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GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Why buy? Exploring the motivations and experiences of four self-confessed impulsive/excessive buyers: A discourse analysis

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April 2013

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ABSTRACT

Shopping and buying is an everyday part of societal life and is encouraged in order to maintain the economy (Dittmar, 2007). In today's society, consumers increasingly buy for a want of an item, rather than a need (Kearney and Stevens, 2012). Research in this area is dominated by the suggestions of a medicalised disorder, Compulsive Buying Disorder, and although a continuum of increasing levels of excessive and impulsive buying is recognised, there remains a lack of subsequent research (Lan, Malhotra and van Ittersum, 2006; Ying-Ping, 2012). What little research there is is dominated by quantitative methods. This current research adopts a social constructionist standpoint and utilises the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews in order to explore the motivations and experiences of four self-confessed excessive/impulsive buyers in order to gain in-depth understanding into this area. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face, and two via internet messaging programs, with around three hours of data collected. Discourse analysis was applied to the data and eight discourses were discovered; two of which, 'Shopping as socialising' and 'Owning the item and its uses' were analysed. Implications, strengths and weaknesses of the study are also discussed.

KEY WORDS:	BUYING	SHOPPING	IMPULSIVE	EXCESSIVE	DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Introduction

A social constructionist standpoint will be adopted throughout the current research, and is made apparent at this stage in order to convey the reasoning behind the criticisms of the previous research surrounding this topic, and how this viewpoint has influenced the research process. This approach allows for the consideration of the meaning that is created through the individuals' choice of language, and it is through this resource that understanding in regards to the world is created (Sullivan, 2010). In essence, social constructionism is the stark opposite of the traditional positivist viewpoint.

Shopping and buying is an everyday part of societal life and is an activity which society condones, as the heavy consumption of goods is not only becoming a more common occurrence in Westernised societies, but also fuels the maintenance and growth of a country's economy (Dittmar, 2007; Kopton, Preilowski and Kenning, 2012; Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney and Monroe, 2008). The increasing commonality of the activity has been prompted by the gradual societal shift from individuals obtaining an item purely for the need or functionality, such as food, medicine or clothing, towards a socially acceptable 'norm' of shopping for, and purchasing an item based upon their 'want' of an item as well (Dittmar and Drury, 2000; Kearney and Stevens, 2012). From this, shopping is now considered as a recreational activity with enjoyment being experienced from the whole of the shopping experience, from the browsing to find a desired item to the purchasing of it (Činjarević, Tatić and Petrić, 2011).

From engaging in this activity however, there becomes a distinction between the differing nature of individuals; some who display controlled, rational buying activities at one end of the spectrum, whilst at the other, in its most extreme form, lies compulsive buying as a full-scale clinical disorder (Clark and Calleja, 2008; Dittmar et al, 2007). Compulsive buying disorder (CBD), initially discovered in 1915 and termed buying mania, was relatively ignored up until the 1980's, where since then the topic has received interest within the academic literature and now research is not uncommon (Faber and O'Guinn, 2007). Although the definition is seen to slightly vary from researcher to researcher, the general view is that CBD consists of a repetitive and continuous urge to purchase goods, with a strong focus on the actual buying process, and consequently the individual will suffer from substantial financial debts and physiological distress (Billieux, Rochat, Rebetez and Van der Linden, 2008; Lejoyeux and Weinstein, 2010; Sang-Hee and Yun-Jung, 2012). However, within this area, there is a wealth of research that is concerned with identifying key characteristics and typologies as well as measuring the strength and prevalence of them, as a way in which to differentiate these individuals from the normal consumers, (Dittmar, 2005; Kearney and Stevens, 2012) as opposed to fully understanding and exploring the motivations of the individual. Therefore, this research is often for the purpose of informing professionals on how to best treat and overcome this disorder, even on a biochemical level (Kopton, Preilowski and Kenning, 2012; Raab, Elger, Neuner and Weber, 2011). This, from a social constructionist standpoint, highlights that these studies allow for supposed sufferers to be identified and acts to impose a label onto these individuals. This traditional essentialist's insistence of the use of labels to try and describe a personality or identity allows for said labels to be seen as almost natural entities within an individual, and therefore make them difficult to escape (Burr, 2003).

Examples of this can be seen from the Clinical Screener for Compulsive Buying and Compulsive Buying Scale, which have both been used as a way to identify the individuals, rather than providing in-depth information regarding the disorder (Chris and James, 2008; Faber and O'Guinn, 2007). It is then through the creation of these questionnaires and scales that researchers can seemingly confirm the existences of their specified trait within the individual, highlighting the oppressive factors that occur, as well as the reductionist viewpoint that they adopt (Burr, 2003).

There is, however, opposition to this viewpoint within the literature, and it is suggested that not only is one merely medicialising a moral problem, but that the two categories of normal and abnormal consumers are a lot less rigid, and can be seen instead as in the form of a continuum (Clark and Calleja, 2008; Lee and Mysyk, 2004). This then opens up the idea of a middle ground; individuals who have varying degrees of impulsive and excessive buying tendencies, yet do not experience constant psychological distress (Dittmar, 2007; Dittmar and Drury, 2000). Through the interchangeably use of the two words impulsive and excessive, there is often disagreement in defining the terms without a certain level of overlap (Faber and O'Guinn, 2007; Lee and Song, 2011; Saleh, 2012). Although both can be seen as lesser forms of compulsion, the idea of a continuum allows for the definition to become less important than the ability to showcase varying degrees of these aspects within each individual (Dittmar, 2007). As such aspects are enviably socially and historically bound, this also permits a level of flexibility over time that could not be achieved with the rigid definition of the compulsive buying disorder (Burr, 2003).

Although there has been some research into the middle ground area, there is not the same wealth of literature, nor level of attention paid, in comparison to the compulsive buying disorder (Lan et al, 2006; Ying-Ping, 2012). This is possibly because this area is also of interest to other disciplinary fields, such as economics and consumer research and consequently psychological research often has competition (Verplanken and Sato, 2011). Therefore, for the purpose of the current research, the two will be discussed together, and will be given a general definition. Impulsive buying, originally championed by Rook, is classed as buying behaviour that results in unplanned, spur-of-the moment purchases (Činjarević, Tatić and Petrić, 2011; Rook, 1987), and excessive buying generally relates to the impulsive nature of continuous purchasing of items (Kukar-Kinney, Ridgway and Monroe, 2007).

Research within these areas has discovered, or been linked, to a variety of factors (Virvilaitė, Saladienė and Žvinklytė, 2011). One of the initial studies regarding impulsive buying, and a piece of research that has been found to be commonly referenced by others in this topic is by Rook and Hoch (1985). Despite it being conducted nearly 30 years ago, it is one of few qualitative studies within this area. Here, the researchers identify through the use of qualitative interviews such aspects from the impulsive participants as being overcome with a desire to purchase the item, rewarding oneself for resisting the urge of more expensive items and guilt after purchasing, alongside many strategies in order to resist the temptation, such as distancing and rationalizations (Rook and Hoch, 1985). However, they also used a quantitative measure using Likert type scales and identified an enjoyment from browsing and going with friends, shopping when they are feeling down and an excitement from credit cards (Rook and Hoch, 1985). From this, it can be established that the topics of rewards and shopping to boost mood, money and debt, post-purchase guilt, enjoyment of the activity of shopping and shopping with others are

linked into impulsive and excessive buying, and further research regarding these will be discussed.

