

*Thesis Title: "A postmodern analysis of the Shopping Experience and the Consumer Society".*

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“Shopping as a research topic may at first glance seem of marginal significance, but it is in fact a major cultural phenomenon in contemporary postmodern society, which increasingly structures the everyday practices of urban people” (Falk 1997:2). The shopping mall with its lure of commodity fetishism has begun to substitute both the family and the church as one of the most sacred institutions of late modernity. It is through commodities that one constructs a narrative or self-identity. According to Gardner, clothes and consumer products are the new raw materials with which to construct new images and identities (1989:56). Men, women and children are beginning to spend more time in shopping malls than they do in church, although there is no statistical evidence as such for this in Ireland one indication of this trend comes from consumer television programmes. A consumer programme on BBC 2 called ‘Big Ideas’ explained how the mall acts as a Temple to consumption and its labels/styles have an almost religious meaning (June’99). Consumption has replaced production, just as the mall has replaced the church. Consumption has an element of iconography, it is a form of expression, signalling information about your personality and social status. You are what you consume. Human sensuality and desire is more than ever manipulated and controlled by the forces of capitalism such as the lure of the commodity. The commodity is the new coloniser of the social world, the new mode of domination – *resistance is futile* . The characteristics of postmodernism such as fragmentation, disintegration, the collapse of boundaries and the fusion of elite and mass culture create uncertainty, doubt and confusion, all of which induce consumers into the lure of commodities. This in turn creates a notion of self-identity grounded on falsity, illusion and momentary pleasure.

This Thesis is essentially a postmodern analysis of consumerism and shopping which will be divided into three key areas of analysis:

\*Are consumerism and shopping a gendered or homogeneous phenomenon?

\*Does consumerism act as the new stimulant/religion of late modernity, in its role as an agent in the reflexive construction of self-identity – is consumption the foundation from which to build an identity and express yourself to others?

\*Is the commodity the new postmodern God? Is the label/sign the new coloniser of the lifeworld – is it all surface spectacle void of all meaning?

Chapter 2 will examine the gender issue in the shopping experience – is it a gendered or homogeneous experience? The department store allowed for the emancipation and liberation of women into the public sphere in a secure and socially acceptable manner. Traditionally the mall was a gendered space, regarded as a feminine experience, I want to however examine the postmodern experience to reveal how the mall and consumerism has become a somewhat degendered, homogeneous, leisure activity (although the experience still differs between men and women). Shopping is still one of the most contested experiences between the sexes, women finding it one of the most pleasurable and self-gratifying way to spend a Saturday afternoon, while men finding it one of the most painful and demanding activities. Why do women get so much satisfaction from shopping and spend so much time doing it while men seem only to shop when a need is established, spending as little time as possible? I will try to make clear the social and psychological motives behind the shopping adventure. Campbell (1997) suggests that

shopping in a modern Western society is a thoroughly gendered activity (1997:166). Men are the traditional instrumental shoppers and women the expressive shoppers, I want to establish the importance of the shopping gaze for consumers- the voyeuristic expedition. I want to examine the pain/pleasure, need/want aspect of shopping between the sexes, paying some attention to the issue of masculinity and femininity with fashion as a particular case study. To examine the issue of masculinity and shopping I will refer to the works of Frank Mort (1998) and Tim Edwards (1992), along with some popular magazine and journal articles. One other important issue which sociologists often disregard are the economic and social skills associated with shopping, particularly for working class women, as it is they who consume for the household. For them shopping around is not a pleasure but a financial necessity, although this receives little recognition. To further examine this point I will refer to the work of Hansen (1986) and Mica Nava (1997). With the rise in the level of disposable income the sociology of shopping and consumerism holds a very interesting gender perspective.

With the rise in the level of disposable income more people view shopping as a leisure activity – but gender still remains the single dividing variable. Colin Campbell's study of males and females between 25-45 carried out in 1992 resulted in some interesting data on the issue of gender and the shopping experience. For example, women expressed a preference for all types of shopping while men favoured product-specific or functional shopping. Campbell examines the pain/pleasure, need/want aspect of gender difference. Shopping is a traditionally feminine activity, so a man's involvement could act to threaten his masculinity. The

above points will be linked into the methodological research to get a deeper insight into the consumer society. The life-document in the form of a diary will be used, four females and three males (all single, with disposable income between the ages of 20-25) have been asked to record daily all consumer outings and experiences with the help of a guideline showing what is required (Please find example guideline in Appendix). A follow up interview will then be carried out in order to investigate fully what has been recorded and to allow further probing. The key thesis I want to establish is the notion of a consumer society centred on identity construction via lifestyle consumption, you are what you consume, which brings me on to the next chapter.

Chapter 3 will examine consumerism as the religion of late-modernity, in its role as an agent in the reflexive construction of self-identity. According to Beck, the change to modernity increased the process of individualisation, cutting people off from traditional ties, beliefs and social relations thus increasing secularisation and urbanisation ... the individual is freed of constraints and obligations but has little support and security (1995:46). The process of reflexivity and individualisation leads to lifestyle choice which is constructed and re-invented through shopping and commodities. Commodities as the new source of existential meaning have replaced God. Ritzer refers to shopping malls as the new cathedral of consumption, we make pilgrimages in order to practice our consumer religion (1999:2). Traditionally one went to Church to fulfil one's needs and to construct a sense of identity, in late-modernity the mall is the new place of worship where we consume a disposable identity. Labels and signs have become the new Gods, it is they alone that give meaning and fulfilment. We consume because we feel the need, but that need is a

stimulant created by capitalist forces of advertising and marketing. According to Shields, consumer society fosters panic and envy and commodity purchase is the only alleviation but commodified gratification's can only momentarily mask the terrors of emptiness and fragmentation associated with postmodernism (1992:68). Essentially when one buys an outfit it gives instant pleasure and excitement but it will last only while it is new, after a while it will lose its glamour to become yet another disposable, unnecessary item. According to Shields, shopping is not merely the acquisition of things, it is the buying of an identity – consumption reflects decisions about self, taste, and images of the body and social distinctions (1992:195). Shopping has great symbolic meaning as one is engaged in a series of endless reflexive questions resulting in self-formation: who am I? What do I wear? Where do I shop? What commodities do I consume? According to Falk, shopping cannot be reduced to the instrumental act of buying as it involves a merging of the imaginary, experimental and reflexive dimensions (1997:41). So to speak a series of selves or identities are available in shops where one browses, consumes and displays the symbolic goods. The above points will be raised in the methodological research by analysing the diaries of shoppers as mentioned previously, in the follow up interview I will probe the respondents with regard to the construction of self-identity via consumption and the communicable value of labels. Some of the respondents may not be conscious of this so probing and questioning will bring out social and psychological experience of shopping.

The core theory or sociological framework involved in this thesis is that of postmodernism, which will be examined in Chapter 4. According to Jameson, some



of the main constitutive features of postmodernity include, a new depthlessness and a new culture of image centred around commodification. Depth is replaced by surface and alienation by fragmentation (1991:6). Shopping can be seen as a postmodern activity as it centres on the acquisition of identity through commodities of superficiality and fusion of high and low art. As according to Guy Debord, the image has become the final form of commodity reification (1994). Commodity society is characterised by a growth in quantity but a loss in quality, the image or spectacle becomes the new coloniser and *resistance is futile*. One need only look at superstars as examples of postmodern consumers, as they need to constantly reinvent themselves as the spectacle is involved in a continual process of replacement. Madonna has to continually reinvent herself in order to maintain her position as the Queen of Pop, since the '80's she has managed to set fashion trends. The wedding of Posh Spice and David Beckham could be seen as the ultimate pre-millennial spectacle. The wedding involved the hire of expert knowledge from designers, florists to PR consultants, it was the ultimate spectacle, a superficial wedding sold on the mass market in OK magazine. One must however ask if the high turnover in commodity lifespan is mere capitalist exploitation or manipulation of insecurities and doubt associated with postmodernism. According to Featherstone, postmodernism centres on the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between elite and mass culture, favouring eclecticism and the decline of originality in favour of repetition (1991:7). One must ask why there is the need to consume such a vast amount of commodities? Does our society lack stability and coherence, or is the freedom of capitalism a mere illusion? Jameson follows Baudrillard in his depiction of consumer society as saturated with signs and images, we now search for individuality and distinctions via

lifestyle cultivation and commodity fetishism. I will give a broader examination of the consumer sovereignty versus the consumer manipulation thesis and examine the creation of lifestyle and individual identity via consumption.

Chapter 5 will centre on methodology and research results. The methodology used in this thesis is that of life-document or diaries, I gave three males between 20-25 a diary to keep of their shopping habits/experiences for four weeks and four females between 20-25 the same. I gave each respondent a guideline of points as to the information required, purchase was not a prerequisite – it was the social and personal experiences.(Please find example of guideline in appendix). On receiving the diaries after the four week period I conducted follow up interviews using the information which I had had the opportunity to analysis from the diaries. The follow up interview will allow for further rummaging into the motives, experiences and image/identity construction process of the consumer.

Chapter 6 will involve a discussion of the research with other sociological sources, combining the data with a theoretical framework of postmodernism.

Chapter 7 will allow for a final discussion of the findings of the thesis, a bringing together of all the information gathered to explain the postmodern consumer society.

Chapter 8, the bibliography will include all references, books and articles used.

## **Chapter 2**

# **Shopping as a Gendered Phenomenon.**

“In the contemporary world the signifying and celebrating edifice of consumer culture has become the shopping mall which exists in pseudo-democratic twilight zone between reality and a commercially produced fantasy world of commodified goods and images that gratify transformed desire and provide packaged self-images to a distinctive form of subjectivity” (Shields 1992:40). Shopping has become the leisure activity of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as society has moved from mass production to mass consumption.

According to Janet Wolf, the literature of modernity ignores the private sphere, the only public arena being the emergence of the department store (1985:44). The department store can be seen as the first space where women were socially acceptable as it was a safe and non-political environment. The question Nava asks is, how can we make sense of the failure to acknowledge women’s participation in the making of urban consumer culture (1997:59). The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of rigid sexual boundaries and limitations but the emergence of the philanthropic movement among middle class women allowed for the first time women’s participation in public life and urban areas. Nava argues, a picture began to emerge in which middle class women were much closer to the dangers and the excitement of city life than the notion of separate spheres would lead us to believe (1997:61). The philanthropic movement allowed these women to become urban flaneurs with the right to look and gaze at city and public life, thus giving them the right to enter into the new consumer culture. The mall and the department store soon became a monument to the emancipation and liberation of women, a monument to modernity.

The shopping mall and the department store gathered an important social and personal experience, a space where women's groups could hold meetings allowing for independence and social interaction. According to Nava, as institutions the stores made a major contribution to the 20<sup>th</sup> century consolidation of women as consumers and to consumption and consumer expertise as activities that were as gendered as production (1997:66). The mall or department store became a legitimate escape route from the routine of domesticity, a women's involvement in the selection and purchase of household items, family clothing and personal luxuries became the only public expression of individualism open to her at that time. The emergence of the flaneuse was the beginning of female emancipation, the first step in the ladder to equality both inside and outside the home.

Why are women so easily lured into the mall and the purchase of commodities? With the rise in the level of disposable income in the post-war era and the boom of the 1960's, the level of consumption began to rise to an all time high. With the lack of female participation in the labour force, once married women became the main consumers. But even today when the workforce is almost evenly represented by both sexes, it is generally estimated that 70% of purchasing decisions are made by women. According to Shields, the department store wants to present itself as an entire world, self-sufficient and abundant, a consumer's paradise and an Adamless Eden (1992:29). The mall becomes a micro-community, with attractive facilities such as crèches, baby changing rooms, restaurants, cinemas etc, it has something for everyone but especially for women. The mall becomes a cosmos for social interaction, mothers go with their daughters, sisters with sisters, girlfriends

with girlfriends – it becomes an excursion of female bonding and identification. Women often work best as a group the exchange of information and experiences is at the centre of the female shopping practice. Many women relate to shopping as an excursion, much time will be spent dressing up for the experience. It is interesting to note how little women dress to *do the shopping* while most dress up to *go shopping*.

