities through footwear. In: The XVIIIth International Congress on Personal Construct Psychology, July 20-24 2009, Venice, Italy. (Unpublished)

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/5677/>

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/>

# In these shoes? Exploring women's identities through footwear

Viv Burr and Nigel King



*University of*  
**HUDDERSFIELD**

**Centre for  
Applied  
Psychological  
Research**



# In the beginning

Shoes and personal identity- just a joke?

How did it all start?

The pilot sample:  
Margaret, Bridget and Lucy

“I’ve waited all my life for this!”

# The Method

- Constructivist
- Shared similarities, individual differences
- Flexible research methods
- Role Repertory Test









# Role Repertory Test

Participants chose 12-15 images

Presented in successive triads and asked  
“how are any two similar and different from  
the third?” (Kelly’s operational definition of a  
construct)

Clarifying constructs with the participants,  
especially contrast terms



# Margaret's constructs

younger.....older  
fashionable .....not fashionable  
practical/comfortable.....for appearance  
not leather.....doesn't give a damn  
classical.....not classical  
elegant.....sloppy  
not worn to look sexy.....worn to look sexy  
everyday wear.....dressy  
cool.....not cool

# Bridget's constructs

streamlined/neat.....garish/in yer face  
sexy..... a parody of sexiness  
heterosexual.....gay/bi  
comfortable/functional.....not practical  
young.....older  
can wear any time.....an 'occasion' shoe  
gives my body a pleasing shape.....doesn't  
sexy.....old fashioned  
extravert.....introvert  
contemporary/trendy/funky.....classic  
designer label.....looks cheap/trashy/low cost

# Lucy's constructs

comfortable.....uncomfortable  
confident feminine.....helpless feminine  
safety.....fun  
toned down sexual.....overtly sexual  
informal.....formal  
not making a statement.....making a statement



# Sexiness Lucy



toned down.....overt



# Sexiness

## Margaret



“...somebody who dresses for a kind of reaction I think, or maybe a women who dresses to look, maybe she [thinks she] looks sexy.”

# Sexiness Bridget

“supposed to be sexy”

but is actually...

“a parody of sexiness”



# Sexiness Bridget

Girliness



VS

dominatrix, fancy dress:  
"It shouts 'dominatrix'"





# Sexiness Bridget

“A girly shoe with a heel and the rest of it sends that message that that’s a straight woman, whereas other shoes send other messages. That shoe...I think BDSM stuff and poly stuff.”





# Sexiness Bridget



“They can be sexy in other spaces”

“Out on the town” and heterosexual

“People would interact with you differently and would make assumptions about you because of the heel.”



# Sexiness Bridget

“[it is] nowhere near high enough for me for it to look like a sexy boot- it’s in between- it’s not making enough of a statement.”

Sexy vs old fashioned, ugly,  
does nothing for my leg



# Signifying personal identity

## Bridget

“an awful shoe, awful...I can imagine somebody who wears a shoe like that...someone who’s not bothered.”

“I see people wearing shoes like that and kind of the whole outfit is like that, plain, kind of blank, not really...not somebody who’s wanting to tell anybody anything about themselves...just a blank...and I know that wearing those shoes they’d think it tells something about them but there’s nothing there that I’m interested in (laughs)”.



“For me it’s about someone who’s giving me everything straight away as opposed to someone who’s going to be hard work to get information, to talk to.”



# Signifying personal identity

Bridget

“This is somebody who is into shoes and likes unusual looking shoes and has probably got a few more! This is someone who would probably take more risks in their dress generally and probably open-minded...it would tell you more about the person who's wearing the shoe, and I like that, that's someone who's not frightened of colour, not frightened of being probably the only person in a room of a lot of people to wear that shoe, it's an unusual looking shoe.”





# Signifying personal identity

## Bridget

“I just like to have them. I never wear them, never wear them, because they’re not practical, they’re too old-fashioned.”

Shoes are “massively important, massively important- what I wear often is, the first decision is what shoes am I wearing and then I’ll build an outfit around the shoe.”

# Signifying personal identity

## Margaret

“a starting point- there’s much more.”

# Signifying personal identity

## Margaret

“[that shoe] would either be worn by a young person or somebody who’s more conscious of their appearance and wanted it to go with a certain outfit. The other one would be worn by someone who wants to feel and look younger than they are.”



# Signifying personal identity

## Margaret

“They’re not my style- I don’t wear high heels”

“I couldn’t wear them- I haven’t got anything that would go with that kind of stuff”

“they’ve got a strap you’d wrap around your leg. I definitely wouldn’t do that- I haven’t got the right shaped legs to do that.”



# Signifying personal identity

## Margaret



“The odd one out is obviously the animal print boot”

Comfortable vs harder to walk in

“I don’t like the animal print- it’s bad taste- it has connotations of people in the past doing real things [to animals].”

# Signifying personal identity

## Margaret

“I suppose it’s a bit like all the issues surrounding wearing, you know, they used to wear foxes, fox stoles around the neck. It’s not killing animals because you need them to, for the leather or something or to eat it’s, erm...I’ll have to think about it, it’s not something I can really just sort of reel off....”

“It’s like not giving a damn. It’s more than that. It’s not giving a damn for the lives of creatures.”

# What next?

- Congress workshop- diversity of participants
- Participants chose 6 shoes from 12
- Worked in pairs
- Elicited constructs and completed grids



# What next?

Laddering: from Reynolds and Gutman (1988)

self-esteem

^

better figure

^

don't get fat

^

eat less

^

strong taste

^

flavored chip