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In these shoes? Exploring women's identities through footwear

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HUDDERSFIELD

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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
fashionablenot 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