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## Gender Differences in Shopping Habits and Goals of Shopping

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*A review of the literature suggested there could be gender differences in the goals and shopping habits of consumers. The hypothesis is that female college students will take part in the activity of shopping for the sake of shopping while male college students will take part in the activity of shopping to purchase specific items. I tested this hypothesis by giving out questionnaires concerning one's shopping habits and goals to volunteer undergraduate college students of both genders from Lindenwood University in St. Charles, MO. The findings did support the hypothesis. Individual statistics from each question show support for gender differences. The findings may benefit both consumers and the department stores by informing them of any gender differences in the habits and goals of college students who shop. With this information, department stores may find it beneficial to adjust their marketing strategy accordingly.*

There could be gender differences in the goals of college students while they are shopping. The five peer reviewed journal articles I reviewed seemed to lean towards the conclusion that there are gender differences in the goals of shopping habits but the research did not specifically pertain to college students. The literature review of Herrmann (2002) found some statements concerning gender and shopping. It portrayed women as the dominant shopper. "Women have never been absent from studies about consumer practice. On the contrary, the separation of production from consumption has

positioned women as the primary consumers. The protagonist of the most frequently told story of consumption has been the bourgeois housewife, she who consumes not as an individual, but as a family member (Herrmann, 2002 pg. 539).” The literature went on to state “they fail to explain why, according to the claim of a Third Wave feminist, the only real difference between women and men is that women shop and men don’t (Herrmann, 2002, p. 539).” These statements support the idea that gender differences exist in the activity of shopping.

The purpose of the Meyer and Anderson (2000, pg. 243) research was “to examine the extent to which conformity motivators influence shopping behavior among preadolescents, especially with regard to clothing purchase criteria and shopping independence.” A convenience sample of 200 male and female preadolescents was used in the study. An interviewer asked the preadolescents questions and then the interviewer recorded their responses on a survey form. Results showed that the majority of preadolescents shop with one or both of their parents rather than by themselves. “Approximately 61% of males and 68% of females shop mostly with their mothers... and shopping alone with fathers represented only a very small percentage of the responses (Meyer & Anderson, 2000, pg.243).” These statistics along with the finding that “t-test results indicate that significantly more females than males go to the mall with friends for recreation (Meyer & Anderson, 2000, pg. 243)” seems to support this paper’s research hypothesis by indicating there are gender differences in shopping habits.

In a recent review of the literature, Carsky and Dickinson (1995) proposed a new shopping model of consumer decision-making designed for a changed marketplace. They found some limitations to the proposed model including “ if household members do not

like shopping or do not like a particular kind of shopping, they must weigh the costs of the shopping, including the analysis of the utilities to be derived from the relevant alternative activities foregone, against the economic benefits of using the shopping model or elements of the model (Carsky & Dickinson, 1995, pg. 442).” Empirical research is still needed to validate the model. This research did not focus on gender differences but did validate the idea that there are differences in the motivations of shoppers.

In another recent review of literature, Underhill (2000) concluded shopping is meant mostly for females. “For many women there are psychological and emotional aspects to shopping that are just plain absent in most men (Underhill, 2000, p. 33).” However, “men do take pride in their proficiency with certain durable goods—cars, tools, boats, barbecue grills, computers (Underhill, 2000, pg.33).” Underhill (2000) also concluded that women demand more of shopping environments than men do. “Males just want places that allow them to find what they need with a minimum of looking and then get out fast (Underhill, 2000, pg. 33).” This research strongly supports the hypothesis that there are gender differences in the goals and shopping habits of consumers.

Klein(1998) concluded that the big gender difference in shopping is that most women enjoy shopping, while most men claim to dislike shopping and do so only out of necessity. “When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, ‘shopping is an experience that is relaxing and enjoyable for me. I make time to shop and browse,’ 37 percent of men agreed, compared with 67 percent of women (Klein, 1998, pg.34).” Also, when asked if they enjoy shopping for clothes and that it’s fun and exciting to see what’s new in the store, 29 percent of men agreed and 48 percent of women agreed (Klein, 1998). Klein (1998) also stated the factor of convenience is more important to men than

to women. This research also supports the hypothesis that there are gender differences in the shopping habits and goals of consumers by providing statistics that show different factors are important to the two different genders. All five of the journal articles research supported in some way the following hypothesis.