Mood plays a considerable role in the influence of impulsive and excessive buying. It is thought that such consumers will buy items in order to alleviate a negative mood, as it is through buying the item and the enjoyment that they receive from this, that is sufficient in relieving the negative feelings (Faber and Christenson, 1996). In support of this, Rook (1987) suggests that when asked about the feelings surrounding impulsive purchases, the respondents noted that it made them feel 'good', 'happy' or 'satisfied'. Additionally, many noted self-gifting or buying as a reward in aiding these positive feelings (Rook, 1987). Such buying has also been seen to be due to such individuals attempting to prolong their positive mood by obtaining items (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Činjarević, Tatić and Petrić, 2011). The pleasure gained from doing this has been recognised as being short term, and therefore the excessive nature becomes apparent from the continuous levels of such buying to alter or prolong the mood state (Atalay and Meloy, 2011). However, rather than such findings being utilised by qualitative studies to gain further understanding, these links within the current research are then abused by studies adopting quantitative methods, as they go on to establish that such individuals are more emotional in their buying than non-impulsive consumers (Virvilaitė, Saladienė and Žvinklytė, 2011). This idea is echoed in research by Atalay and Meloy (2011), who use differing measures to measure mood, personality traits and consumption, essentially breaking down the concept and measuring each aspect separately, yet go on to link them back together to make a seemingly objective conclusion.

Post-purchase guilt was not uncommon with the impulsive/excessive buyers, and it is thought that most cases are related to unplanned buying and a low conscious involvement with the purchasing decision (Saleh, 2012). Conversely, Rook (1987) suggests that such individuals recognise the potential consequences and feelings of guilt that may occur with the purchase, but succumb to their desire to own the product. This latter research by Rook (1987) was a qualitative piece of research using content analysis, and highlights how such research can go beyond the linking of two behaviours to convey the individual's consideration and deliberations, aspects that would not be discovered through quantitative methods. Further dimensions uncovered by qualitative research using thematic analysis suggest that regret may be experienced not only due to a reconsideration of the quality of goods, highlighting the item itself to be regretted, but also their general spending patterns and the consequences that entail such as debt (Dittmar and Drury, 2000). Additionally, the attraction of a low price offered a further justification to the purchase, to which afterwards the individuals experienced regret (Bell, Corsten and Knox, 2011).

Shopping with others and the influences they have is a debated area, yet research in this area is lacking (de Vries, Trampe and Fennis, 2011). This dispute lies in whether they act as the voice of reason, or whether they actively encourage the spending behavior. Research by de Vries et al (2011) has suggested that the presence of a friend reduced both the buying urge and intention, and reduced the excessive consumption. Interestingly, it was also suggested that these benefits were at the highest when the companion was considered as a close friend (de Vries et al, 2011). However, other research suggests that when in groups, individuals will visit more areas of the stores, and therefore create more temptation for the individual (Borges, Chebat and Babin, 2010). Additionally, on a neutral level, companions can be seen

to assist the shopper in the way of offering product information regarding the features and individual shops, which can result in increased confidence in regards to the decision on the product (Junsang, 2012). This idea also appears to be dependent on the type of companion. In order to preserve group cohesiveness, it is thought that when shopping with peers, individuals will engage in socially desirable behaviour, which in this instance would be conforming to the group appraisal of impulsive purchases (Xueming, 2005). Shopping with family members on the other hand may decrease the level of impulsive buying, as it is thought that such members may adopt a sense of responsibility, and therefore discourage any wastefulness (Xueming, 2005). Within this there is the suggestion that such consumers may take another's buying habits as justification of their own, therefore creating a sense of normality (Xueming, 2005).

However, it is not just the shopping activity that is important, but the actual items serve the individual as well. Goods have been found to function as material symbols for the individual in order to not only create an identity for the individual, but help to portray this to others, so much so that it has been considered that such goods are an extension of ourselves (Kearney and Stevens, 2012). When a consumer feels the product will generate status or a socially desirable feature, the impulsive/excessive buyers cannot resist the purchase (Lan et al, 2006). This emphasises the idea of the products acting as social communication 'devices', as the meaning of certain objects will be shared by society at large (Richins, 1994). This historically and culturally bound idea emphasises the need of qualitative data, as such knowledge is constructed and therefore kept alive through our everyday interactions with one another, and decreases the value of the idea of a rigid universal truth (Burr, 2003). Therefore, any attempt to discover the ultimate truth, like traditional psychology claims to do, is impossible, as it is forever changing within societies and throughout time (Burr, 2003). Furthermore, there is particular consideration to the nature of clothes due to their external representation as they offer an ideal opportunity to convey a certain image to others, and can be hastily changed if they wish to change certain aspects of themselves (Činjarević et al, 2011; Kearney and Stevens, 2012). In impulsive and excessive buyers, the extensive nature of their acquisition of goods is therefore thought to suggest that such individuals have identity and self-esteem concerns (Verplanken and Sato, 2011). However, rather than trying to gain further information of how the item serves them in their identity formation, such results are taken and focused towards profiling the different identities and types of shoppers, again imposing a label onto individuals that can consequently result in being stigmatised (Burr, 2003; Kearney and Stevens, 2012).

Despite the rejection of the medical disorder, and the adoption of the continuum idea in the previous research, there is still a shadow of the clinical aspect within the discussed studies. This is because there remains an emphasis on the cognitive approach and the want to understand the framework behind impulsive and excessive buying, and the assumption of a disruption from an otherwise rational decision maker (Dittmar and Drury, 2000). This can be seen through the variety of theoretical models and frameworks that have been developed, even in qualitative studies, as a way to establish links between the certain cognitions and behaviours (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Bell et al, 2011; Saleh, 2012; Sang-Hee and Yun-Jung, 2012; Virvilaitė et al, 2011). From a social constructionist standpoint the use of language in this way, particularly from the qualitative studies, is wrong. Unlike the traditional psychology viewpoint that regards language as a passive vehicle in which our thoughts and

emotions can be uncovered, social constructionists instead champion language as a tool through which we construct meaning, and instead of pathologicalising such behaviour, we should instead look at how our constructions play a part in our meanings (Burr, 2003).

With the majority of the aforementioned studies using quantitative methods, this suggests an imbalance towards the traditional essentialist viewpoint within this area. Through the use of the quantitative methods, researchers are trying to establish the idea of using seemingly objective methods that are impermeable to bias, when in fact it is impossible within psychology to create an unbiased result, as there will be always be influence from the individual's beliefs and own perspectives, considered as their everyday psychology, from which no one is exempt, even professionals (Burr, 2003; Tyson, Jones and Elcock, 2011).

Overall, it is profusely recognised within the surrounding literature that research on impulse and excessive buying is limited, and despite recognition of the varying levels along the continuum of such shopping and buying habits, there is not only a need for more research within this area, but in particular there is a lack of qualitative studies uncovering descriptive and comprehensive accounts of these individuals (Clark & Calleja, 2008; Kearney and Stevens, 2012; Lan et al, 2006; Rook, 1987).

The Present Study

In summary, the majority of the work regarding the general topic of shopping and buying has been heavily influenced by the use of quantitative methods, as well as a focus on research within the extreme form of the disorder of compulsive buying, the 'normal' consumer, or comparisons of the two. There has been little focus towards the middle of the continuum, yet when attention is paid to this area, it is often in the form of studying individual aspects of shopping and buying, with the exception of studies such as Rook (1987) and Dittmar and Drury (2000), yet even then, considering the nature of knowledge from the social constructionist standpoint as being historically bound, such research could be classed as somewhat dated now. These limitations highlight the need for up to date research using qualitative methods that allows for exploration of the whole process, and to explore the aspects within the context of which it occurs, instead of taking the parts out of context to explore them individually, which can be seen in the quantitative studies.