Shopping can be understood as an experience with its own skills, motives and morals. Tauber was the first to ask, 'Why does the consumer shop' in order to understand the sociological and psychological motivation of shopping. The social motives included, social experiences outside the home, communication with others, peer group attraction, status and pleasure of bargaining. The psychological or personal motives included, diversion, self-gratification, learning new trends, physical activity and sensory stimulation (Journal of Marketing). The above motivations go some way to explaining the female shopping experience, although it will differ slightly with age and marital status. Most single, working women with large amount of disposable income are employed in what Featherstone called, the emotional fulfilment in narcissistically pleasing oneself (1991:24), meaning consumption for pleasure or desire not for need or function. This lead's us to Campbell (1997). His data suggested women expressed a positive view to shopping, viewing it as a leisure activity. Women are most often expressive shoppers in that consumption acts as an means of self-gratifying of desire and fantasy. Perhaps this could explain why the range of lingerie for example is so vast but most is non-functional or wearable. Women consume over-priced, uncomfortable restricting items of underwear in an effort to fulfil an emotional desire that they saw on a Hollywood movie, realising

only later that romance is not included! Women are often impulsive and irrational shoppers, vulnerable to and manipulated by the techniques of advertising and marketing.

J.Hansen explores the relation of the marketing of cosmetics and fashion to the oppression of women and the ways in which these companies try to manipulate women's insecurities and fears to sell commodities and rake in massive profits (1986:3). The cosmetic industry alone is worth billions each year, but their role as oppressor's is often over-looked. Women on average spend between £20-50 a month on cosmetics and between £50-200 a month on clothes. Fashion has been taken away from the individual and put into the hands of large-scale fashion companies. According to Hansen, women do not indulge in cosmetics, it is a social compulsion to use them (1986:57). Have women become victims of manipulation and insecurity? The rise in women's disposable income has lead to liberation in the mall, but is this perhaps a mere illusion created by capitalism to encourage individualism and difference through consumption. According to Hansen, women have become victims of insecurity complexes under the capitalist rat race of commodity fetishism (1986: 56). Women often feel very intimidated in clothes shops as the shop assistants with their perfect hair, make-up and clothes can make the shopper feel self-conscious and insecure. The dressing room experience can be one of great frustration and intimidation if the room is communal, many will purchase the item without trying it on if there are no single cubicles. In Treasa Brogan's article "The Feminisation of the Male Shopping Domain" one female respondent replied, 'I never feel intimidated in a man's shop as much as I do in a woman's shop', another replied, 'I find that men's

shops are women friendly and the sales assistant comes over straight away – if you go into a woman's shop you could be waiting twenty minutes before being approached' (1998).

Women are expressive shoppers, they can wander into a mall without a specific item or purchase in mind. Women act as tourists in a mall of scenery, deriving pleasure from the act of gazing upon surfaces of identities shelved and packaged in stores. According to Shields, being a shopper is usually assumed to be synonymous with being a purchaser – but shopping does not always involve purchase, it can be seen as a process or a social practice of exploration and sightseeing akin to tourism, known as the shopping gaze (1992:102). This act of looking/gazing is associated with voyeurism. Gardner argues that, women are usually the object of the gaze but shopping is one area of life where it is permissible for women to look, to gaze, to fantasise – shopping for young women is an idle aesthetic experience or daydream (1989:57). Although it may be an Adamless Eden, great temptation and exotic desires are available in abundance to be looked at and consumed. Consumption does not necessarily constitute purchase, it is the experience or voyeuristic journey which is of importance. According to a recent article in the Irish Independent for women shopping is like talking, it doesn't need a point or a definite outcome – women find shopping relaxing and rejuvenating whether or not they buy anything, this behaviour would drive most men mad after twenty minutes. Women enjoy testing the range of commodities available as it suits their emotions and need for information. According to "Fashion Weekly" a retail magazine, shopping for clothing is about the perception of need, the desire for self-



gratification and a human to make oneself current (Feb 1998:35). For women shopping does not require instrumental research or reasoning, it does however involve pampering, self-adornment and self-pleasing. Dr. Lewis, a shopping psychologist recently carried out a survey of over 1000 shoppers in both the UK and Ireland. He reported that there were three types of female shoppers. Mavens are specialist shoppers, they clip the coupons and watch the advertisements. Magpies do a lot of shopping therapy, they use it as a comfort or pick me up often buying things they never use. Magicians are people who transform people's lives by giving them the right gifts . Modern retailers are beginning to understand that the store not just the clothes must be stylish in order to indulge the consumer's senses.

But of course not all women can involve themselves in this self-gratifying process of pleasure and desire, for working class women operating on a tight budget is a skill not a leisure activity. According to Daniel Miller, for decades the media has sneered at the inconsequential nature of women by detailing their involvement with and concern with shopping (1997:32). Working class mothers are often the unit that holds household economy together due to thrift, bargaining and accountability. Working class women with children to support and cloth will shop around for value and choice, not because it is a pleasure but because it is a financial necessity. They will shop in Dunnes instead of Marks and Spencers, because for them shopping is not a self-gratifying process – it is a spend thrift experience. Miller (1997) explains that the highest sense of anxiety is most often associated with the mundane shopping of household and grocery items. This consumer study centres on commodities the principle on being fashion and clothing, but one must note that pleasure is not always

associated with shopping, sometimes the dominant emotion can be that of depression and anxiety. Tim Edwards makes the point that for some shopping is a pleasurable experience but for others it remains the epitome of misery and exploitation (1997:95). Working class women must manipulate the system that acts to manipulate them by shopping around for the best value, thus being rational and prepared shoppers. a prepared shopping list is a vital tool against the seductive presentation and packaging of many items. The mall has however acted to democratise shopping as everyone's money is the same, all are welcome and purchase is not a requirement for the experience. The people who shop or browse most often tend to be unemployed, low-income workers or housewives, those with spare time as opposed to spare money.

“In 1883 Lady Paget remarked that the reason why fashion changes so quickly now is because they at once spread through every stratum of society, becoming deteriorated and common” (Corrigan 1997:161). This is a reference to the opposition of high/elite and low/mass fashion. The catwalk designs of DKNY, Gucci, Armani etc. soon filter down market to be copied by high street stores like Oasis, Warehouse, Morgan, Topshop, River Island etc. then filter down again to mass clothing or budget stores like Dunnes Stores and Penneys. Fashion's ever changing face is a result of class competition at the level of appearance thus explaining Simmel's 'Trickle-Down' theory, the elite design of Gucci will cost £500 in Brown Thomas, the design will then filter down to Oasis at £60 and finally down to the mass/ low design of Penneys at £30. One of the fundamental characteristics of

postmodernism is the fusion of high and low culture, the diffusion of elite and mass – the destruction of barriers.

One final point in relation to women and shopping malls is that of urban planning. One must also examine the expansion in the number of cars in the development of suburbanisation and out of town shopping centres, this is particularly interesting in reference to the development of Blanchardstown and Liffey Valley shopping centres. Blanchardstown is a quite homogeneous shopping centre with a large array of shops (including high and low cost) and a large amount of car parking spaces, but more importantly it has a good public transportation system. Liffey Valley steers towards a more middle-class centre due to its lack of public transportation, and its high cost shops, for example very few working class people shop in Marks and Spencers – it clearly targets the more affluent middle class lifestyle shopper. The slogan of the Liffey Valley Centre is ‘where the M50 meets the N4’, clearly this is of little benefit to those that rely upon public transport as very few buses actually go into the centre, unlike the Blanchardstown centre where all the buses that go from the surrounding area into town pass through the centre. According to a report into large out of town shopping centres by Prof. Frank Convey based in UCD, 40% of urban households in Ireland do not own a car, those without a car risk becoming economically and culturally isolated if stranded without shops and related services. There is the additional danger of the emergence of segregated shopping facilities, with upmarket malls for affluent areas and retail warehouses for the less affluent (Musgrove Report 1999). Wendy Saunderson’s article (1997) argues that most of those who produce the urban landscape, the architects, planners etc. are male

and most of those who consume it are women, mothers and family shoppers. Liffey Valley could be seen as an example of a spatial constraint experienced by working class urban women. Accessibility and public transport are often not considered into the plans for out of town centres, but smaller local centres like Finglas, Ballymun, Ballyfermot and Clondalkin often hire small buses deliberately to bring the shoppers into the centres from the surrounding locale.

Another important part of the shopping experience is the male experience and the relationship between masculinity, consumerism and fashion. According to Lurie, not only have men been reluctant to wear clothes that exude sexuality but they have also been loath to indulge in other behaviour associated with sexual display including shopping (1994:192). Clothes and shopping are seen to exert feminine characteristics so if a man was to show a fondness of these activities he runs risk of damaging his masculinity and being viewed as a homosexual, an outsider. Edwards speaks of the marginalisation of men's fashion, fashionably dressed men are seen as homosexuals (1997:2). A recent documentary on BBC 2 entitled "Ready to Wear", traced the development of men's fashion. The traditional uniform of dress for men was the suit, which left little room for individuality and self-expression. It wasn't until the late 1950's that new colours and styles were introduced due to the Italian influence and the growth of a new generation of magazines for young men. The growth of men's fashion was in part due to the development of youth subcultures such as Mods, Rockers, Punks and Hippies. Young men could now openly take an interest in their appearance and self-identity. The 1970's and 80's was driven by the development of individualism, according to Frank Mort it was the renaissance of fashion in a post-

recession era (1996:161). But it wasn't until the late 80's and early 90's that a *New Man* began to emerge from behind the rigid boundaries of sexual stereotypes. Mort points out that for the first time men were forced to look self-consciously at themselves and their identity, men now had the freedom and confidence to experiment with fashion (1996:121). Just as with women the expert knowledge in the form of the style magazine was the principle tool in creating this *New Man*. Magazines mainly from the UK such as I-D, Arena, GQ, Esquire etc. spoke to the style conscious 17-25 year old male functioning as style manuals and texts about masculinity. The Irish market has always been saturated by UK based magazines, it wasn't until recently with the launch of Himself and Patrick that the young, style conscious Irish male had the opportunity to seek assistance from an Irish expert system. According to Mort, the young male white-collar worker wanted a mildly individualised fashion statement, balanced against an ethos of collective cultural conformity – they began to affirm their individuality through differentiation from the group rather than via traditional patterns of status emulation (1996:96).

Tim Edwards (1997) moves from the *New Man* to the development of a style conscious, narcissistic masculinity in the shape of the *New Lad* (1997:84). This New Lad is quite confident and style conscious, one who breaks all the sexual stereotypes and boundaries of fashion. One only has to look at the many Boy Bands to see this New Lad, the shirts and trousers have got tighter, the muscles bigger, highlights have gone in the hair – over all the look has become more attention seeking and self-absorbed. But the average male still will receive some amount of mocking and stigmatism when found to be involved in a self-gratifying and self-adornment

process. Women used to be the main rebels in the fashion industry, crying out for liberation and freedom – but it is now men who are breaking the boundaries and liberating themselves. For example, last summer David Beckham stepped out in France with Posh Spice wearing a sarong, the tabloids tried to ridicule him as a ‘poof’, the ironic thing is that this summer male sarongs are on sale in one of the leading men’s shops, TopMan. So by breaking the sexual stereotypes Beckam actually set a trend, the question is how far will it succeed, it is hard to imagine young Irish men wearing a sarong on a night out in Temple Bar! According to Nava, there is a blurring of the conventional distinctions in advertising to men and women: shopping and self-adornment have become less gendered and less specifically female activities (1992:166). The fashion industry has become more degendered or homogeneous, the line between gay/straight, male/female is blurred. Women’s fashion is developing masculine traits such as combat trousers and boxer shorts, while men’s fashion is becoming more feminine with the arrival of men’s skin care products and more body conscious clothing. This would all seem to tie into the core theory of this thesis – postmodernism, the fusion of elite and mass culture and the eclecticism of styles ‘I shop therefore I am’.

If men are now more involved in the construction of self-identity through consumerism and fashion – why are they still instrumental, stressed out shoppers? One reason for stress and anxiety could be the lack of variety in men’s fashion and the limited amount of men’s fashion outlets. There is little difference between how most men dress, most wear either sports wear, jeans, combats, shirts, trainers, boots purchased from either high street or designer stores, for example TopMan, Envy,

River Island or BT2. Even for night time or clubbing outfits, there is little difference – they all seem to look the same with little display of individualism. Unlike the female body, the male body is not quite an object of gaze (unless he is wearing a pair of ripped Levi's and drinking a can of Diet Coke or unless he is a Chippendale!) Perhaps men are less vulnerable to and manipulated by the forces of advertising and marketing which lure the consumer into commodity fetishism.