The hypothesis is that female college students will take part in the activity of shopping for the sake of shopping while male college students will take part in the activity of shopping to purchase a specific item(s). I plan to test this hypothesis by giving out questionnaires concerning one's shopping habits and goals to volunteer college students of both genders from Lindenwood University in St. Charles, MO.

### Method

#### *Participants*

Participants were 15 male and 15 female undergraduate students. Some of those participating in the study received extra credit points for their introductory class in anthropology, sociology, or psychology. I recruited the majority of my participants through the Lindenwood University Human Subject Pool. I posted a sign up sheet on the Human Subject Pool bulletin board with specific times in which students could sign up for. The sign up sheet listed the room number in which they were to report to at their chosen time. In order to collect enough data I used a convenience sample to recruit the rest of the participants. All questionnaires were administered by a female researcher.

#### *Materials*

The two-page questionnaire I used in the study asked multiple choice questions which included questions concerning your gender, how many times you go shopping on average in a month and addresses whether you tend to look around in the store. The

complete questionnaire is attached as Appendix A. I used a classroom setting to give out the questionnaires. Materials I needed for this experiment included a classroom equipped with desks, a table to put my papers on, pens, and typed papers such as the sign in sheet, consent forms, questionnaires, and feedback letters.

### *Procedure*

For the participants who volunteered to participate through the human subject pool, I used the following procedure. When the undergraduate students arrived at the designated classroom I greeted them and asked them to sign the sign-in sheet. Then they picked a desk to sit at. I then handed them a consent form with the directions to read it and ask me any questions they may have. Once they signed the consent form I collected it and handed them a questionnaire. I gave them the directions to take their time and feel free to ask my any questions they may have. Each student then answered the questions on the questionnaire. Upon completion I collected their questionnaire and handed them a feedback letter. At this time I shut the classroom door to ensure no one outside the classroom could hear the contents of the feedback letter. I went over the feedback letter by verbally summarizing the main points of gratitude, purpose and benefits of the study along with the contact information. I then handed them their participant receipt which they could turn in for extra credit points. At this time the session was over and students left the classroom.

For the participants who participated through the convenience sample no extra credit was offered. Much of the procedure was the same. All of these participants also were in a classroom setting. I approached the person and inquired whether or not they would like to volunteer to participate in my study. If they agreed, I handed them a

consent form and told them to ask me any questions they may have. When they completed the consent form I collected it and handed them a questionnaire. Once the questionnaire was completed, I collected it and handed them a feedback letter. I told them to ask me any questions they may have and made sure they knew my contact information was on the feedback letter. This experiment was a between-subjects design.

### Results

According to the statistics calculated for each individual question on the questionnaire, there is evidence that supports the hypothesis that female college students will take part in the activity of shopping for the sake of shopping, while male college students will take part in the activity of shopping to purchase specific items. The following are the statistics for each question. According to a t-test for the question “How many times a month do you shop at a store in a mall setting?” the mean for male participants was 2.06 and 2.33 for the female participants. Therefore, female participants reported on average shopping more at a store in a mall setting than male participants. For the question, “How many times a month do you shop at a stand alone store setting?” the mean for male participants was 3.00 and 3.46 for female participants. Therefore, female participants reported on average shopping more at a stand alone store setting than male participants. See Figure 1 for a histogram illustration.

For the next question concerning what you know about what you are looking for at a stand alone type store setting when you go there, seven male participants answered they knew exactly what they wanted compared to four female participants. Seven male participants answered they have somewhat of an idea of what they want while ten female participants answered in that way. One female participant answered she had no idea what

she wanted and one male participant checked all four answers. For the same question except for a mall type store setting two male participants answered they knew exactly what they wanted compared to four female participants. Twelve male participants answered they have somewhat of an idea of what they wanted compared to five female participants. One male participant checked all four answers. The fact that six female participants answered they have no idea what they want compared to zero male participants who answered this way supports the hypothesis that males have more of an idea of a specific wanted item than females do.

