

Men hate it, Women love it?

A Critical Examination of Shopping as a Gendered Activity

**Submitted by Ivonne Hoeger, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the
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I. Hoeger

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to investigate whether shopping is still a gendered activity in the 21st century. Past research in a number of social science disciplines with a focus on consumer affairs indicated that traditionally shopping was part of the woman's domain and therefore it was seen as an activity only women engaged in. More current research has however suggested that shopping is no longer just a female activity, and asked for more research to be conducted into both male and female consumer behaviour. The present thesis focuses on recreational shopping and attempts to address the issue of male and female consumer behaviour by means of a multi-method approach. Chapter 1 summarises the background literature and provides the rationale for the research conducted in this thesis. Chapter 2 focuses on the methodological issues relating to the present studies provides a justification of each methodological approach used. Chapters 3 to 6 present the empirical work carried out for this thesis and Chapter 7 presents the conclusions drawn from the research carried out.

In Chapter 3 we present an investigation of participants' (27 men and 71 women) written accounts of past (good and bad) and ideal shopping experiences using thematic analysis. The findings show that women report higher overall shopping enjoyment than men, which is in agreement with previous research results. However, men and women describe similar obstacles and negative experiences that deter them from participating or wanting to participate in shopping activities, and they exhibit similar motivations when thinking about shopping. In contrast, all descriptions of ideal shopping experiences were highly idiosyncratic.

The study presented in Chapter 4 explores the relationship between product involvement and shopping enjoyment. One hundred and seventy-four participants

(69 men and 102 women) responded to an online questionnaire, which measured attitudes towards shopping in general and shopping in a high involvement situation. As in the previous study, the results showed that overall women reported much higher general shopping enjoyment than men. But when product involvement was high men reported a more positive attitude toward shopping than when just rating shopping in general. This suggests that the issue of gender differences in shopping enjoyment needed to be investigated further and that a more fine-grained approach to research in this area was required to explore the differences and similarities in the way that men and women approach this activity.

In Chapter 5 we investigate potential differences and similarities in men and women's conceptions of shopping. The first study in this chapter asked participants to list types of shopping or shopping activities as they came to mind and the second study utilised a free-sort task. Surprisingly, the results from the Chi-Square analysis of Study 3 and EXTREE and INDSCAL analysis of Study 4 showed that there are very few significant differences in how men and women view shopping. Thus, it seems both sexes appear to think about shopping in very similar (if not the same) ways.

In order to address this question in more depth, the study presented in Chapter 6 took a different methodological approach. Here, a focus group study was carried out to explore what lies behind men and women's conceptions of shopping. Three groups ($N=19$) of first year undergraduate students participated in focus groups and discussed what they thought and felt about shopping. Results showed that perceptions of what shopping is are very strong even amongst this group of young consumers. Finally, the results are reviewed in Chapter 7 together with their implications, limitations of the present research and possible future directions.

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