Campbell (1997) offers an insight into the behaviour of men and women when in the shopping mall. Men favoured product-specific, functional shopping meaning that when a need arose such as an electrical, domestic or personal item they would plan a visit to a previously established store, purchase the item and then set home. This is a very basic hunt and gather scenario, get the good and bring it home with as little delay as possible. According to Campbell, men seem to be old-fashioned consumers as they centre on satisfaction of needs while women are modern, sophisticated consumers as they centre on the gratification of needs and desires (1997:175).

According to a survey by shopping psychologist Dr. David Lewis involving over 1000 shoppers in the UK and Ireland commissioned by Clery's prior to the opening of their new store in Blanchardstown, found that shopping can cause the same levels of stress for men as a fighter pilot going into combat. Congested shops and crowded malls cause high blood pressure, so Clery's incorporated wider aisles and air conditioning into their new store to facilitate male shoppers accompanying their female partners. According to the report there are three types of male shoppers:

(when I refer to this report throughout the thesis I am basing my information on an article in the Evening Herald of the 6/5/99)

1.Dodos are men who believe women were born to shop and should do all the shopping

2.Dirvishes are under 30, they race in and run out, grabbing what they need and don't spend any longer in the shop than they have to

3.Dungbattles are sad men who trail around after their women folk looking miserable, never really taking part in the shopping experience. (Evening Herald 99)

Irish men on average make very bad shoppers, they hate the weekly chore of grocery and household shopping and they limit time spent in malls to a minimum. According to a review in the Evening Herald (6/07/'99) of a book by Paco Underhill (1999), most women go shopping with a list but less than a quarter of men do so – women are not as susceptible as men to suggestions that they try something more expensive and women will ask for assistance while men will not. One of the most typical arguments between young couples under 25 is how to spend a Saturday afternoon. Most young women enjoy a day spent shopping with lunch in between, while men enjoy the coach potato activity of the Premiership on Sky Sports with a few beers in between. A War can often break out between the sexes on a shopping trip, the men follow the women from shop to shop, while she tries on dress after dress demanding his opinion, although it will not be what she wants to hear or if it is she will not believe him. For men more than half an hour of this type of non-purchase driven shopping can cause stress and fuel tempers. According to Nava, if shopping is perceived by men as a feminine activity then it is hardly surprising that they



approach it in a different spirit than women, attempting to limit their involvement as much as possible (1997:190).

This is not to say that men don't enjoy pampering and fashion, it is the shopping experience that causes the stress, that is why so many men leave it up to their partners to purchase their clothes. Treasa Brogan in her article "The Feminisation of the Male Shopping Domain"(1998) tested the vital statistic which claims that the female customer is an essential element in the success of menswear retailing. Kevin Melia, menswear buyer with Arnotts revealed that 70% of all small menswear articles under £70 are bought by women. Women accompany 50% of men buying suits and 40% of men are colour blind. Younger women have a big influence on what men wear, they ask more questions and dress their partner in the new styles and shapes. Men's outlets, such as Louis Copeland actively plan strategies to attract the female consumer, he argues that women tend to push men, who are conservative by nature with regard to styles, colours and fashion. According to Philip Kirwan from Brownes of Naas, a lot of men in the 35-50 age group depend on their wives. The women are more adventurous, while the men are slower to change. He argues that there are two types of shoppers, one who wants style and the other just wants something to wear. Many men panic and just want to go, they almost have a phobia about shopping. According to an article in the Irish Independent a man's clothing reflects the male brain set, very predictable and conservative, so not surprisingly most well dressed men have their clothes bought for them by female partners. The Evening Herald (July 6th '99) review of "The science of Shopping" (1999) explained while women linger, men pay and flee, men move at a much faster

pace and only 72% of them look at the price tag as it is considered a sign of virility – men are often so anxious to get out of the shop that they will say yes to anything. Could this then explain why Irish men will drop before they shop!

Shopping is becoming a homogeneous experience, a shared activity between men and women. According to Mort, shopping at Next was seen as a shared experience, twinned stores would bring in partners of women responding to market research which pointed to women's continuing influence over the shopping habits and taste patterns of their male partners (1996:126). Many high street stores are now homogeneous or unisex, such as TopShop, River Island, Principles and even Irish stores like Motion Picture, Simon Hart etc. As according to Shields, the sexual organisation characteristic of the modernist department store has been disorganised, rejected by a postmodern retail institution in which sexual boundaries are more diffuse and sexual meanings more ambiguous (1992:188). Is 'Girl Power' changing men into objects to be gazed upon, is the '90's women demanding that her partner live up to her 'Diet Coke Man' expectations. The 90's is an exciting but risky time for men as according to Mort, something is happening to young men, they are now being sold images which rupture traditional icons of masculinity, they are getting pleasures previously branded taboo or feminine (1996:194).

This chapter has raised some interesting points about the gender difference in the shopping experience. According to Featherstone, the urban flaneur or stroller celebrates the artificiality, randomness and superficiality of the diffusion to codes found in fashion and cities (1991:24). Both the male and female consumer strives to express an individual identity and a stylistic self-consciousness through

commodities. Both sexes are involved more than ever before in a process of self-gratification and narcissism through commodity fetishism but the shopping experience still remains the dividing factor. The expressive versus the instrumental, the leisure shopper versus the rational shopper. With the increasing colonisation of the lifeworld by commodities and with the doubt and insecurity created by postmodernism – the shopping experience will become a more homogeneous encounter. I will further examine the gender issue in the shopping experience in the methodology and research chapter, with follow up discussion.

# **CHAPTER 3**

**Consumerism as the new religion  
of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – The  
Reflexive Project and Narcissistic  
Worship.**

Many theorists have referred to the mall as the new Cathedral of Consumption, the new temple of worship. According to Miles (1998) consumerism is the religion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, life is now dominated by our relationship with consumer goods, our homes become shrines to the religion of consumption (1998:1). It was traditionally the Church that gave existential meaning and foundation for the construction of identity. According to Ritzer, these cathedrals of consumption are centred on the quasi-religious act of commodity worship, we make pilgrimages in order to practice our consumer religion (1999:4). The mall has become a pseudo-community, an enchanted palace, a fantasy theme park. although illusory and superficial. According to Ritzer, rationalisation, is the new means of consumption centring on efficiency, calculability, mechanisation and predictability (1999:50). However the spectacle or visual stimulation acts to conceal this rationality, as according to Baudrillard the distinction between real and unreal has disappeared in an avalanche of simulations. Throughout this chapter I will focus on the role of the mall in the construction of identity, the reflexive project of the self and the displacement of the church by the mall.

“Shopping is not merely the acquisition of things, it is the buying of identity: an aesthetics of self” (Shields 1992:15). Commodities act to construct a surface identity, they act as a method of presentation of self in so far as they communicate symbolic meaning to others. Labels are the new Gods of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Nike swoosh, the Levi’s red tag, the CK logo, the Ralph Lauren polo player etc. all indicate distinctiveness and status. According to Corrigan, objects of material culture function as means of claiming status and prestige, the advent of fashion displaced

patina from the central status (1997:1). Patina refers to old money, to inherited wealth and family status, while fashion refers to new money, personal mobility and individual status. One cannot buy the status of patina unlike the status of fashion, as it is a democratic force and holds all money equal. Even in youth subcultures, image or label sign is essential for group membership and status. According to Corrigan, advertising is involved in the transformation of mere objects or merchandise onto spectacle, a theatre of commodities - we purchase the social meaning of the object rather than its practicality (1997:57-59).

The reflexive project of the self is involved in the construction of identity through commodities and labels/signs. One of the most existential questions of late-modernity is what to wear? How to look? What to buy? Where to shop? Who to be? Giddens' argues that self-therapy is grounded in continuous self-observation, it is a process of growth (1991:71). Shopping is regarded as one of the great therapies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the mall as the therapy centre and the spectacular commodities as the therapist. The reflexive project involves self-interrogation, one must consciously construct one's identity. Popular culture encourages the selection of an identity (or identities) from a wide selection including styles such as, hip-hop, dance street wear, spice girl, indie, punk etc. The individual involved in this reflexive project is often left confused and anxious as to the right selection, so they may turn to the advice of an expert. The role of expert knowledge has grown significantly in late-modernity, those most evident in relation to malls, clothes and commodities include fashion/lifestyle magazine's such as *Just 17* and *Smash Hits* for the younger age group, to *Vogue*, *Esquire*, *Arena*, *IT* and *U* magazine for the more sophisticated

consumer. Giddens argues that modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices, while at the same time offering little as to the best selection (1991:80).

Dress is very much a modern reflexive and organised tool in the formation of the self. Today's young people place great emphasis on appearance and management or organisation of surface impressions. With the growth of expert knowledge systems Nava (1997) argues that fashion magazines and dress manuals have become technologies of the self (1997:312). Foucault suggests that technologies of the self permit individuals to effect by their own means a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts and conducts to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity and wisdom (1988:18). Both men and women employ technologies of the self, the new breed of educated, middle class, city dwelling urbanities. Men who work in the 'city' often shop in the best up-market stores and employ expert knowledge, either fashion manuals or image consultants to perfect their surface meaning or symbolic dress code. The management of appearance is quite a recent development in the male domain but is evident in stores such as Louis Copeland, Brown Thomas and Arnotts. According to Nava, the services offered by image consultants marks a new attitude to consumption which requires the same application of instrumental rationality to consumption that is required by work (1997:322). The hire of expert services is quite rational and functional behaviour. One must note however that we are not all dedicated followers of fashion, we do not all share the same knowledge about fashion trends. According to Nava, most people are not sufficiently conversant with the language of fashion to

be successful in either sending or receiving messages (1997:342). But in this age of narcissistic self-obsession and reflexivity, if one cannot successfully dress to impress one must consult an expert for guidance. Those who cannot directly hire an image consultant must instead pay close attention to fashion magazines and advertisements, it is these consumers that are most often caught by the claw of commodity fetishism and signification. The fashion and cosmetic industry openly manipulates those who are most vulnerable, as appearance is of prime importance in the gazing society. According to Corrigan, there has been a shift from body as ruling clothes to clothes as ruling the body (1997:163).

According to Mort, consumption is a critical factor in determining identity. The new consumption is driven by the appearance of intensified forms of individualism, the self-reflexive project and the cultivation of the self through and enshrined consumption (1996:4). Shopping has become a modern day ritual essential for the display and consumption of identity. There has been a phenomenal growth in the availability of lifestyle/fashion magazines for both men and women, many of which have become narratives or discourses about masculinity and femininity. Tim Edwards refers to the snowballing symbolic significance of goods in constructing individual identities and to the intoxicating liquor of ideological individualism with the growth of single, professional, city men with huge disposable incomes (1997:4-6). Individualism as a project of the affluent supports the notion of reflexivity as a characteristic of the new middle class. Jameson saw fashion as a depthless culture, fascinated with surfaces, packaging and seduction. The actual material good was of little significance, it was the stimulation, the spectacle or the visual signification that



was of prime importance. People are continually being defined in accordance with their consumer knowledge and identity. Commodities are ultimately disposable and associated with the rubbish society, their symbolic meaning and visual spectacle are only momentary (a point I will revisit in chapter 4).

Lifestyle choice is a characteristic associated with late-modernity and the reflexive project, created through the consumption and display of commodities. According to Giddens, a lifestyle is an integrated set of practices which an individual embraces that give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity (1991:81). The labels or identities of the Spice Girls (Scary, Posh, Baby and Sporty) are a good example of lifestyle choice via consumption. They could be seen as 20<sup>th</sup> century icons of the reflexive project (maybe not!). According to Featherstone, lifestyle connotes individuality, self-expression and a stylistic self-consciousness: commodities are the indicators of the individuality of taste and sense of style (1991:83). The purchase of the Nike swoosh or the Ralph Lauren polo player act as distinctive indicators of the reflexive lifestyle choice of the individual, commodities are no longer noted for their use value but instead for their symbolic or communicable function. You are what you wear, a slogan frequently used by advertisers to lure consumers into the need/desire to consume a specific item. A regular parent – child argument is over the purchase of clothes: the child will refuse to wear non-label jeans or trainers as this may endanger a loss of status and identity within the peer group. Although both items will serve the same function, the symbolic meaning through signification will not create status, distinction and peer recognition. As according to Featherstone, the social usage's of cultural goods firmly

direct our attention to the practices of embodied persons who read off and make judgements about others by decoding the cultural signs which others display and consume (1991:63). Although a dress from Oasis or Morgan (exclusive high street stores) may look similar to a dress from Dunnes or C&A (economy, low status shops) the dress will differ in status, distinction, signification and symbolic meaning. A question that must be asked however is, are individuals becoming so insecure and superficial about themselves that they must consume labels and signs in order to achieve status and recognition. Surely this type of behaviour feeds directly into the hands of capitalism (this point will be revisited in chapter 4).