The next question concerning the item's price had 6.6% of both male and female participants answer they buy something they need even if it is regular price. 13.3% of male participants answered when there is a sale compared to 26.6% of female participants. 80% of male participants answered both compared to 66.6% of female participants. For the question of when you engage in the activity of shopping 26.6% of male participants answered they go directly to what they want and leave after the purchasing of the item and fewer female participants at 13.3% answered in this way. 73.3% of male participants answered they look around before they look at what they need compared to 33.3% of female participants. The majority of female participants at 53.3% answered they looked around at the store they are trying to make a needed purchase and then proceed to other stores to look around while no male participants answered in this way. Clearly, this supports the idea that there are gender differences in the shopping habits of college students.

For the question concerning money, 46.6% of male participants responded they have a set limit of how much money they are going to spend when they set out to go



shopping compared to 26.6% of female participants. 20% of male participants responded they do not plan on how much money they are going to spend compared to 40% of female participants. 33.3% of male participants answered they spend however much money it takes to buy the things they want compared to 26.6% of female participants. 6.6% of female participants answered other. For the question of who you engage in shopping with 13.3% of both male and female participants answered alone, 6.6% of female participants answered with family, 60% of male participants and 40% of female participants answered with friends. 26.6% of male participants answered other along with 40% of female participants. For the question of when you go shopping, 6.6% of both female and male participants answered they plan on shopping on a specific date. 86.6% of male participants answered they go shopping only when they need a specific item compared to 73.3% of female participants. 6.6% of male participants answered other along with 20% of female participants. According to a t-test for the question on average, the amount of time you spend shopping at one time the mean for the male participants was 3.13 and 3.46 for the female participants.

### Discussion

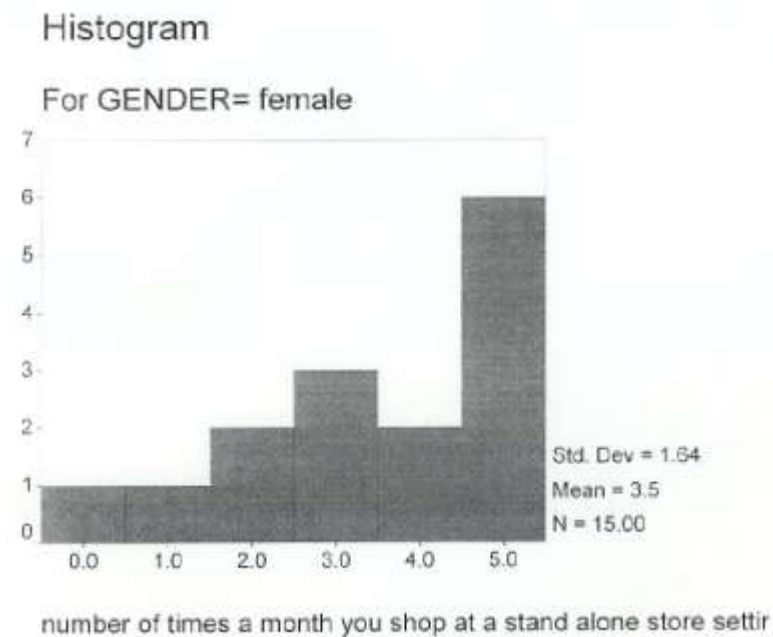
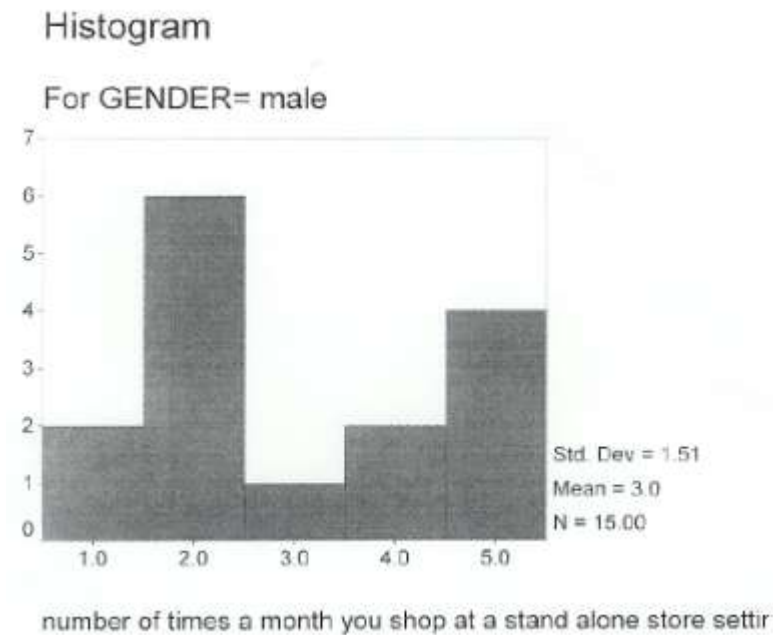
As predicted, the answers on the questionnaires supported the hypothesis that female college students will take part in the activity of shopping for the sake of shopping while male college students will take part in the activity of shopping to purchase specific items. An inherent problem with this design was individual differences between the participants but I tried to limit that by having all participants be undergraduate students from Lindenwood University. Confounding variables included different amounts of

