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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 (Unpublished)

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Exploring personal identities through constructions of footwear

EPCA Conference
Belgrade, 2010

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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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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

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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?