Therefore, the present study will investigate, using qualitative methods, the experiences and motivations of individuals with the middle ground tendencies, regarding their shopping and buying habits and processes, and will focus on such areas as mood state, identity, socialising, influences such as temptations and regret, as well as the general enjoyment of the activity in the hope that a qualitative approach would introduce a further dimension to the study, through the exploration to bring about more depth and awareness of the topic. In doing this, discourse analysis would be deemed the most appropriate, as although not the only type of analysis that could be used, it is thought to interlink well with the social constructionist's viewpoint, making the present study more united throughout (Burr, 2003). Additionally, to the researcher's knowledge, there has been no previous research into this area using this form of analysis. Discourse analysis allows understanding of how language is constructed in a way to convey meaning to

themselves and others, and concentrates on how the individuals creates their account through their choice of language (Wiggins and Riley, 2010)

Within the social constructionist framework, there must also be consideration for the differing perspectives of the relativists and realists. A critical relativist position will be adopted, which will allow the researcher to remain participant orientated, an aspect which previous research has failed to do and so forth is suited to challenging mainstream psychology's findings (Stainton-Rogers, 2011). However, such a position is aware of the dangers of a "psychology without foundation" and therefore adopts a mentality of the existence of social realities, yet unlike a realist perspective, understand that they are multiple, and are ever-changing in line with society (Stainton-Rogers, 2011, p47). Additionally, this position promotes the idea of abduction (Stainton-Rogers, 2011). This suggests that instead of analysing data in line with a particular theory, or using the data to create one like quantitative methods do, one should place more emphasis on achieving insight and making unusual discoveries within the data (Stainton-Rogers, 2011). Furthermore, critical relativism understands the importance of language in the construction of meaning for each individual, without the comparison to an 'objective' truth (Burr, 2003). Therefore, this position interlinks well with the social constructionist viewpoint.

Method

Participants

Purposive sampling was chosen as the method of choice in order to recruit participants that met the criteria of the study. Setting a criteria was viewed as important as would lead to relevant participants volunteering based on the compatibility of the knowledge and opinions they held and the exploration the study intended, which Coyne, (1997), suggests has a positive effect on the quality of the research. The criteria (see Appendix B) was purposely detailed to ensure that various topics could be covered in depth during the interviews, therefore resulting in richer participant accounts.

According to the dissertation regulations for qualitative research, around 3 ½ hours of data was collected from four participants.

Participant 1, given the pseudonym of Adele, is 20 years old and is currently a student at another university. She volunteered to take part in the research through a Facebook post (see Appendix C) and contacted the researcher saying she fitted the criteria. Adele was previously known to the researcher. Her interview lasted approximately 2 hours, but due to the nature of online messaging, around 1 hour of transcript was collected.

Participant 2, given the pseudonym of Penny, is in her 40's and is married with three grown up children. Previously an acquaintance of the researcher, she was recruited through word of mouth and was happy to take part in the interview after agreeing she fitted the criteria. Penny's face-to-face interview lasted 35 minutes.

Participant 3, given the pseudonym of Susie, is 21 years old and is currently a university student whilst also maintaining a part-time job. Being well-known to the researcher she expressed interest in taking part in the research after feeling she fitted the criteria. Susie's interview lasted 55 minutes.

Participant 4, given the pseudonym of Fiona, is in her early 20s and was previously unknown to the researcher before the interview. Having initially expressed interest in the study the researcher contacted Fiona, and when given the criteria, agreed she fitted it. Fiona's interview lasted approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes, but due to nature of the online messaging, around 1 hour of transcript was collected.

Design

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as they allowed the researcher to maintain the direction of the interview in view of the research aims (Willig, 2008), whilst giving each participant a chance to talk about the aspects they believe are important within excessive buying. This flexibility of the interview is important, as participants often raise aspects that are not initially anticipated that would be of significance interest and would otherwise be lost through more structured forms of interviewing (Hugh-Jones, 2010).

Penny and Susie were interviewed face-to-face which allowed for a naturalistic setting to be created, enabling the interviews to remain informal and conversation-like in a bid to gain further insight and detail from the interview.

Due to geographical boundaries, Adele and Fiona were interviewed through internet messaging programmes, Adele through a text interview via Skype and Fiona through a private messaging area on social networking site Facebook. Both were familiar with the programs they used and were therefore comfortable using them. Interviews through the internet are found to be advantageous despite the lack of physicality between the researcher and participant, as they allow for suitable participants to be interviewed despite any distance, and it has been found that interviewing in this manner results in participants being less inhibited with their responses, allowing for richer accounts (Evans, Elford and Wiggins, 2008; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The forms of internet messaging programs used were deemed to be appropriate as are synchronous, and are therefore most alike face-to-face interviews (Evans, Elford and Wiggins, 2008).

Materials

The researcher had Skype messaging installed on a private computer, and had an internet Facebook account, both of which were password protected. A criteria for participants was developed in consideration of the nature of the excessive buying topic (see Appendix B). A consent form was developed and was given to all participants prior to the interview to ensure that they fully understood the purpose of the study (see Appendix D). An interview schedule was devised to create a general direction to the interview and so that participants would feel familiar with the questions asked (see Appendix E). A second schedule for the researcher's use only was also created which contained the same information as the initial interview schedule, yet included additional follow up questions (see Appendix F). To reduce researcher bias towards framing the questions to current themes already in the literature, only a brief literature review was undertaken in order to understand the general topic and not to guide the interview questions and forcefully direct the interview. This inductive method allows for deeper exploration of the participants' understandings and avoids the questions shaping their answers purely to fit the current themes. For the face-to-face interviews, a digital voice recorder was used for recording the interview and a transcription foot pedal and computer software were used to aid the transcription.

Procedure

Before the study, a preliminary ethical approval form was completed and signed by a dissertation supervisor allowing the study to take place (see Appendix A). Willing participants were sent a consent form to read and sign, giving their fully informed consent, and were encouraged to keep a copy for themselves to allow them to re-visit anything they were unsure about. The interview schedule was also sent to the participants in advance in order to familiarise themselves with the questions, and so that they were comfortable in the forthcoming interview. In this, they were given the

option to remove or add any content they did not want to answer or thought was important.

Once the signed consent forms were received (see Appendix G), further correspondence followed in order to set dates for the interviews. Regarding the online participants, times and dates were agreed upon that suited both parties, and it was known that both participants as well as the researcher were at home and in a relaxed setting when the interviews took place.

Regarding the face-to-face interviews, both were undertaken in the participants' homes in order to ensure a comfortable setting for the participants, and when no other members of the household where present to avoid any distractions. King and Horrocks (2010) emphasise the importance of making the participant feel comfortable in order to avoid an unsettling atmosphere, which can often result in underdeveloped answers. As both participants were known to the interviewer there was considered to be no risk to the safety of the researcher.

After the interview the online participants were thanked and sent an electronic copy of the debrief form. The remaining participants were thanked and briefly verbally debriefed before being given a copy of the debrief form (see Appendix H).

The text scripts from the online interviews were then copied and pasted into a Word document and were correctly formatted (see Appendix I). The face-to-face interviews were loaded onto a personal computer and transcribed by the researcher themselves, in order to initially familiarise themselves with the text before the analysis began.