background noise for the different times of administering the questionnaire due to the school environment. There are several ways in which this research could be improved for a replicate study in the future. The researcher could limit individual differences between participants by perhaps matching the groups in relation to their level of education and their annual income. Tighter control over the amount of background noise and using the same room and time period could help decrease confounding variables. Also, future research needs to include a significantly higher number of participants. Future findings from a replicated study with more participants could benefit both consumers and the department stores by informing them of any gender differences in the habits and goals of college students who shop. With this information, department stores may find it beneficial to adjust their marketing strategy accordingly.

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Figure 1. The frequency of the number of times you shop at a stand alone store setting separated into genders.



## Appendix A

### Questionnaire

Please check the best answer.

Are you an undergraduate college student? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

Your gender is \_\_\_male \_\_\_female

Do you ever engage in the activity of shopping? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

If you do, how many times a month do you shop at a store in a mall setting?

\_\_\_on average less than once \_\_\_once \_\_\_twice \_\_\_three \_\_\_four

\_\_\_more than four \_\_\_other please be specific

How many times a month do you shop at a stand alone store setting such as Walmart, Target or Walgreens?

\_\_\_on average less than once \_\_\_once \_\_\_twice \_\_\_three \_\_\_four

\_\_\_more than four \_\_\_other please be specific

When you go to a stand alone type store setting do you know?

\_\_\_exactly what you want \_\_\_have somewhat of an idea of what you want

\_\_\_have no idea what you want \_\_\_do not want anything except to look around

When you go to a mall type setting store do you know?

\_\_\_exactly what you want \_\_\_have somewhat of an idea of what you want

\_\_\_have no idea what you want \_\_\_do not want anything except to look around

Do you buy something

\_\_\_when you need it even if it is regular price \_\_\_when there is a sale

\_\_\_both \_\_\_other please specify

When you engage in the activity of shopping do you

\_\_\_go directly to what you want and leave after purchasing the item

\_\_\_look around before you look at what you need

\_\_\_look around at the store you are trying to make a needed purchase and then proceed to other stores just to look around

\_\_\_other please specify

When you set out to go shopping do you

have a set limit of how much money you are going to spend

do not plan on how much money you are going to spend

spend however much money it takes to buy the things you want

other please specify

Do you engage in shopping

alone  with family  with friends  other

Do you

plan on shopping on a specific date

go shopping only when you need a specific item

other please specify

On average, the amount of time you spend shopping at one time is

ten minutes or less  eleven to thirty minutes  thirty one to sixty minutes

one to two hours  two to four hours  more than four hours

Would you say you

only shop when it is necessary

shop when you could use something but the item is not necessary

shop just for the enjoyment of shopping

other please specify

Thank you for filling out this questionnaire.