Perhaps the process of secularisation and urbanisation has created a personal or spiritual void, one that can only be filled via commodity fetishism. The growth of individualism is a two way process, although we may become free from social and religious constraints we also become more insecure, isolated, self-centred and narcissistic. According to Featherstone, this new narcissism allows individuals to seek to maximise and experience the range of sensations available, the search for self-expression, presentation and appearance (1991:91). The mall with its lure of commodities, ready to wear or take-away identities becomes a haven in a heartless world. It acquires a new social and psychological meaning, as our emotional and mental stability, our self-identity and symbolic surface depends on our indulgement into the consumption and display of commodities. Beck's "From love to Liason: Self-reflexivity in the private sphere" can also be applied to consumer reflexivity. "The struggle between autonomy and dependency, closeness and distance are expressions and reflections of the contradictions which come about through the

process of individualisation (1995:70). The individualised reflexive postmodern consumer society is full of contradictions and illusions, we strive for individuality and distinction while conforming to the mainstream we become part of a collective uniformity. As according to Hansen, we have become victims of inferiority complexes due to the capitalist rat-race of commodity fetishism (1986:63).

In conclusion to the notion of consumerism as the religion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in its role as chief agent in the reflexive construction of self-identity, one must agree with Giddens – in that the search for self-identity is a modern problem with its origins in Western individualism (1991:74). Self-observation results in self-awareness and self-actualisation, an understanding that lifestyle and identity construction involves both opportunity and risk through the consumption and display of symbolic goods. Is the mall as the new cathedral, an iron cage or a wide open space in the construction of individualism? Does the lure of commodity labels such as the Nike swoosh, the Levi's red tag etc. act to construct or deconstruct individualism? We consume and display these goods in order to create status, distinctiveness and recognition, but by being lured into the dominant mode of capitalism are consumers not just conforming to the ideals of uniformity and collectivity thus creating a homogeneous culture. Chapter 4 will continue on with these questions in mind.

# **CHAPTER 4**

## **THE POSTMODERN CONSUMER**

Postmodernism is the core theoretical framework of this study into consumerism and the shopping experience. I will examine how this era of the consumer society is founded on principles associated with postmodernism, such as depthlessness, aesthetisation of everyday life, commodity fetishism, superficiality and spectacle. What was once real has been turned on its head to be replaced by a falsification of life. We live in an age of reinvention and replacement – the disposable or rubbish society. There is no fashion but fashions, the subject along with imagination and creativity has died to be replaced by imitation and uniformity. Existential meaning is derived from labels and signs, the Nike swooshisation and the Coca-Colaisation, the commodification of society by symbolic signs. According to Shields, the transformation of persons from workers into modern consumers in a global market place may well have been the greatest social change since industrialisation (1992:41). Throughout this chapter I will examine the role of commodity fetishism and the colonisation of the life by commodities, with the consumer manipulation by capitalism thesis, along with fashion uniformity and the loss of individuality. Finally I will briefly examine the future of the shopping experience with the development of cyber or on-line shopping, the internet has replaced both the catalogue and the mall/store.

According to Shields, with the growth of mass mediated culture, brand-name products and the mass mediated discourses of advertising, the lifeworld is soon to be colonised by commodities and desires (1992:48). It is no longer about what we wear, about warmth and protection but dress as symbolic construction of identity through commodities or visual labels. The market is saturated with an oversupply of

consumer products, it is becoming more confusing to decide what to wear or where to shop. The spectacle or dream process now controls our senses and lures us into commodity consumption. According to Shields, malls stand as symbols to an entire amusement order in which carnivals and spectacles of consumption gratify desire, they constitute a new dream-like order of commercial reality as the promise of wish fulfilment is the new hyper reality of spectacular images and fantastic gratification's (1992:50). The consumer society is founded on a surface of glittery images, superficiality, depthlessness and instant gratification. According to Falk, a postmodern analysis can reduce the shopper to a mere 'subject of consumption' (1997:3). Shopping has become a leisure or entertainment activity, purchase is not essential as at the centre of the experience lies the arousal of free-floating desires, the spectacle or glamour of the commodities consumes our senses.

Postmodernist theory argues that people spend more time consuming than they do producing. The retailisation of society implies that we consume at every point: the airport, trainstation, museum, hospital etc. Commodities facilitate voyeurism, the act of gazing or consumption without purchase as a prerequisite. According to Tim Edwards, the heightening importance of representation and appearance in the construction of identity has led to the commodification and signification of society (1997:34). The logomania process refers to the replacement of meaning and use value by superficiality and sign value. Never before has the label of a garment carried so much social signification, postmoderism has accelerated this process even more with the communicable value of labels, so the label is now carried across the outside of the garment for display. The blurring of the boundary between

the real and unreal has meant our senses have become overexposed to and dominated by signs, images, illusions and simulations bound in commodity form thus increasing our desire to consume in order to create a coherent sense of self-identity. One of the fundamental problems of postmodernism is how to live within a society that is increasingly defined by consumption.

Featherstone lists some of the key points of postmodernism as;

- \*postmodernism goes beyond high modernism and rejects institutions with the destruction of the boundary between art and everyday life

- \*postmodernism brings about the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high/elite and low/mass culture

- \*it encourages a stylistic promiscuity favouring eclecticism and a mixing of codes

- \*the decline of originality in favour repetition (1991:7).

Most of the above characteristics have already been mentioned in this study. Fashion is one aspect of social life which has already encountered the changing tide of postmodernism. According to a recent article in Vogue magazine, there has been a blurring of the lines and collaborations between artists and designers. Once fashion was fashion and art was art, separate concepts, individual disciplines with sharply defined boundaries. Fashion was a commercially driven design and art an high cultural endeavour, but today there's a synergy of art, fashion and even architecture (July 1999:93). The concepts of postmodernism have fused into popular culture and style magazines, Vogue is referring to the same blurring of lines, of fabrics, styles and ethnic influences, a stylistic promiscuity and eclecticism. The essential postmodern guide to fashion is to mix 'n' match, to dismantle the rules and boundaries in order for it to become disorganised and liberating. The epitome of this

blurring of genres can be seen in Andy Warhol's depiction of Campbell's Soup, bringing art out of the museum into everyday life, taking it from the elite to the mass audience. Advertising has become the art of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading to the democratisation or popularisation of elite culture. Does the filtering of high art into the masses entail a loss of appreciation, a McDonaldisation of the museum?

“The over production of signs and reproduction of images and stimulation's leads to a loss of stable meaning and an aestheticisation of reality in which the masses become fascinated by the endless flow of bizarre juxtapositions which take the viewer beyond stable sense (Featherstone 1991:15). The advertising and marketing strategies transit the sign value not the use value to the consumer. The saturation of signs and messages tends to lead to over-consumption. We consume not because we need to but because we become excited, non-rational and impulsive – we tend to temporarily loose our senses. Marx's discussion of the fetishism of commodities emphasises the exchange-value, as the lure of the commodity suspends the use-value of an item. According to Corrigan, in the consumer culture the body has become a discourse, a system of symbols, body appearance is seen as a marketable commodity in a culture dominated by image and display (1997:147). Never before was there such a vast supply of beauty and cosmetic products, although the consumer has a larger disposable income then before they are more confused as to the correct selection. One has to trust the promises of advertising, the assurance of gratification and fulfilment. According to R.Goldman “Advertising and the Production of Commodity Signs” (1987) in the Theory, Culture and Society Journal,



contemporary advertising teaches us to consume not the product but its signs, the primary value consumed is the symbolic image of the good that can be displayed (1987 Nov. Vol.4:694).

Jameson is one of the key authors in the literature of postmodernism, he argues that aesthetic production has become integrated into commodity production with the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (1991:16). Commodities only possess a short lived signification, the symbolic image is so artificial and depthless that it soon becomes outdated or left on the shelf. Everything has to be packaged and presented as new and different, or else it must be reinvented or relaunched. Fashion and clothes are one of the most constantly reinvented and repackaged commodities due to their disposable nature. The postmodern consumer no longer adheres to reliable, durable commodities – symbolic meaning or logomania has replaced use value. All football boots for example carry out the same function, the main difference is the price tag: top of the range are on average £90 with the lower end of the market averaging about £30. The difference in the price tag is status and image associated, Adidas for example sponsored David Beckham of Manchester Utd. £2 million to promote the new boots in order to enhance their status and value. According to Guy Debord, the image has become the final form of commodity reification (1967:26). Fashion and consumerism centres on status and distinction via lifestyle cultivation via commodity fetishism. Featherstone (etal) (1997) refers to how the lower stratum look and strive towards the upper but as soon as they begin to appropriate their style and thereby overstep the demarcation line which the upper strata have drawn and destroy the uniformity of their coherence

symbolised in fashion, so the upper stratum turn away from this fashion and adopt a new one which in turn differentiates them from the broad masses (1997:190). Essentially this explains Simmel's 'trickle-down theory' of why fashion is so short lived in late modernity, once it has become adopted by the masses and into the high street stores it loses its authenticity to become a mere imitation or copy. The popularisation of a particular item and its imitation will lead to its demise, as it will lose its status and distinction. The 'peddle-pushers' of last season's elite fashion houses are now out of fashion simply because too many people are wearing them. Collectivity cancels out individualism thus uniformity cancels out imagination. This then moves me on to the next point, that of the manipulation thesis associated with the postmodern consumer society.

In late modernity capitalism is the dominant ideology, the more we seek to control its advancement the more we are in turn controlled by the interests of capitalism, such as commodification. Social and cultural modes of resistance/protest have ultimately failed as they have been incorporated into or assimilated into capitalism. According to Featherstone in the *Journal of the British Sociological Association*, some see the consumer culture as leading to egalitarianism and individual freedom while others regard it as increasing the capacity for ideological manipulation and seductive containment (Feb 1990 Vol.24:5). Postmodernism and capitalism reinforce and serve each others interests as they act to aestheticise reality, to present dream-images which fill momentarily the void of fragmentation and isolation. Our constant exposure to spectacles and flowing images increases our

desire to consume in order to produce a coherent sense of self-identity and individualism, but by doing so are ultimately conforming to the demands of capitalism. Self-expression has lost its authenticity and originality, the postmodern age of mechanical reproduction and blurring of styles has resulted in uniformity replacing individualism.

According to Hansen, the fashion world has become a capitalist gold-mine, capitalism will not let women live without cosmetics (1986:63). We have become victims of insecurity complexes, we consume in order to conform to advertisements and ideals. We consume identities in malls and stores which give only illusory and momentarily pleasures. Fashion constantly reproduces and reinvents itself in order to make profits and create a high turnover, for example this summer season the fashion is three-quarter length trousers, last winter it was grey slack trousers this leaves the consumer with outdated and disposable items at the end of each season or trend.. this in part explains the consumer manipulation thesis, commodities are disposable entities which lose their signification and status within a short time of purchase. If one buys a top of the range television set, a month or two later a bigger and better one will explode onto the market. The spectacular depends on being able to reproduce and reinvent itself. The postmodern consumer will never be satisfied due to commodity manipulation, we buy what is essentially replaceable, the status attached to the product is deliberately produced to be short lived. According to Lefebvre, we are surrounded by emptiness, but it is an emptiness filled with signs (1971).

According to Featherstone, the over-supply of symbolic goods in contemporary society creates greater opportunities for controlled and manipulated commodification (1991:14). Realistically we do not need ten pairs of shoes or ten jumpers, it is a false need created by capitalism with the aim of creating a false sense of individualism and distinction. The more you conform to fashion, the more you lose your individualism to become a mere face in the crowd – fashion is a postmodern contradiction. Eamon Delaney, freelance journalist writes a weekly column in the Irish Style magazine *IT*, an article in the July '99 issue spoke of the lack of individualism and imagination in fashion which I referred to earlier. He writes "I'm sorry, but I thought one of the things about fashion was an element of individualism of difference – once it was just the unfashionable who all looked the same but now it seems that even expensive designer label fashion has become the same. One would think that people might break out of this sheep-like conformity. The black and charcoal of last season made everyone look like they had been at a funeral, I ask who has died? The answer is imagination killed by regimented, magazine, dictated fashion homogeneity (July'99:130). Jameson refers too the death of the subject just as Delaney refers to the death of imagination, consumers have become regimented, programmed victims of capitalism, who no longer create style but consume style. The grey of last season and the brown before that showed how fashion houses dictate what we wear, knowing that it will only be in season for maximum one year. The sheep syndrome applies to postmodern consumerism as it does to all other means of lifestyle, we crave for distinction via consumption of what is uniform and replaceable. As according to Shields, affective recognition is a basic human motive, to be noticed and admired provides pleasurable emotional

experiences – being noticed encourages consumption as fame and recognition has an immortal quality (1992:62).