Ethical considerations

Ethics are an important part of any research study, as if these are not up to standard with regards to protecting the well-being of the participants, then approval of the research will be denied (King and Horrocks, 2010). All decisions made were informed by the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009).

Informed consent

All participants were asked to sign a consent form before the interview, where details of the study were included, as to not deceive them in any way of the purpose of the study and the intended use of the data collected. They were encouraged to keep a separate copy of the consent forms for reference.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Participants were informed that the researcher would take steps to ensure confidentiality by protecting their identities in the form of giving each participant a pseudonym, and that any information that could enable them to be identifiable would be changed or omitted. They were told any records regarding the interview will be destroyed after the examination board has met, and that all data will be retained and

processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act of 1998 and that all recordings will be held on a personal computer that is password protected, therefore only accessible by the researcher. However, the participants were warned that extracts from the interview transcript will be included in the analysis section of the dissertation and may be held in the library for student and staff use.

Right to Withdraw

All participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study without any negative consequences in the time leading up to the interview, during the interview and could withdraw their data up to a week after the interview. The participants were allowed access to the interview transcript in which they could omit any of their answers or comments that they were uncomfortable or unhappy with and were given a week to do so.

Protection of Participants

All participants were reminded of their rights regarding the previous sections throughout the interview, and were directed to relevant forms of help if they experienced any distress. The researcher felt their own safety was protected at all times during the interview process.

Debrief

All participants were given a debrief form at the end of the interview (see Appendix H) and profusely thanked. The face-to-face participants were also given a brief verbal debriefing.

Analytical strategy

Discourse analysis was conducted on the transcripts in accordance with the procedural guidelines set out by Potter and Wetherell (1987). The verbal interviews were then transcribed by the researcher to gain a primary familiarity with the transcript, and were coded using a simplified Jefferson method (Rintel, 2009; Jefferson, 2004). Using a non-simplified Jefferson transcription would take a significantly longer amount of time (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and was therefore not deemed appropriate due to the time constraints upon the current research, as well as due to the consideration that complicated forms of transcription can make the readability of the transcript difficult, particularly for lengthy scripts and novices to this method. The online messaging transcripts were unaltered in content, however, the format of the interviews were changed (see Appendix I).

The transcripts were read prior to analysis to further familiarise the researcher with the data, and were then read and re-read when conducting the analysis. The initial micro coding then took place, which involved emersion within the data to unpick each sentence, which generated a large variety of codes (see Appendix J). From

this, eight main discourses were developed, and can be seen in the transcripts through the use of colour coding (see Appendix K - P). For a more detailed explanation of the analysis, see Appendix Q.

The research also took a mainly inductive approach, which means that the identified discourses would be driven largely by the data from the participants, and that there will be less influence by the researcher's bias towards any literature (Thomas, 2003). Some literature was read in order to gain an overall grasp of the topic, but due to the nature of the topic of shopping, no in-depth reading was needed to understand it.

Analysis

Through conducting discourse analysis on the transcripts (see Appendices J-N,P,Q), three broad discourses emerged from the data as being 'Before the shopping trip', 'During the shopping trip' and 'After the shopping trip'. These were considered to depict three stages of the shopping process, yet, as each stage encompassed a large amount of data they were reviewed and broken down into eight main discourses. These eight discourses were 'Planning, Control and Trusting oneself', 'Shopping as a hobby/necessity', 'Influences on purchase decisions', 'Shopping as socialising', 'Money as disposable income', 'Owning the item and its uses', 'Lack of understanding from others' and 'Buyers regret', and are each interlinked with at least one of the three stages (see Appendix L and M for a detailed explanation). For the purpose of the analysis and due to word count limitations, only two will be discussed. These will be 'Shopping as socialising' and 'Owning the item and its uses' as they were thought to address the research question well, yet whilst still considering the unique nature of the participants from the social constructionist standpoint, they offered a wide range of discussion due to the salience of them within the text and their ability to stand alone as distinctive discourses.

Shopping as socialising

Shopping as socialising was apparent in all the participants' accounts, and although some participants displayed more emphasis on this discourse than others, shopping as socialising was constructed as a significant part of the shopping experience and was regarded throughout with positivity and heightened levels of enjoyment.

Extracts from Fiona and Penny can be seen to highlight this:

> *Spending time with my best friend and we can have a laugh and still chat about stuff that we would if I went to her house but we are spending money on things we like at the same time (Fiona, line 67-69)*

> *I think it's just nice, it's nice to have company (1) and it's nice to be with somebody who enjoys doing the same thing as you (Penny, line 121-122)*

Both participants construct the idea of shopping as being made more enjoyable when it is with someone who appreciates the shopping activity in the same way that they do, as shown by Fiona's use of the word "*we*", suggesting that going shopping with a more active and interested companion is more desirable than a passive companion. Whilst Penny draws upon the physical presence of someone as enough in altering her enjoyment from the use of the word *"company"*, Fiona expands on this by suggesting that social interactions are enhanced when the activity of shopping is added, suggesting that for her shopping is a key device in strengthening relationships with others through partaking in an activity that both parties equally enjoy.

Likewise, Susie shares a similar view by saying "*when you're walking to the different shops you can have a good chat*" (line 151-152), combining social interaction and

the activity of shopping, yet she is more specific on where the interaction originates from:

> *it's almost like a bonding sort of, er thing, with the, if I like a top and someone else- I know that someone else is gonna like it, then we'll like chat about it and bond (Susie, line 153-154).*

For Susie, the socialising and interaction comes mainly from discussions on a product in a shop and goes on to construct shopping and socialising as interlinked as one and the same. She suggests that the use of a top acts as a tool through which interaction can occur, as she suggests through the use of her words "*chat about it and bond*". The use of the word "*bond*" is interesting, as it invokes the image of Susie and her companion as connected, in this context, in their fondness of the item and indicates that through Susie's certainty that her companion will like the item, their relationship is strengthened.

Additionally, this level of enjoyment from the socialisation of shopping for the participants has been portrayed in extracts from Susie and Adele to equate to longer shopping sessions.

This can be seen when Susie refers to shopping alone:

> *I can't be bothered to go into those shops, if I was with someone and they said they really wanted to go into a shop, and we go into that shop that may lead me to buying something else. But if I was on my own and the shop was all the way down the road, I'd think oh I can't be bothered (2) and I probably would- I don't take half as long shopping, like I'll think of something that I need and go and get that rather than have a look in all the other shops. (Susie, line 212-217).*

Susie's construction of shopping in this extract seems to change from previous enjoyment of the activity into a task that requires additional effort. When she acknowledges a shopping request from another, Susie accepts this as adequate reasoning in travelling any distance to the desired shop, and does not show any questioning of this decision. This not only elongates the activity of shopping, but through the lack of specificity of what she would buy; "*something else*", creates the impression that the enjoyment comes from the other person, and it is through their presence and shopping choices that an impulsive purchase on Susie's part would be made. Susie goes on to emphasise this by suggesting that when alone, the physical distance becomes apparent and is viewed negatively; as though a consequence of shopping alone. This can be seen through her words of "*all the way down the road, I'd think oh I can't be bothered*", in which Susie utilises the extreme case formulation device (Potter, 1996), as in emphasising that the shop is a fair distance away, she is appealing to the interviewer to understand and empathise with this justification. This construction created by Susie creates the general impression that when shopping alone the activity becomes a chore, and lacks the thrills of a possible purchase through the influence of friends, and instead morphs into purchases that are practical.

And from Adele:

> *yeah if i'm at home i'll go with my mum or sisters and then most of the time at uni i will go with one of my housemates or rees. i think i probably spend more going with other people because we will tend to go for lunch as well and take longer just looking around shops (Adele, line 64-67)*

For Adele, shopping with others can be seen as integral to her shopping trip, as conveyed by her emphasis on listing the individual shopping companions for when she is home and at university. Adele warrants her overspend when with others by discussing the various aspects encompassing the shopping trip, constructing it to be more about time spent with others than obtaining products; "*we will tend to go for lunch… and take longer just looking around shops".* Through this construction, it evokes the image of 'making a day of it'; highlighting the role socialising has, as extending the trip through the aspects, such as going for lunch, that can be added when with others.

Furthermore, unlike Susie, Adele suggests that when going by herself she is often longer, but still utilises the purposeful nature of the trip as reasoning behind going alone:

> *i normally go by myself if i have certain things to buy like if im going for presents and stuff and i know im going to be a while looking for things because i don't want to drag other people round with me but otherwise i'd rather go with other people (Adele, line 73-75)*

Adele's self-confessed preference for going with others again highlights the importance of them for her during shopping. Interestingly, she creates purposeful shopping as boring through her explanation of not wanting to "*drag people round*" with her when doing it. Her choice of the word "*drag"* is curious, as it evokes the image of physically pulling someone round with her, implying that her companion would also find this boring and would have to be forced to go. In this context, as Adele values the aspect of shopping with others, it suggests that she wants to 'save' her companions from this unnecessary torment, perhaps in a bid to appear as an exciting companion herself, so that others will want to go shopping with her.

Interestingly, differences between the types of shopping companion were noted by all participants, namely the variations between family members and friends, and that their different 'uses' and the way the socialisation occurred depended on whom they were with. For Fiona, she holds preference of shopping with her mother in certain circumstances:

> *I think I benefit more from shopping with my mum because I know I'm going to get a gods honest truth opinion. If I look an idiot she will tell me. I know my best friend will but if I'm slightly undecided on something if I'm with my friend ill buy it but if I'm with my mum I won't because I know 100% it's not right (Fiona, line 88-91).*

Fiona constructs her mother, in this context, as an authority figure, and one that she can reliably trust "*100%*". This can be seen by her use of "*gods honest truth opinion*"; an example of extreme case formulation used as a way to maximise the validity of

her mother's opinion, and to strengthen her case (Potter, 1996). The reference to God is interesting, as it gives the impression of an ultimate all-knowing and all-seeing power, which in this context may have to be used to suggest that Fiona's mother's opinion is factual truth, giving a sense of certainty to the following accounts. Fiona goes on to suggest that in the company of her mother, and through this communication with her, she becomes a more sensible individual in regards to spending money, as with others she would still be tempted to buy the product even though she was "*undecided*". In general, Fiona constructs the socialisation that occurs here as purposeful, instead of fun or leisurely.

Despite this extract from Susie also embodying a purposeful nature, she instead positions herself from a different angle than Fiona when she shops with her mother:

> *she likes to take me because erm (2) she then, cause she doesn't like buying new things and doesn't like trying new things, so if I say to her that it looks nice then she'll probably buy it. Because she's a bit worried about what she should buy and what she shouldn't buy. And what looks good on her and what doesn't look good on her. (Susie, line 222-226).*

Throughout the extract, Susie positions herself as a self-appointed advisor to her mother; a position which she validates by suggesting that her mother will "*probably buy*" something if it is Susie who suggests it. Susie's construction of her mother as a naïve shopper from her caution to try "*new things*" serves to emphasise her own product expertise from her ability to introduce her mother to new items. Additionally, by listing her mother's insecurities about the clothes she should wear, Susie justifies any purchase made by implying that it will be beneficial to her mother, as it will ease her worries about what to wear.

From this, social shopping with family members can be seen in the participant's accounts to evoke a sense of assistance in which either themselves, or their family member receives guidance and a heightened consideration of their purchase decision.

All of the participants accounts however, can be seen to change in regards to shopping socially with friends as opposed to family members, particularly in the case of Susie, who previously constructed herself as an advisor:

> *Erm it probably (2) erm if I'm a bit like, mmm do I really want to spend that much money on that or do I not and then someone else, 'oh no that's really really nice', 'you- that's really nice' 'you'll really suit' that I'm like oh ok, I'll get it (laughs) it kind of reinforces the fact that I should get it rather than thinking hmmm I'll wait and see if there's anything else (1) I'll just get it (Susie, line 175-179)*

Through this extract, Susie's position changes, and she becomes the one who is requiring the assistance, and shows how when shopping with her friends, they too become involved in her own purchase decisions. She highlights her initial indecision regarding the purchase and stresses money as an overarching factor, appealing to the reader that her decision making is logical and sensible. Susie uses active voicing (Potter, 1996), shown in the repetition of such phrases as "*that's really nice*" and "*you'll suit that*", to establish a sense of objectivity to her claim by bringing in other's

words acting as the validation for her purchase decision. This creates the impression that if she was alone, Susie would shop around before making a decision, and not be as impulsive. Her construction of this extract displays a tension between how she should be, that is, careful with money and regarding all her options, and how she is when socialising with others, suggesting they warrant any impulsive buying.

Fiona too, shows a change when shopping with friends rather than her mother, as she acknowledges that whilst she receives a degree of encouragement and influence from her friend, she also returns this (line 71-73) and goes on to say:

> *I guess it's because we are honest and we like to just give each other positive encouragement. If I have someone give me a positive comment about an outfit I'm trying on I know it must look good so ill want to wear it again because I feel confident (Fiona, line 76-79)*

By using the word "*honest*" when discussing their reactions to one another, Fiona constructs her friends and herself as close, and their relationship as strong for both of them to be able to express their thoughts to one another in this way. For Fiona, the socialisation in this extract, which she presents as "*positive encouragement*", serves to act as a confidence booster for her and through the link Fiona makes between positive words, thinking "*it must look good*" and wanting to wear it again suggests a desire to prolong the positive feelings, which in turn will ultimately lead to her purchasing the item to preserve and relive these thoughts.

For Penny, however, the differentiation between shopping companions was different. Instead of the difference lying between shopping with family members or friends, she constructs the different shopping experiences as due to her companion's shopping budget and available money:

> *My sister I do a lot. And she's quite like me really, so we'll go round the shops and we're quite happy to wander. You know, sometimes we'll go up there and like I said I like to buy something, and I might come back with just, I don't know, like a cake or (2) but it's <u>something.</u> I don't always buy clothes, but she'll wander round with me. We go shopping quite a lot together (Penny, line 113-117)*

> *Yeh but with my sister, she got money and she don't- if she sees something she'll buy it (Penny, line 131-132)*

First, Penny talks about shopping with her sister and suggests that the two of them are alike; "*she's quite like me really*", and goes on to back up this statement by suggesting their mutual enjoyment regarding the shopping experience though her repeated use of the pronoun "*we*"; "*we'll go round the shops*", "*we're quite happy to wander*", "*We go shopping quite a lot together*". As she continues, Penny constructs her own sister's spending habits as unproblematic and sensible, as through highlighting her sister's possession of adequate funds; "*she got money*" Penny suggests this as enough to warrant any purchase, without negative repercussions. This particular construction for Penny then authorises her own spending habits through the normalisation of her sisters', and provides sufficient justification for her to do the same.