One could put forward the idea of consumer sovereignty as they have the freedom to pick and mix identities and styles, but the colonisation of the lifeworld by signs/labels and the use of clothes as forms of symbolic communication means that resistance is futile. Gardner (1989) argues that many socialist critics see commodities as oppressive and alienating referring to the notion of manipulation by advertising, marketing and retailing. The desire to consume is a false need offering only momentary and delusory satisfaction (1989:48). A visit to the mall or store will centre not on the consumption of a need or a particular item but on self-gratification, distinction and recognition. We no longer use clothes as functional objects, they are symbolic, status signs bought out of the need for individualism and distinction, but which actually create uniformity. A dress bought in Oasis or a suit in Next will act as an outlet for self-expression, but the point often over-looked is that the item has been mass-produced to be mass consumed. In Ireland there is on average 10 Oasis outlets, each will sell between 100/300 of that specific dress. The colour for this summer season is pink, every store has each item available in pink – so when one goes out to socialise one looks like a part of a pink jigsaw. We strive for difference but we consume the same, we aim for individualism but we receive uniformity, imagination and creativity has died all that one can do is pick ‘n’ mix. According to Steven Connor (1989), modern life with its individualist fragmentation is based on the need for the newness of impressions and forms of life, the growth of a fashion drives it to its doom because it thereby cancels out its distinctiveness (1989:191). With the

emergence of universalism and globalisation all stores seem to mirror each other, this sense of monotony cries out to the death of fashion and the birth of the postmodern consumer uniform.

S.Miles (1998) explains how reality implodes in the postmodern world transforming into images. Consumption serves as the most influential arena within which this world of superficiality is perpetuated (1998:26). Is the consumer really free to choose, or is this a postmodern illusion under capitalism? Youth sub-cultures are the most pronounced or visible group of resistance, the centre around anti-establishment expression and identification. But they too eventually become absorbed into the capitalist mainstream, the fashion or style statements of ghetto rappers, anarchist punks and jungle dancers become assimilated into the dominant mode of mass production for mass consumption. "They've got Burton shirts ... turning rebellion into money (The Clash), a reference to how the style of the Mod's was assimilated into high street stores like Burton's. Gail Fourschou (writing in the *Canadian Journal of Social and Political Theory*) explains that fashion is the purest and most developed form of commodity, in its compulsive desire to produce innovation for the sake of innovation, and to stimulate and multiply desire that can never be satisfied (in Connor 1989:194). As according to Baudrillard, it is no longer a question of a false representation of reality but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real (1993:172). The authentic is replaced by the commercial, the genuine by the artificial and the real by the unreal, this creates postmodernism as an era of bad taste or no taste. Featherstone's "Consumer Culture" in the *Journal of the British Sociological Association* (Vol.24 Feb 1990) referred to an aesthetic immersion, a

blurring of genres and a deconstruction of symbolic hierarchies. Design and advertising have become not only confused with art, but are celebrated and museumified as art. We live in an age of no style but styles with emphasis upon pastiche, retro and playback (Feb 1990:18). The consumer labels and logos of Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Budweiser, Gucci, Armani, Levi's etc. are the new Gods of the consumer culture, they give meaning to our lives and communicate this meaning to others via visual display. Identity has become a saleable commodity in the postmodern consumer society.

Where does the future of the shopping experience lie/ will postmodernism lead to the development of cyber or on-line shopping? According to Emily O'Sullivan fashion/beauty editor of IT Magazine, why go shopping with the masses when you can view the latest fashions dressed in the comfort of your own pyjamas. She explains that somewhere along the line the phrase 'let's go shopping' stopped being an invitation to engage in sartorial indulgence and instead became a veritable war cry. Things feel a lot different in cyber space, she explains it's the ultimate pre-millennial modern experience (July '99:56). Cyber shopping involves no crowded stores, no communal changing rooms, no hellish shop assistant or no intimidation – but also no social or physical interaction. On-line shopping could be the new postmodern experience, a self-centred, adornment process, a leisure activity where you are in total control.

The postmodern theory slots into the consumer shopping experience of today, with the breakdown of boundaries and the mixing of codes/styles. Today there is no

fashion but fashions – for as soon as it becomes available in the mass consumer market it loses its status and distinction. The individual imagination collective has died to be replaced by uniform or imaginary style. Fashion, just like modern life is full of contradictions and confusion, associated with risk and excitement.



# **CHAPTER 5**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Statement of Research Problem:**

Does the consumer society focus upon shopping as a homogeneous leisure activity or is it still a gendered activity causing stress, frustration and anxiety?

### **Objectives of Research:**

- \* to examine the shopping experience for both men and women
- \* to examine if a trip to the mall is an activity best done by oneself or with others
- \* is shopping a form of pleasure or pain – is it a form of escapism or a chore
- \* is the mall the new place of worship – a fantasy palace
- \* to examine the social and psychological motivations of the shopping experience
- \* to examine the difference between expressive and instrumental shoppers
- \* are men functional shoppers and women emotional/impulsive shoppers
- \* is shopping about self-gratification and identity construction
- \* do we purchase commodities in order to create or construct a sense of individuality
- \* do labels and logo's signal messages to others about our self-identity
- \* do labels hold an important social meaning – are they the new colonisers
- \* is fashion dictated instead of being individually created
- \* does fashion create an illusion of individualism and distinctiveness while creating a fashion of uniformity – we all look the same while trying to look different
- \* is fashion a depthless culture – all surface with no meaning
- \* is the (post)modern consumer a creator of style or a creation of style
- \* do we try in vain to create our identity while actually consuming it ready to wear
- \* does consumerism act as a mirror upon the postmodern society

## **Methodology**

“Methodology is a body of knowledge that describes and analyses methods, indicating their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences, and relating their potentialities to research advances” (Miller 1973:65).

In order to carry out research on the postmodern consumer society and the shopping experience I decided that I would achieve the best results by asking four females and three males to keep a diary of their shopping experiences for four weeks. All of the respondents were in the same age bracket 20-25 years old, as this age group has a lot of disposable income to spend. They all live at home and all are single meaning they will have more disposable income than those who have to pay mortgages, insurance etc. Five of the participants' work full-time and the other two work part-time as they are post-graduate students. It is this age group that is most targeted by advertisements and marketing campaigns as they have the most disposable income and they are the most style and image conscious, they want to drive sport's cars, wear designer labels and display expensive/exclusive logo's. The main commodity that I chose to focus upon in the consumer research is that of fashion (clothes, shoes, sports wear, accessories, cosmetics etc.) as it is important to the image conscious 20-25 year old and it is the most regular purchase/commodity experience. I want to examine if identity is a saleable commodity for 20-25 year olds and to examine the communicable importance of labels in relation to the postmodern consumer's shopping experience.

As identity and self-construction may be a sensitive topic or issue with some young consumers and they may find it difficult to talk about it openly, I decided it would be best to give each participant a diary to keep of their shopping experiences. Social researchers refer to this method of research as 'life documents'. According to Ken Plumer, this is a style of investigating and understanding human experiences, a style which advances getting close to concrete individual men and women, accurately picking up the way they express their understandings of the world around them (1983:12). It essentially allows the researcher give a voice to personal experiences and opinions of young consumers. It gives them the freedom of self-expression and throws light upon the unconscious motives of shoppers. The diary acts as an autobiography of the self – an insight into the psyche of the postmodern consumer.

Before I gave the participants' their diaries I gave them a short guideline to read through and keep to refer to as a framework. This meant then that I had some control over the material produced and recorded in the diary, as I has written down the specific experiences and information that I required. This guideline was crucial because without it the diary may have been full of irrelevant and worthless data. This is what Burgess called a solicited document as it was produced at the request of a researcher to cover specific activities which were consciously observed and recorded by the respondent (1984:124). In a way they act as informants or spies to their own experiences as they are consciously aware of the objects of the study. The diary that each participant was given was structured in a way to make it easy to both record and analysis the data. The four week period was structured into the diary, with a date and

day on the top of each page, for example Monday June 5<sup>th</sup> etc. On average four to five pages was allocated to each page, so they were free to express emotions, experiences and opinions. I did not expect to find an entry for each day as not many people go into town or to shopping centres everyday but I did expect more entries at the weekend and when people got paid, so I left some extra space on these days. I also explained that purchase was not a prerequisite for recording into the diary, all experiences such as window shopping and browsing were to be acknowledged.

I contacted each participant at least once a week just to make sure that there were no problems and to answer any matters of confusion. Overall the participants' found the diary experience quite enjoyable and interesting, as they became more conscious of their own behaviour, emotions and motivations when out shopping. Some did feel slightly self-conscious about recording certain experiences, in particular when they related to their body-consciousness and self-confidence, but I assured them confidentiality and that almost everyone feels the same. After the four week period had lapsed I met with each respondent to take back the diaries. This then meant I could analyse the content of each diary, underlining what I thought to be important and which may need to be re-examined. Of course the diary by itself was not enough with regard to data research, as according to Burgess the diary can be used as a resource tool to raise questions and queries that may generate further data (1984:135). The diary was the first step in the research, it acted as a base to allow insight into the social and psychological experiences of shoppers from which I could construct some qualitative research interviews. This method of research is known as 'diary-diary interview' method, using the diary as a primary document I can probe

further into the shopping experience via a semi-structures interview using some quotes or own words of the participants'

After reading and analysing the content of the diary I contacted and met with each respondent to discuss and further investigate what had been recorded in the diary in order to obtain a more detailed account. I compiled a semi-structured interview based partly on what had been recorded and partly on additional information that I required. It centred on an informal and conversational like interview, using themes and topics which I had put into the diary guideline and also some of the participants' own words from the diary to function as a probing mechanism into the psyches of the shopper. I was thus able to use the interview as a digging-tool, going beyond the limitations of the diary to allow the respondent to speak freely about the shopping experience and the consumer society. According to Plumer, the diary diary-interview method creates rich documentation due to the fact that each person is subsequently interviewed step by step on each facet of the diary (1983:17).

The interview at the end of the diary trial proved to be an essential investigating tool, particularly into the male shopping experience as they tended not to record in as much detail as the female participants' did. The men tended to be very functional and analytical in their approach to recording their experiences, as opposed to the women who tended to openly express themselves, almost as if it was a therapy session. Another point is that men generally do not consume or shop as much as women do, so while each female recorded 3-4 experiences a week most of the males

only recorded 2-3. The female response was very emotional and detailed while the male response seemed to be sterile and rational. This however did not surprise me as a researcher I did expect a gender difference in how and what was recorded – so the post diary interview allowed me to delve into the gender experience much more.

I interviewed each participant for a half an hour on average in order to control the content and time frame. It was semi-structured in so far as each respondent was asked to recount generally on their shopping experiences/habits allowing them to feel free to speak openly and to create an atmosphere of comfort and intimacy. I then recounted on some of the entries in their diary asking for further explanation and detail. I used a Dictaphone to record the interview session so I would not disturb or distract the respondent by writing down notes and stopping them. There was slight hesitation at first by some of the respondents but I developed a conversational approach to put them at ease and to help them to open up. I had to rephrase some questions and use examples to get a detailed account of certain experiences but overall the interviews worked well and resulted in some interesting qualitative research data.

Altogether the diary- diary interview method worked out to be the most suitable and productive research tool. It did create some gender differences in relation to detail and depth which I will return to in the next chapter. The method did have some limitations though with regard to limited scope and authenticity. Firstly I had a limited budget and time frame from which to work so this meant I had to narrow or limit the respondent group to seven. Secondly I had to rely on each

participant to be as honest and open as possible in both the diary and the post-diary interview. This demanded a lot of dedication and energy from the respondents over the four week diary period, but overall they worked well and proved successful. Overall the research allowed for an interesting and insightful sociological account of the (post)modern consumer. 'To shop or not to shop', that is what shall be discussed in the next chapter of the research results.