The way in which her sister acts as justification for Penny's shopping habits is very important to her:

> *I think if I go with Leanne or Louisa because their budgets are limited, if they ain't got no money they can't spend it, but because I know that I can spend it, I will. And it's easier to spend I think, if somebody else is spending (Penny, line 125-127).*

When speaking instead about shopping with her daughters, who are in a different financial situation, Penny mimics the attitude earlier expressed as her sister's: "*because I know that I can spend it, I will*" emphasising the contrast between herself and her daughters' budgets, yet without evoking judgment. Although she does not construct her daughters' budget as wrong, the lack of like-mindedness appears to be problematic for Penny. This is created through her use of words "*it's easier to spend…if somebody else is spending*", as although the differing views do not stop her spending, it seems as though they create a sense of discomfort and guilt, lacking the justification and therefore the enjoyment she receives from shopping with her sister.

This justification is continued throughout her account, as she constructs herself as adopting the mentality of "*its ok for you to buy it so I'll buy*" (line 140), serving to protect herself from any negative thoughts regarding her spending habits.

These extracts showcase the level of enjoyment the participants receive when shopping with others, whether it be the company that Penny enjoys, strengthening of relationships as seen from Susie and Fiona or the extension of the shopping trip as described by Adele and Susie, and how it is through the act of socialising that a variety of uses of the companion is constructed, such as the advice and encouragement given and gained for Fiona and Susie, or the warranting behaviours and beliefs as utilised for their own purchases as seen in Penny and Susie.

Owning the item and its uses

The 'Owning the item and its uses' discourse was important to all of the participants and was constructed as being split into two main aspects; the process of coming to own the item and the reasoning for the purchase, and how the item serves to benefit them after the shopping trip.

It is recognised within the literature that in today's society, shoppers do not only buy things that they need, but also shop for things they purely want (Kearney and Stevens, 2012), highlighting the possibility of a variety of reasons behind a shopper's purchase.

One element that was noted in all of the participants was their persistence to obtain an item that they particularly wanted, rather than needed, with such instances being seen mostly in the responses of Penny and Fiona:

> *I might go up once and see something, not buy it come back and then say I wish I'd bought that, I'm going back up to get it, and I'll go back up and get it. (Penny, line 272-274)*

At first, Penny constructs her initial indecision on the product through her disclosure of ending the shopping trip without buying the item. Yet, by voicing her inner dialogue, this allows Penny to express an internal struggle regarding the purchase and show the escalation of her thought process from contemplating to getting: "*I wish I'd bought that*" to ultimately "*I'll go back up and get it*". Not only does this serve Penny in her account appearing more genuine, but it decreases any perceived impulsivity of her decision. To some, Penny's decision of going back to get the item virtually straight after she has come back from town may appear rash, but to Penny it is constructed as a logical solution to resolving her initial non-purchase 'mistake'.

> I: So how would you feel then if you got there and then you found out it had gone?
>
> P: Oh I'd go mad. I have to find something then, uff, well I'd just find something that will be the equivalent to that (1) I'm terrible for seeing things and then knowing what I want, but can't find it (1) so I'll shop, and I'll shop and shop and shop until I find what I'm looking for (Penny, line 279-283)

Then, when presented with a situation of unavailability, Penny verbally expresses her anger at this situation, suggesting that despite her initial indecision earlier, when committing to purchase the item, she must then follow this decision through and purchase it. Penny's acknowledgement of her shopping habits, "*I'm terrible for seeing things and then knowing what I want*" acts as a type of disclaimer, as by expressing this herself she is disallowing the researcher to pass judgment on her shopping habits, possibly acting as protection for Penny against any possible negativity. Additionally, through the use of extreme case formulation (Potter, 1996) regarding her shopping; "*I'll shop, and I'll shop and shop and shop*", this not only serves to emphasise and ground her previous disclosure (as discussed above), but highlights the level of persistence and determination that Penny holds in order to obtain the item she desires. This is echoed throughout the extract from her persistence to buy something equivalent in nature.

A similar level of persistence was constructed in Fiona's account, yet she expresses differing ways to own the desired item:

> I: I see. how would you feel if you couldnt buy something you wanted because it wasnt in your size or out of stock?
>
> F: I get a bit mardy about it but then I go online and look and see if it available anywhere else. I saw a dress in new look one year that I really wnted for Xmas but one store didn't have it in my size so I got them to ring to another local store and because they had it I drove over and collected it. Desperate times called for desperate measures (Fiona, line 176-182)

Like Penny, Fiona verbally expresses her frustration at the perceived unavailability. Yet instead of giving up and attempting to find something similar, Fiona uses other resources, such as the internet, in order to further her search for the desired item. By emphasising not only how much she wanted it; "*really wnted*", but that it was for a particular occasion; "*Xmas*", not only conveys an aspect of urgency as justification, but also serves Fiona in defending her forthcoming decision to travel to collect it.

Additionally, by using the slogan *"Desperate times called for desperate measures"* it injects a humorous and light-hearted air to the previous utterance, and allows Fiona to convey that this level of persistence is not an everyday occurrence, suggesting the situational string of events to be the cause of her determined nature.

Not only is this persistence apparent in the participants from buying something that they want, but persistence can also be seen when buying an item that acts as a justification mechanism. This can be observed in Susie's comments regarding a shopping trip which requires a lengthy travelling time:

> *I'll try and buy something, even if it's just like a £2 belt from Primark, I'll still be like, yes I've bought something. And I will probably never wear that belt (Susie, line 514-516)*

In this extract, Susie constructs the item vaguely through her use of the word *"something"*, highlighting that the item itself is not important, and that it is the purchasing of the item that is the key aspect. Though using the words *"even if"* when describing her possible purchase, this serves to emphasise the minimal cost of the product, and yet how it is sufficient in justifying the shopping trip. Susie constructs such a purchase as one that evokes a sense of delight, *"yes I've bought something"*, and almost relief from managing to purchase an item.

This celebration regarding ownership of an item is echoed in other participants such as Penny, when asked how the product makes her feel: *"Nice. I just think oooh I got it now (smiles)"* (Penny, line 299). Here, Penny is constructing the fact of owning an item as evoking positive feelings for her.

Additionally, through Susie's disclosure that she *"will probably never wear that belt"*, she is acknowledging the impulsivity of the purchase and suggests she is aware that the aspect of buying and owning the item is enough, and that she doesn't have to use the item for it to have served its purpose, that is, justifying the shopping trip.

Furthermore:

> *I: …have you ever gone and you think oh I don't like anything, and then would you try and get the other person to buy something?*

> *S: Erm (1), no I'd be too preoccupied with me buying something I think (laughs) (Susie, 519-522)*

Here, Susie emphasises that for her to feel the relief of a purchase as justifying the shopping trip, she has to be the one to buy something, and it is not sufficient that someone in her party makes a purchase. Through the use of the word *"preoccupied"*. Susie stresses that she is consumed with finding an item to buy throughout the trip, and gives the impression that she would not leave happy if this essential purchase was not made.

Aside from the physical ownership of the item, and the feelings evoked by this, the process of shopping and coming to buy an item serves the participants in another way, that is, as a mood moderator. Most of the participants constructed the shopping process as a way to improve a negative mood, or to prolong a current positive mood.

Whereas Fiona states shopping and owning an item acts purely to improve a negative mood: "*It's normally more so to cheer myself up*" (Fiona, line 154), Susie and Penny establish the activity as acting as both:

> *Erm, if I've had (2) a really bad day, or I'm really stressed, <u>or</u> if I've had a really good day (Susie, line 22-23)*

> *I shop whether I'm happy or whether I'm sad. If I'm really down, I'll go shopping, 'cause I think it makes me feel better, and if I'm really happy I'll go and buy things (Penny, line 268-270)*

When buying to moderate her mood, Susie constructs shopping as being able to do this even in the worst of situations from her emphasis and repetition of the word "*really*", through which she also places a high value on this activity to regulate her moods. The importance of shopping in this manner is also echoed by Penny, as she holds shopping and owning an item as important in also prolonging her positivity. Additionally, she goes beyond emotional healing by suggesting it makes her "*feel*" better, indicating she experiences an almost physical sensation of improved well-being.

Despite the significance placed on buying items as mood regulators, both participants note that there are flaws in doing this:

> *I: … how do you normally feel after…*

> *S: Errrrm, quite happy? and then (2) I don't know, I go home and be like oh I don't think I should of done that (Susie, line 36-38)*

> *Yeh, but I'd say when you're down and you buy things it's very short term, it'll make you feel better for that, that small time (1) errm and probably the next day I'd take it back (Penny, line 308-310)*

Despite both Susie and Penny acknowledging the 'feel good' qualities of their purchases, they both experience regret and consider the impulsivity of the buys for mood enhancement, rather than need of the product. By utilising personal experience by the words "*I'd say*", Penny is considering that judgement may be passed on her following words, and so makes it difficult to criticise based on the personal nature of her account. However, she invites the researcher to understand her point of view by attempting to include them in her opinion through the repetition of 'you': "*when you're down*", "*you buy things*" and "*you feel better*". By highlighting the short lived mood enhancement she gets from the product, Penny is implying that it is through the processes of coming to own the item and the initial ownership of the item that instils positive feelings for her, and by realising the item has no particular use in the long term, the explanation of returning the item serves Penny in appearing a logical person, despite her self-confessed impulsivity.

Additionally, coming to own the item was often constructed as due to it being a treat for something the participants felt they had done well in. For Adele, achieving academic success warrants a shopping trip in order to treat herself (line 146-147), and she goes on to say:

> *i think i feel like its a reward for doing well and like i kind of deserve it. (Adele, line 151)*

Throughout this quote, Adele displays an air of uncertainty through her use of words such as "*kind of*" and "*like*", suggesting an aspect of social desirability towards the researcher, in order to dispel any negativity towards her decision of treating herself under this particular circumstance. Despite this, Adele refers back to herself on several occasions, such as "*I think*", "*I feel*", suggesting that decisions regarding treating oneself are personal to each individual, and serves to justify Adele's own reasoning. Through her use of words "*reward*" and "*deserve*", Adele is suggesting that the treat is one which she has rightly earned, and is therefore deserving of it. Not only this, but by attaching the label of "*reward*" to the item, it would evoke the illusion of happiness and positivity when the item was discussed or used, acting as a symbol of her hard work.

Interestingly, although Susie also mentions academic reasons in justifying a treat, "*done loads of work*" (line 47), she establishes a lack of spending as reason also:

> *Errm yes if I've (3) been really good for the last couple of weeks and not spent loads (Susie, line 46)*

Susie warrants treating herself as necessary for refraining from spending money in excess, and suggests how she must have been "*really*" good for this to happen, implying that she is usually overcome by impulsivity. From this, she is suggesting that she is rewarding herself for being able to remain in control and displaying willpower, and that the purchase she will make as a treat is planned, and is therefore a controlled purchase unlike the impulsive ones she has managed to avoid.

Having explored the aspect of coming to own the item and the purposes this process has, it was also clear that once bought, the physical item serve the participants in many ways, with one salient aspect being the expression of their identity. Fiona can be seen to highlight this idea:

> *The things you buy I guess kind of make you who you are as a person (Fiona, line 165)*

Here, Fiona is stressing the value of possessions in creating identity, and through focusing purely on the "*things you buy*", ignoring any other influences, she implies that they can serve many functions for the individual. However, her use of words "*I guess*" and "*kind of*" is a display of stake inoculation (Potter, 1996), where she is making no attempt for her words to appear as factual truth, yet she invites the researcher to share this viewpoint through the repetition of the word "*you*".

In terms of identity formation and maintenance, clothing could be seen as having a key role to play in this, and was apparent in accounts from Susie and Adele.

An important aspect for Susie was the desire to appear as a unique individual and someone who chose an item for liking it, rather than following the crowd. This salient issue can be seen in following extract:

> *Like I love my doctor martin boots (laughs) and a lot of people are like, doctor martin boots, really Susie? But erm I'll wear them anyway cause I really like them, so I hope people see me as that rather than (3) going into town because everyone's got a certain top, I'll go and buy that top, its more of a I like it so I'll buy it (Susie, line 564-567)*

Susie begins this extract by emphasising her fondness for her boots; "*love*", before suggesting that most people do not share her viewpoint. This construction allows Susie to suggest her individuality and unique style, and that she is not influenced by others to change this despite much disdain. This is further developed by her disclosure of "*I'll wear them anyway*"; going against the views of many others yet serving to establish her unique identity. Furthermore, this disclosure acts to convince the researcher of the second part of the extract, that is, that her intentions of buying the top are genuine to her own tastes, and therefore: "*I like it so I'll buy it*", rather than purchasing it to follow the crowd, or fit in, an aspect which Susie makes clear she is not prepared to do due to the costs of sacrificing her own unique identity.

This is echoed in Adele comments:

> *i wouldn't buy something just because it was new or in fashion like i'm never going to wear leather hotpants no matter how long they're 'in fashion' (Adele, line 177-179)*

Here, Adele is questioning the concept of fashion, and through the use of quote marks surrounding the words " *'in fashion'* ", she is suggesting that by attaching the label of fashionable to an item, it fails to tempt her into buying it if it is something that she does not like. Through her assertion "*i'm never going to wear leather hotpants*", because they are deemed to be on trend, serves to emphasise that Adele will not purchase this item to suit the current social expectations regarding fashion, highlighting her strength of identity as impenetrable to fleeting changes in fashion.

Although clothing was considered to contribute to identity maintenance and portrayal for Penny, she placed a higher emphasis on the appearance of her house:

> *But I like to have nice things, and I think (2) everybody that comes in here will say oh ain't it lovely, but I like that, I don't like to have just make do (Penny, line 373-374)*

> *You know you can go round other people's houses and things don't match, but that's not me, I like things to match and I like things to look nice and I like things to all be (2) do you know what I mean? (Penny, line 393-396)*

> *I think by walking in here, if I wasn't here now, and you walked in, I think you could probably tell what kind of person lives here (1) I think you could probably look round and think it's somebody that (2) cares about what there (1) what people thinks of them. (Penny, line 423-426)*

> *I don't wanna have things that don't match in (3) it's not me. (Penny, line 431-432)*

This selection of abstracts from Penny help to piece together her construction of her purchased goods contributing to her identity. For Penny, having objects that "*match*" and "*look nice*" is an aspect that she relishes in, and constructs these product qualities as alike to herself, "*things that don't match in (3) it's not me*", suggesting that Penny sees her possessions as not only an extension of her identity, but that they also help to create and reflect her own qualities through an entity that people can physically see. By then using her possessions as a reflection of identity, she can compare herself to others: "*You know you can go round other people's houses and*

things don't match, but that's not me". Penny holds great importance on the value of her possessions to reflect herself as a person, as she suggests that if she was absent from the room, it is through her possessions that an individual could understand her identity. Interestingly, when suggesting this, she draws upon the researcher by her use of the pronoun "you"; *"if I wasn't here now, and you walked in", "you could probably tell"* and *"you could probably look round",* as being the objective opinion, despite the researcher already knowing Penny. This may have been used however, to persuade the researcher to agree with her viewpoint.