# **CHAPTER 6**

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

List of those who took part in research:

Respondent 1	Female	Age 22	Full-Time Worker
Respondent 2	Female	Age 21	Full-Time Worker
Respondent 3	Female	Age 23	Full- Time Worker
Respondent 4	Female	Age 22	Student/Part-Time Worker
Respondent 5	Male	Age 23	Full-Time Worker
Respondent 6	Male	Age 22	Student/Part-Time Worker
Respondent 7	Male	Age 24	Full-Time Worker

In this chapter I will focus on the research and discuss the findings in relation to the overall theoretical framework of the thesis. I shall present the research results by key themes or topics, as I feel this make a clearer understanding of the shopping experience. This chapter will allow for an insight into the psyches of the shopper, a sociological analysis of the experiences, behaviour and motives of the shopper.

Even the fact that the females had almost twice the number and length of entries of the males showed a huge gender difference. In the diaries the females recorded on average 2-3 shopping trips per week, spending on average 5-7 hours shopping over the course of a week. They also went into greater detail when describing their experiences and emotions of shopping, the inner psyche of the female shopper flooded on the pages – a self-help therapy session almost. The male participants on the other hand recorded a shopping trip on average every fortnight, spending no more than 2-3 per week shopping. Their diary accounts were quite similar to scientific journals, very exact but lacking in emotions and feelings. Could Colin Campbell be right when he argues that, men seem to be old-fashioned consumers as they centre on satisfaction of needs while women are modern, sophisticated consumers as they centre on the gratification of needs and desires (1997:175). Let me now delve deeper into the motives, experiences and psyches of the shopper in to today's consumer society.

*\*“When I get paid there's no way I wouldn't go shopping ... I just have to spend money on clothes ... I love shopping” (Respondent 1)*

\* *"I go shopping at least at least 3-4 times a week. I work in town so I spend a lot of lunch breaks wandering around Grafton St. and on a Saturday or Sunday I usually go to Blanchardstown or Liffey Valley. I work hard all week long so at the end of the week I feel I have to treat myself by buying something new"* (Respondent 2 Diary)

\* *"I work in town so I pass by the shops everyday, so I usually take a wander around ... I guess I feel I have to spend my money on something"* (Respondent 3 Diary)

\* *"I go shopping quite a lot, especially if I've to meet someone in town or if I've got time to kill I'll just have a look around"* (Respondent 4)

\* *"I very rarely go shopping, maybe once a fortnight"* (Respondent 5)

\* *"I go to town mostly when I've been paid, on a Thursday or Saturday when I've money in my pocket. I have to get rid of the money otherwise I'll spend it on stupid things like beer and cigarettes"* (Respondent 6)

\* *"I don't go shopping that often, I prefer to spend my time off at home watching football or going out with my mates .. it's not that important to me .. I could think of better ways to spend my time"* (Respondent 7)

The motives venturing on a shopping trip differed greatly between men and women.

The diary was the first source of this difference, the females recorded experiences of wandering or floating into the shops without planning or needing to, this seems to correspond to Shields definition of the *Flaneur* being a shopper who strolls aimlessly. According to Shields, in France one study found that one third of people exiting from suburban Parisian shopping malls had made no purchase, between 8-10% were just strolling through (1992:8). They recorded in their diaries quite a lot of lunch time and late night shopping after work – shopping acting as a relief from the stress and monotony of work. It is too simplistic to assume that all shoppers' are

there for functional reasons, for many shopping acts as a mode of diversion or an escape for the litany of everyday life. The quotes from the female respondents suggest that purchase is not a prerequisite in the shopping experience, browsing or window-shopping is just as important. The behaviour and comments of the male respondents suggest the approach of an avoidance strategy with regards to shopping, they rarely involved themselves in the experience. There was no mention of wandering into town or a shopping mall in their diaries, all if not most visits were planned or organised to meet a specific requirement. They did not record a consumption of the experience of shopping they only recorded consumption of the product. Although Shields speaks of the male flaneur, from my research of the male shopper I found little evidence to support his idea.

\* *"Absolutely wrecked from work but couldn't pass up the late night opportunity to shop in the newly started Oasis summer sale"* (Diary entry Respondent 1)

\* *"The shopping centre was lacking something – people, it had only just opened which encouraged me a great deal as I detest people brushing off me and worrying about picked pockets"* (Diary entry Respondent 1)

\* *"I don't have a need to go shopping, I just go shopping – it's the act of shopping that makes me happy, it just gives me a feeling of inner happiness .. even if I come home with nothing it doesn't bother me .. it's not the purchase that brings the joy it's the actual act of shopping"* (Interview Respondent 1)

\* *"I walk by Grafton St. everyday so without noticing I go window shopping at least twice a day"* (Diary entry Respondent 3)

\* *"I usually only go shopping when I need something, it's not a leisure activity for me I find it very frustrating especially when I can't find what I want ... I wish the clothes would just come to me"* (Respondent 3)

\* *"I need to have space when I shop, I can't stand crowds or queues – if I see this I won't even bother to go in"* (Diary entry Respondent 3)

\* *"Sometimes shops freak me out if they're too crowded and claustrophobic ... I'm a contradiction because sometimes it can be pleasurable and relaxing but other times it can be depressing and frustration"* (Respondent 4)

From this research one can see that shopping has contrasting experiences, containing both pleasurable and painful elements. Shields talks about the shopping as a social practice of exploration and sightseeing akin to tourism, he calls this the shoppers gaze (1992:102). The experience of Respondent 1 would probably relate to the description of the voyeuristic and gazing experience of shopping, a leisure activity which is spontaneous and impulsive. While Respondent 3 and 4 find it to be quite a stressful and frustrating operation, one must point out that one's enjoyment of shopping can differ according to factors such as disposable income, spare time and mood. According to an article in the Irish Independent ( ) for women shopping is like talking, it doesn't need a point or a definite outcome, women find shopping relaxing and rejuvenating whether or not they buy anything. This is quite a generalisation and many young female consumers and shoppers may not agree. This could be called the paradox of shopping as the mall or city stores are portrayed as fantasy palaces which promise to satisfy the desires and needs of the shopper. Although the mall may be a utopian space the experiences of the shoppers are very contrasting, ranging from pleasurable to painful, self-gratifying to self-conscious.

\* *"It's not a leisure activity for me, the less hassle the better .. I wouldn't spend any longer than two hours in town"* (Respondent 5)

\* *"It's more of a chore or a hassle than a leisure, I would regard it as a mission .. to get what I need and then split"* (Respondent 6)

\* *"I went into town with a friend, went to a lot of bookshops looking for nothing in particular. It was a nice relaxing day and we had a coffee afterwards, but it was more of a day out than a shopping experience"* (Respondent 6)

This is very interesting as the male experience seems to be coherent, there is almost a stable consensus. Respondent 5 and 6 both used the 'hassle' when referring to shopping, also the use of the word 'mission' could function as a synopsis of the male experience – the aim being to get what is needed as quickly as possible and with as little hassle as possible. It is also interesting to note how Respondent 6 associated clothes shopping with hassle, using a run in run out approach to limit frustration, but browsing around a book or record store is regarded as a day out. Respondent 7 from his diary account seemed to enjoy shopping or browsing for videos and football magazines, but clothes shopping was regarded as too demanding and a major cause of distress. Does the modern man adopt a strategy of avoidance or retreat when confronted with the task of clothes shopping, is it an activity that is put on the long finger for as long as possible? The research data would seem to suggest so. Are men simply not able to cope with crowds and queues and going from shop to shop, do women have a higher tolerance level and if so could this explain why women make up the majority of shoppers and why most household purchases are carried out by women? Again I would refer to Dr. Lewis when he suggested that shopping can cause the same level of stress for men as a fighter pilot going into combat, congested

shops can often lead to higher blood pressure. I would think that the sociology of consumption and the shopping experience is so under researched in the Irish case even though it is of ever growing significance.

Most of the Respondents recorded in their diaries who they had shopped with or if they shopped alone, their preference was one of the few expressions that held some consensus or agreement.

\* *“My enjoyment of shopping depends on who I’m with. If I’m by myself it’s totally relaxing. I can’t stroll around when someone is with me and if my boyfriend is with me I feel pressured into buying something because he can’t understand why I would want to go shopping without buying anything”* (Respondent 1)

\* *“I always shop alone when buying clothes, I don’t want someone following me around with a frown on their face”* (Respondent 2)

\* *“At lunch time I went down to Oasis to get an outfit that I’d seen yesterday, a girl from work came with me so I tried it on for her ... she said she didn’t like it which totally ruined my confidence so I didn’t buy it ... what a big mistake I should have gone by myself”* (Diary entry Respondent 3)

\* *“I prefer to go shopping alone when shopping for me, but I like going with friends when they’re buying and we go for a coffee ... it’s a day out”* (Respondent 3)

\* *“I prefer going shopping with a girlfriend because you can have a laugh and they will always tell you the truth .. its so much hassle when I shop with my boyfriend .. we always argue and he puts me off”* (Respondent 4)

\* *“Shopping for myself was fine but for my girlfriend well that’s a different story ... I have no interest in girls clothes but if I don’t go with her she will get into a bad mood*



*and an argument will start. What really annoys me is that she has to go into all the shops when all the clothes look the same anyway. There's only so much of this that I can tolerate"* (Respondent 7)

\* *"I was in Belfast today with my sister and my girlfriend, I dreaded this as Belfast is renowned for shopping and being with two girls I wasn't looking forward to it ... I normally shop on my own because other people make you self-conscious and you can't relax as they might be just following you and not enjoying it ... I don't like spending too much time in town so its better to be alone"* (Diary entry Respondent 5)

The enjoyment of the shopping experience seems to rest with whether you are alone or with a companion who can in turn make the experience miserable or good fun. Although some of the female Respondents did say that they liked going with girlfriends they said also that their preference was to be by themselves. Even though the shopping experience may be a form of social interaction, it is also a very individualised process centred on self-gratification and self-adornment – the gaze or shoppers voyeuristic experience can be interrupted if accompanied. A companion can also limit the scale of the outing, the shopper may only go to four instead of fourteen shops, they may buy something they don't like or not buy something they do like just to satisfy their companion, as explained by Respondent 1 and 3. The postmodern consumer is often portrayed as self-centred and narcissistic, this could explain why women in particular are very competitive when it comes to clothes and shopping. In order to maintain distinction and status one may not indulge the location of consumption of a particular item, this was mentioned by Respondent 2

\* *"You don't want people to dress like you so sometimes I won't tell where I got a certain top .. or I might pretend I got it somewhere else"*

When I asked the female Respondents if they would prefer to go shopping with a girlfriend or boyfriend, they all said they would prefer a female companion, the reason being that men take little interest in fashion and that girlfriends are more likely to be honest when you ask their opinion. However when I asked the male Respondents two said they did not mind girls accompanying them once they were the one's who were getting clothes. They mentioned that girls have a habit of being able to pick out things that suit them, they can select what trendy at that time – almost acting as their image consultants. This would seem to correspond with the article by Treasa Brogan entitled “The Feminisation of the Male Shopping Domain” which argued that younger women have a big influence on what men wear, they will dress their partners in the new styles and colours. It would seem that the advice of a female is involved in the construction of the male self-identity. But there are still few men who enjoy shopping with their partners when they have to go into girl's shops. As Respondent 5 noted when in Belfast with two female companions. Respondent 7 would seem to follow the description of Dr. Lewis typology of the male shopper, he would be a ‘Dungbettle’ one who trails around after their women folk looking miserable, never really taking part in the shopping experience. The object of the male shopper does not lay in the experience but in the operation of controlling and limiting the time and energy spent, again noted by Respondent 5.

I shall now examine the issue of the expressive versus the instrumental or functional shopper. According to Gardner, shopping allows women to gaze and fantasise it is an idle aesthetic experience or daydream (1989:57). One could generalise and argue that female shoppers are irrational, impulsive and expressive

while male shoppers are functional, exact and instrumental. Do only women enjoy pampering themselves? Are men not self-gratifying consumers as well? By analysing the comments made in the diary and in the interview I hope to delve into the psyche and the motives of the consumer.

\* *"I feel the need that I have to shop and that I want something new to wear out on Saturday night. Shopping makes me feel really happy ... it's a day off, I can chill out and relax"* (Respondent 1)

\* *"It's not that I need something specific, this usually frustrates me ... I prefer to impulse buy ... its more exciting to find something really cool than plan to get something specific ... planning puts on extra pressure"*(Respondent 1)

\* *"I mainly go shopping to get a thrill, to pass the time and to gain confidence ... I think my confidence soars when I buy something new. If I see something I like I'll buy it ... the impulsiveness makes it fun"* (Respondent 2)

\* *"I went into Oasis looking for a dress to wear to a wedding, I got so frustrated when I couldn't find anything that I bought a pair of sunglasses ... I don't even like them anymore .. a total impulse but because I was feeling depressed"* (Diary entry Respondent 3)

\* *"I went into Marks and Spencers to get some make-up because I was going to a work party ... I feel so guilty because I spent £30 ... I couldn't control myself ... I couldn't stop ... I didn't even need half the things"* (Diary entry Respondent 3)

\* *" If I'm depressed I'll buy stupid things that I don't even need ... if I'm feeling run down I'll go into town and spend a fortune on silly things"* (Respondent 4)

When reading the diaries of the female Respondents I underlined the word impulse on several occasions and the feelings of impulsiveness came up again in their

interviews. These women would seem to correspond with Dr. Lewis typology of the female shopper in that they are Magpies – one who does a lot of shopping therapy, using it as a pick me up or comfort but often buying things that they do not need. The excitement comes from the spontaneous purchase, seeing something that catches your eye and makes you feel good – almost being a stimulus to boosting your confidence. Respondent 2 from her diary account seemed to be an extreme impulse buyer, she noted that she would only shop in stores where there was a no quibble refund policy – she said she would often buy very expensive items without any planning or need for them but she would later return them when their excitement or glamour had faded away. These Flanuers acknowledge self-gratification and self-indulgence to be at the centre of their impulsive shopping experience. The planned experience is considered to be a chore, buying things they need does not give them the kick. Many of the female Respondents referred to experiences of going into Boots or cosmetic outlets and not being able to control themselves. They explained of an inner need to consume these cosmetics, that they were lured into purchase. The lure of commodities like cosmetics preys on women's emotions and vulnerabilities, it's a social compulsion to look good so they must constantly consume. Could self-consciousness explain why women consume more commodities than men? Hansen explores the relationship of the marketing of cosmetics and fashion to the oppression of women and the ways in which these companies try to manipulate women's insecurities and fears to sell commodities and rake in profits (1986:3). Shopping therapy could be seen as a drug or stimulant for the female consumer but a very manipulative and addictive solution.

\* *"I needed a shirt for my sister's wedding ... I felt happy shopping by myself so I found what I needed straight away ... I was actually so happy with the shirt that I bought a pair of CK boxer shorts which were close by the till"* (Diary entry Res 5)

\* *"I really needed a pair of football boots, so I shopped around which I wouldn't normally do but as I only get runners once every six months or so I wanted to get a really good pair"* (Diary entry Respondent 5)

\* *"I felt that I'd got the football boots for a good bargain so I also bought a pack of sports socks that were in a large basket beside the cash desk ... I didn't need them but I had some money left over"* (Diary entry Respondent 5)

Respondent 5 is very interesting because he is a functional but impulsive shopper, a contradiction in terms. He strategically plans out his shopping trip by what he needs, where best to get it and the best value/quality for his money. But he feels so happy with finding what he needs in accordance with his mission that he treats himself to some impulsive and spontaneous purchases. I recorded the word need in almost all of his shopping experiences as according to Campbell, men favour product-specific functional shopping, meaning that when a need arose they would visit an established store, purchase the item and set home (1997:175). He is an instrumental shopper who is gullible to the baskets close to the tills, once he is victorious in his purchase he will reward himself with some indulgence. Respondent 7 from his diary account also only went shopping when a need arose, when he required something specific.

\* *"My main motive for going shopping might be to buy the new Liverpool jersey or if I needed a shirt for work ... I only go to town when I have to"* (Respondent 7)

The males recorded their most enjoyable experiences being centres around their hobbies or lifestyles, for example going into record, music or sports stores.

\* *“ If I’ve got a few bob to spare I enjoy going in to town to get some new videos or maybe a football jersey ... I love wandering around HMV, Easons or Champion Sports”* (Respondent 7)

\* *“When I go into HMV or Virgin I don’t get hassled and I can browse around without having to be style-conscious ... I enjoy music and books so they are normally why I go shopping”* (Respondent 6)

The male Flaneur expressed an enjoyment and pleasure when shopping for things that they had an interest in such as books, videos, music or sports wear. They found these shops to be more open, feeling free to stroll around and consume the atmosphere – relating to the experience as a voyeuristic or gazing experience. Overall the men seemed to be in control when shopping, they psychologically organised the outing as a mission- preparation being the key to success. But they are also reflexive shoppers in that what they consume acts as a communicator of their lifestyle. Their lifestyle and hobbies commands their shopping experience while for most women the shopping experience controls their lifestyle. Women are governed by what they buy but men govern what they buy.

In this section I shall analyse the shopping experience in terms of how the respondents felt while in the shop, in their dealings with the clothes sizes, the fitting rooms, the shop assistants and the security guards.

\* *“The dressing room was communal and from that moment on I swore I’d never undress in a room full of strangers ... its not the place to discover how huge my bum was ... its such a mortifying experience”* (Respondent 1)

\* *"It is really frustrating when your clothes size will fit you in one shop but not in another ... its not as if you can expand from a size 12 to size 14 in twenty minutes"*

(Respondent 1)

\* *"I saw some lovely clothes on Grafton St. today but I was feeling too fat and frumpy to bother trying them on ... it really bugs me when people get so dressed up to go shopping ... I usually shop after work so I look crap"* (Diary entry Res. 3)

\* *"I tried on a dress in Oasis but it was too small so I asked the assistant to get me the next size ... she gave me such a filthy look as though I didn't deserve to shop there"* (Diary entry Respondent 3)

\* *"I bought a bag in Oasis that has really strange handles on it so I asked the assistant to show me hoe to use them ... she was so snotty and rude even though I had spent £40 on the bag"* (Diary entry Respondent 2)

\* *"Bad day in town to day ... I went into a shop looking for shoes for my boyfriend. There was a shoe rack near the door which were all reduced in the sale ... the sales assistant came up to me and said that the girls shoes were on the lower floor, when I said I was looking for my boyfriend he turned away and laughed, he then told the other assistant and they both laughed out loud ... I was so embarrassed and humiliated that I ran out of the shop"* (Diary entry Respondent 4)

\* *"I felt as though the Security guard was constantly eyeing me up as if I was going to steal something"* (Diary entry Respondent 1)

\* *"I was just looking around in Habitat but the Security guard kept following me so I left immediately"* (Diary entry Respondent 2)

\* *"I was in a really exclusive shop which was quite empty, but I felt like I was being watched so I made a quick exit"* (Diary entry Respondent 2)

If the fitting room is communal it can be a nerve wrecking and self-conscious experience for the shopper, women can be very bitchy (*excuse my language*) and competitive in relation to appearance and body image. Also the variation in clothes sizes from one shop to the next can cause anxiety and self-doubt for many women, pressure from the fashion industry to be a size 8 can lead to various problems for young girls especially anorexia and bulimia. Almost all of the female Respondents recorded feelings of intimidation and humiliating when shopping mainly due to the attitude of the sales assistants. Understanding this situation from the view point of the sales assistant and their relationship to their job one could witness elements of alienation and resistance. The sales assistant may feel alienated from their labour or that they are stuck in a dead end job with little of career opportunities or promotion. They are often underpaid and work long hours, serving customer after customer so there is little incentive for them to be pleasant or helpful to the customer. Perhaps their only enjoyment or novelty comes from ridiculing or undermining the customer, the staff in a fashion outlet are often well dressed and groomed – so they mock those who come in underdressed as a form of resistance to their low status employment. Also the social control in the mall or store via the role of the Security guard although employed make the shopping experience safer and protect the interests of the store, actually can act to hinder or prevent purchase as their presence is so discouraging and intimidating. It is interesting to note that not one of the male Respondents recorded experiences described by the women above, do they possess a higher status as a shopper or are they merely less vulnerable to attacks of paranoia or self-consciousness? I think this whole section is worthy of further sociological investigation, as there is a huge gender divide in this part of the shopping outing.



In this section I shall analyse the role of fashion labels and brand names in the construction of self-identity and the colonisation of the lifeworld by commodities. The construction of self-identity via commodities is not necessarily a conscious activity, so this experience was not directly recorded in the diaries – it was something I had to probe into in the interviews.

\* *“Everyone likes to be seen in the latest gear ... everything centres around looks so shopping is essential ... I've always been real image conscious”* (Respondent 2)

\* *“I would buy a dress in Oasis before Dunnes Stores because what you are wearing is the name”* (Respondent 1)

\* *“I only wear certain labels, it's not deliberate ... I guess you feel secure with the label behind you”* (Respondent 2)

\* *“I shop in the same shops all the time, I wouldn't wear something from Dunnes going out at night because appearance is so important ... it's the first thing people notice”* (Respondent 3)

\* *“Shops are geared to create who you want to be ... each shop can construct a different identity ... you change who you are with what you wear”* (Respondent 4)

\* *“It is nice to have a label, it makes you feel better ... the logo can make you look cool because people will know you spent a lot of money on it”* (Respondent 4)

\* *“I guess what you wear acts as an indicator of your status and wealth ... when you buy a pair of football boots you buy the whole package – the boots plus the status of the label or brand”* (Respondent 5)

\* *“I think that clothes have an illusory meaning ... the label creates an illusion which makes you feel better ... I think that 14-18 year olds are more influenced by labels especially if endorsed by a footballer or a pop singer”* (Respondent 6)

\* *"I'm not a label freak as such, I think that all clothes look the same ... its so tacky to flash labels but everyone does it"* (Respondent 7)

Mort argued that, consumption is a critical factor in determining identity. This new consumption is driven by the appearance of intensified forms of individualism, the self-reflexive project and the cultivation of the self through and enshrined in consumption (1996:4). The research generated from this study seems to suggest that consumers are very much aware of the importance of labels in communicating status and distinction. The hierarchy of fashion from the elite, to the mainstream to the lower stratum is the dividing boundary in today's fashion. Although postmodernism would argue that the boundary between the high and the low has broken down, the research would seem to suggest that the status boundary is more visible than ever but that the styles have assimilated from the elite to the masses, all clothes look the same but the label is still the dividing factor with regards to signification. As Shields would argue, shopping is not merely the acquisition of things, it is the buying of identity, consumption reflects about the self and social distinctions (1992:195). The postmodern consumer must pick and mix between styles and labels, the research suggests that males tend to distance themselves from labels and conforming to fashion trends, while they acknowledge their importance in status and distinction they also acknowledge their role as being one of illusion and manipulation. The research would seem to suggest that females place greater emphasis on labels, especially high-street stores like Oasis, Warehouse and Morgan – they tend to disregard low-budget stores like Dunnes or Penneys as they do little to increase status or image. As according to Corrigan, in the consumer culture the body

has become a discourse, a system of symbols – body appearance is seen as a marketable commodity in a culture dominated by image and display (1997:147).

The next topic I shall examine is the importance of fashion and the shoppers understanding of its the manipulative role. Simmels' 'trickle-down' theory explains why fashion is so short lived in today, for once it becomes adopted by the masses and into the high-street stores it loses its authenticity to become a mere imitation.

\* *"I hate when I go out and see someone is wearing the same top as me ... I won't wear something if it goes out of fashion, for example I've got two pairs of peddle-pushers but I won't wear them now because they're so last season"* (Respondent 2)

\* *"I like to wear exclusive clothes but if someone asks me where I got my outfit, I'll pretend I got it somewhere because I don't want them to buy it"* (Respondent 2)

\* *"I might spend £60 on a dress but after wearing it a few times it loses its attraction, I begin to feel like I'm wearing a rag"* (Respondent 2)

\* *"I read a lot of fashion magazines and I look at what people are wearing so I have a habit of seeing things before they become popular"* (Respondent 2)

\* *"Everyone is a fashion freak deep down, to be honest I wouldn't wear something that was in last season. Image is so important nowadays and if you don't wear the right gear you risk being an outcast"* (Respondent 1)

\* *"The top of the fashion pyramid is so exclusive, the middle is cool but the lower part I wouldn't go near. But they all copy each other eventually, so they all look the same after a while"* (Respondent 1)

\* *"People have become so superficial and materialistic but that's the '90's, we have all become more self-obsessed"* (Respondent 1)

Women can be very competitive with regards to clothes, there is almost an unwritten between girls that will not copy or buy each other's clothes. Respondent 1 comment about the superficiality of the '90's seems to support what I said in Chapter 3, the reflexive consumer strives for self-gratification and recognition, fashion is almost narcissistic. From the research one could suggest that fashion and its importance to women is one reason why there are so many women's fashion and lifestyle magazines. Fashion only possess a short lives signification, the symbolic image is so artificial and depthless that it soon becomes outdated, fashion is the ultimate disposable commodity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It must be pointed out that we do not all possess the skills, confidence or finances to be constantly in fashion and keep up with trends, it can be so consuming of one's time, energy and budget.

\* *"I follow fashion trends but I mainly wear what suits me ... sometimes I'll wear what everybody else is wearing ... if I see a friend wearing something nice I might buy it, I can't relate to fashion magazines"* (Respondent 3)

\* *"Even though fashion changes so much there is some consistency ... I try to look as up to date as possible but if I can't afford it I'll just mix 'n' match ... I try not to let fashion govern my lifestyle because its so superficial, but the society we live in demands that we dress a certain way and follow the rules of the elite"* (Respondent4)

\* *"I think I can look trendy without having to buy what's in, I'm not dependent upon labels to create my exterior identity ... I think labels are the easy way out for those who lack the confidence to create their own style. I usually mix 'n' match between*

*styles and colours ... I want to be noticed for being who I am, not a mannequin copy from a clothes shop"* (Respondent 7)

\* *"Fashion changes so quickly, but there's so little choice for men that we all look the same ... I suppose this makes it easier for men to look good but it takes a very confident guy to wear something different"* (Respondent 5)

\* *"Men will normally put comfort before fashion, a guy can get away with looking shabby but there's more pressure on women to look good"* (Respondent 5)

\* *"Clothes only make me feel good when they're comfortable"* (Respondent 6)

\* *"I do care what I look like but I put comfort first ... I think women are probably the opposite"* (Respondent 7)

One's ability to be fashionable can depend on confidence and imagination, those who do not possess these qualities can simply consume their identity instead of creating a distinctive and individual image. Respondent 3 explained how she prefers to follow the mainstream, it being the easier and less risky option. Others like Respondents 4 and 7 prefer not to be dictated to, instead they mix 'n' match to create their own distinctive and individualised style. They seem to be aware of the capitalist rat-race that fashion is, they correspond to be the ultimate postmodern shoppers and creators of style as they break down the boundaries between elite and mass fashion, mixing codes and identities. As Giddens argued, modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices, but at the same time offers little as to the best selection (1991:80). A lot of the Respondents argue that fashion seems to always look the same, some manipulate this by a postmodern eclecticism of styles while for others it can lead to frustration due to such a wide selection and little available guidance.

Postmodern theorists argue that the shopping experience and fashion is becoming more homogeneous, the sexual boundaries are breaking down. But the research I generated seemed to suggest that Irish society is slower to and perhaps slightly narrow-minded in relation to men, fashion and sexuality.

\* *“Some men are beginning to dress like women, they’re wearing tighter trousers, fitted tops and heeled boots ... they look like Gary Barlow’s”* (Respondent 6)

\* *“If I’m out in the pub and I see a guy dressed like David Beckham or someone from a boyband I’ll probably think he’s queer ... I don’t like vain women but vain men I can’t tolerate”* (Respondent 7)

\* *“I generally will go for a guy who looks after himself, buy if he was too fashionable and girly it would be a turn off because he would be more interested in himself than in me”* (Respondent 2)

\* *“Heterosexual fashionable men are very rare, men generally don’t take too much interest in their appearance ... maybe their right!”* (Respondent 4)

Overall I believe that the research generated from this study goes a long way into understanding the shopping experience, but more research is needed to fully understand the Irish shopper. Society is constantly changing, as is the shopping experience – the research suggests that it is not yet a homogeneous experience or activity. The ’90’s is a time of excitement and adventure for the shopper, commodities go out of fashion as soon as they become too popular. Consumer products allow one to mix ‘n’ match identities, images, meanings and status. The boundaries of modernity are slowly breaking down, Dublin/Irish society is very different today due to absorption of influences and trends.

# **CHAPTER 7**

# **CONCLUSION**

I would hope to have further developed the importance of Falk's argument from this thesis when he said, shopping may at first glance seem of marginal significance, but it is in fact a major cultural phenomenon in contemporary postmodern society which increasingly structures the everyday practices of urban people (1997:2). The shopping mall has become one of the most important sites in the sociology of everyday life and consumption, it is a site of pilgrimage and a tool in the reflexive construction of self-identity. There is a social and psychological need to consume at every point, sites such as Grafton St., Henry St., Blanchardstown Centre, Liffey Valley Centre etc. have become symbolic agents in the construction of one's self and one's lifestyle. People today more time consuming than they are producing, we consume not just the product but the whole package: the spectacle, the illusion, the lure, the promise, the status signification and the symbolic distinctiveness. As according to Shields, shopping is not just merely the acquisition of things, it is the buying of identity – consumption reflects decisions about the self, taste and images of the body and social distinctions (1992:195).

The research data suggests that the female experience centres on voyeurism, gazing and self-gratification. Most women feel compelled to go shopping for commodities such as clothes and cosmetics, they have to look good in order to feel good due to the importance of appearance and signification of fashion. One interesting point from both the research and the literature was the suggestion that women rarely plan out a shopping expedition, their enjoyment and the thrill of the experience came from spontaneity and impulsiveness. While for men their enjoyment or satisfaction derived from a control or a limit with regards to spending of time and



energy. Both sources suggest that although men like to look good they often adopt an avoidance strategy with regards to clothes shopping. According to my research, young men on average venture into town once or twice a month compared to young women who may go shopping at least twice a week. My research and other literature suggested that men regard shopping as a mission to get what they need in the short amount of time and hassle as possible, while for women it was a voyeuristic, pleasure seeking experience. Commodities and labels are becoming increasingly significant in the lives of young consumers, but their consumer experience, motives or behaviour are not homogeneous. Further study and research is needed to highlight the sociological importance of the shopping experience and to examine on a wider scale the gender differences of the reflexive postmodern consumer.

One specific area that requires further investigation is how consumption of commodities by males is controlled by their lifestyle, their hobbies and individual identity will govern when, what and where they shop. But for women their lifestyle is governed almost by commodities themselves, what, when and how they shop constructs who they are. Shopping is one of the most frequent pastimes of women, although they complain of crowds and queues they feel compelled to shop because they have to. As Respondent 1 said, "I just have to spend my money on clothes" and Respondent 2 said, "I don't have a need to go shopping ... I it's the act of shopping that makes me feel happy".

The consumer society is expanding at an ever increasing pace with the development of inner city Dublin and out of town shopping centres. People are

spending more and more time in malls and stores, purchase is not a prerequisite it is instead the consumption of the experience, of the spectacle and the lure of the commodities. The mall is the new place of worship, the space we go to when seeking self-gratification, pampering and self-indulgence. The commodity is the new God, giver of existential meaning, identity, distinction and status. But the lure of the commodity is only momentary due to the capitalist illusion and its constant replacement by something new. The shopping experience is in some parts unconscious, the experience is so addictive and impulsive that we become sleepwalkers in the mall, unaware of the capitalist exploitation of consumers. The shopping experience holds little consensus or unity, the research generated would suggest that it has not yet become a homogeneous experience. More than anything it is an individualised experience, one best done by oneself so the shopper can behave in a self-obsessed, self-centred manner. Perhaps the future of the shopping experience lies in cyber or on-line shopping, a thoroughly individualised and hassle free experience.

Sociologists must understand the importance of the shopping experience and the consumer society as we now consume at every point, everything has become a saleable commodity. Even our inner selves and our identity has become commodified, a saleable entity. *You are not what you are but what you consume.*

# **CHAPTER 8**

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## APPENDIX

## SHOPPING DIARY MONDAY MAY 31st - SUNDAY JUNE 27th

Please record on each day the number of shops you went into (purchase is not a requirement)

Shopping includes both personal i.e clothes/cosmetic/luxury

I will give you a diary to keep for four weeks - this is not a questionnaire, so please treat as a personal journal for recording your experience of shopping - the information you provide will be treated as confidential but I would appreciate it if you could be as open and truthful about you emotions and feelings felt either in a shopping centre or grocery store.

below are some guidelines as to what exactly I am looking for but please do not hesitate to provide additional if you feel necessary.

- \*how many shops you visited on each day, please list
- \*list of purchases, if any in the shop
- \*how long did you spend in each shop on average
  
- \*how did you pay for the purchase
- \*could you afford the price
- \*was it an essential item or a luxury item
- \*was it an impulse buy or a planned buy
- \*what were the forces which influenced the purchase
  
- \*the shopping experience
- \*did you dress up to go to the shops/to town
- \*would you say you made a conscious effort to look good for the outing
- \*did you go shopping with a partner or friend or did you go alone
- \*did the companion make it a more pleasurable or painful experience
- \*did the companion make you feel self-conscious or more confident
- \*did you feel unable to shop around due to the presence of your companion
  
- \*would you say you went window shopping or with the intention of buying a specific item
- \*did you feel annoyance due to lack of money
- \*did you see an item which appealed to you but was out of your price range
- \*did you save up for a specific item
- \*would you term the shops you went to as exclusive, high street or budget
  
- \*what was the experience in the actual shop
- \*did you feel free to explore
- \*did the shop assistant hound you or offer help in a pleasant manner

- did you feel intimidated by the shop assistants
- did you feel intimidated by the security guards
- did you try on any items of clothing
- was the fitting room communal – how did this make you feel
- how did you feel about the clothes sizes
- did you have any negative feelings about your body
  
- if you purchased any items did you buy them for a special occasion
- did the items increase your self-confidence or make you self-conscious
- did you feel the items made you stand out or blend in with the crowd
- was the label or brand important in the decision to buy it
- did the label act to construct your style

PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO RESPOND TO ALL OF THE ABOVE – WHAT I AM SEEKING IS TO UNDERSTAND IS THE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE OF BOTH MEN AND WOMEN.

I REALISE THAT YOU MAY NOT GO SHOPPING OR INTO TOWN EVERYDAY DURING THE FOUR WEEK PERIOD, BUT PLEASE DO RECORD ALL EXPERIENCES WHETHER THEY BE JUST LOOKING, BROWSING OR ACCOMPANING A FRIEND.

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH - THE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

- \*how often do you go shopping?
- \*how long do you spend shopping?
- \*do you shop alone or with a friend/partner? does this make it more pleasurable or painful? do you feel unable to shop around?
- \*do you exchange information/knowledge about sales, stores etc?
- \*do you view it as an excursion or as a chore?
- \*do you view it as a pain or a pleasure?
- \*is it a form of work or a leisure activity?
- \*do you see the mall as a leisure centre, all under the one roof- entertainment.
- \*are there any rituals or skills associated in shopping?
- \*explain the social interaction found in the mall/store
- \*do you ask for assistance- explain your relationship to shop assistants
- \*list some of your motives for going shopping -explain
- \*could you see shopping as a narcissistic, self-gratifying process?
- \*does consumption create individualism and distinctiveness
- \*does it lead to social recognition and being noticed
- \*do you consume in order to fulfil an emotional desire?
- \*do you feel the fashion industry is manipulative of people's insecurities
- \*do you think it is a modern day social compulsion to look fashionable?
- \*how do you feel about the fact that fashion soon goes out of fashion?
- \*do you see the price tag attached to an item as a status sign
- \*do you think social recognition comes from exclusive labels
- \*list some of the fashion labels that you wear - are they important?
- \*do you think that fashion is dictated instead of being individually created?
- \*do you think fashion creates uniformity, we all look like sheep of modern collective

- \*do you think that you can create individual identity via consumption?
- \*is identity a saleable commodity- you can buy it from the shelf?
- \*does what you wear explain who you are- you are what you wear
- \*does advertising and marketing play a role in what and how you consume
- \*does dress act as an organised tool on the formation of the self
- \*colonisation of the lifeworld by commodities- nike, coca-cola
- \*is fashion a depthless culture- all surface with no meaning
- \*are you seduced by the lure/packaging of commodities
- \*could you compare the shopping experience to a tourist gaze
- \*do you see the mall as a palace of fantasy
- \*do you stroll into the mall just to browse or will you have a specific item in mind
- \*are you an expressive or instrumental shopper
- \*do you go shopping with a prepared list or do you impulse buy
- \*what are your main emotions when shopping (stress or pleasure)
- \*has the individual died to be replaced by programmed victim to fashion conformity
- \*(postmodernism) do you feel confused due to the mass market and over-production
- \*cyber shopping - could you ever get involved in this process

### **POSTMODERN / HOMOGENEOUS QUESTIONS**

- \*is shopping/ fashion becoming becoming a homogeneous experience
- \*are the sexual stereotypes breaking down
- \*are men now free to shop and dress fashionably- men's liberation in consumerism
- \*are men afraid to look too trendy, they may look feminine
- \*what is the male shopping experience like
- \*are you a Dodo - Dirvish - Dungbettle