Penny's disclosure, albeit through the use of voicing another, that her possessions would portray somebody who "*cares about what there (1) what people thinks of them*" implies her items bought and the ownership of them suggest using possessions on a compensatory level, and therefore when receiving compliments on them "*everybody that comes in here will say oh ain't it lovely, but I like that"* acts to boost her own self-confidence.

Other than identity, Susie highlights that there are others uses of such purchases, particularly in regards to gifting:

> *it makes me feel happier knowing that I've got them something, erm and I think perhaps it's 'cause I want them to know that I'm thinking of them (Susie, line 272-273)*

> <u>Yes</u>*, yeh, and I like to put a lot of thought into what I get people, so that they know that I am thinking of them. (Susie, line 275-276)*

Despite giving the item away, Susie suggests that it is herself who feels happy. In this extract, Susie goes beyond the physicality of the actual gift, and suggests the gift serves as a kind of vehicle through which thoughts and intentions can be recognised by the receiver. Her construction of this extract suggests that it is the meaning embedded into the gift more than what it actually is that is important for Susie in feeling happy.

These extracts display the participants' persistence during the shopping process to either obtain an item that they particularly want, such as in the extracts from Penny and Fiona, to justify a shopping trip as seen from Susie, or to act as a mood enhancer or as a treat for all. The purpose such items serve in forming and maintaining an identity was apparent in all of the participants, as well as the separate gifting function for Susie.

Conclusion

The construction of the participants' accounts were given presidency in the analysis as there was little of immediate use regarding the previous literature, yet in the discussion I will review the links between the current study's findings and the previous literature surrounding the topic. This decision also links in the researcher's standpoints of social constructionism and critical relativism.

Exploring the motivations and experiences of my participants regarding the shopping process created eight discourses, two of which 'Shopping as socialising' and 'Owning the item and its uses' were analysed. The discourses uncovered were found to address the research question in mind, as all the discourses, particularly those discussed, where found to showcase the different dimensions which build up the motivations behind the participants shopping and buying habits.

From the analysis of the discourse 'Shopping as socialising', there was an array of findings that resulted in a complexity that was not apparent in the previous literature. The idea of the use of the shopping activity as a platform for the upkeep of social relationships was apparent in the participant's accounts, as well as the use of products within the shops in acting as tools for communication. Additionally, a companion was often enough to result in further enjoyment of the shopping trip, and created a sense of 'making a day of it'. This was seen through the participants' creation of lengthy and more developed trips when with others, which was emphasised through a lack of motivation to engage in a similar shopping experience without a companion and a sense of protection of the companion from 'useful' shopping trips which was often constructed as boring. This depth and dimension was not available in the previous literature, possibly because of the lack of qualitative studies.

However, there was an initial link with the previous research by Xueming (2005), as when shopping with parents, the participants constructed themselves as becoming more sensible individuals, and yet when with friends, they constructed the idea of a heightened temptation and impulsiveness to buy. There was also an agreement with the previous literature from the suggestion of other's buying behaviours as justification for their own.

The discourse of 'Owning the item and its uses' was equally as multidimensional. It highlighted the importance of the process of coming to own the item and how the item serves them once it is in their ownership. Within the participants' accounts, there was a high level of persistence in obtaining an item that they want. This was often displayed through the use of expressing inner dialogue, and therefore has not been discussed in previous literature, as would not have been uncovered through quantitative methods. Additionally, this persistence was often due to the constructed need of purchasing as either justification for a shopping trip, or for the item's use of a mood regulator. This latter aspect was prominent within the literature, and confirmed the quantitative results of acting as either to enhance a negative mood, or to prolong a positive mood (Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Činjarević et al, 2011; Faber and Christenson, 1996; Rook, 1987).

The purpose such items held for the participants can be seen to link in with current literature. There was the suggestion from the participants of products creating themselves as a person, and they gave examples of how the product served them,

mainly in their identity formation and maintenance. This relates to the idea within the literature that goods create an identity for the user, act as a tool for social communication, and are essentially an extension of ourselves (Kearney and Stevens, 2012; Richins, 1994).

Limitations of this study included the lack of researcher experience regarding the interview and analysis stages. A more experienced researcher may have utilised the participants' responses in a way to create further interaction, increasing the richness of the account and therefore enabling additional analysis from an increase in data. However, the use of qualitative methods within this study was a major strength. Such semi-structured interviews invite individuals to discuss the topic at length, and was utilised in response to a lack of previous literature using such methods. Therefore, despite researcher inexperience, it is still a valuable piece of research within this area.

Reflexive Analysis

Due to word count limitations within the main body of this research, an extended reflexive analysis is presented in Appendix R.

This section allows the researcher to acknowledge the influences upon the current research from both the individual person and their own experiences (personal reflexivity), as well as the researcher as a theorist or thinker (epistemological reflexivity) (Willig, 2008).

Initial interest

I am glad that I choose a topic that I am passionate about, as it gave me encouragement and drive to add to the literature in this under-researched area. However, I am aware that my personal experiences and prior reading will have impacted on my aims and outcomes regarding the study.

Inductive vs. Deductive approach

I chose to take a mainly inductive approach, as I wanted the discourses to reflect the data from the participants, rather than being influenced by my pre-existing ideas from having read a vast amount of literature beforehand. I accept that my own beliefs and experiences will also be embedded within the analysis, however on reflection, I stand by my decision as I feel that this approach considerably reduced any additional bias from thorough reading.

Participants and interviewing

Regarding the interview process, I feel that my lack of experience was reflected in some aspects of the interviews. For example, in the face-to-face interviewing I was worried that the participants would be uncomfortable, as I knew I would be, if there was a substantial pause in between the crossover in speakers. Because of this, I felt I often moved on quickly and didn't allow a more detailed explanation from the participants, which on reflection, I see that I missed many chances in expanding on, and enriching, the responses from the participants.

In my interviews conducted via the internet, although this way of interviewing allowed me access to participants that I would not have otherwise been able to interview, I did feel that it had its disadvantages. The first online interview lasted nearly 2 and a half hours, and during this, I was extremely conscious of the time and I felt that I often rushed my questions and did not offer up follow up questions. Additionally, I often felt that the participants frequently summed up their responses as a way to reduce the amount that they had to physically type, and therefore some meaning were lost. I was also concerned that the participants were getting distracted and were multi-tasking, as there were often large pauses in replying which I feel had a negative impact on the flow of the interview.

Analysis and Interpretation

Being a novice at Discourse Analysis, I found myself describing in a passive manner, but with further practice I found myself developing these skills and I believe that I managed to effectively analyse the transcripts in an active manner.

I am aware that by doing this process, not only is the data that emerged a direct result of the particular questions asked and the interactions within the interviews that would be unique to this study, but I also appreciate my active, and therefore subjective, role.

Epistemological and ontological position

As a social constructionist, I believe I took away some of the researcher/participant power imbalance, apparent in traditional psychology's quantitative methods, by allowing the participants to look at their own accounts before I went ahead with the analysis (Kvale, 2007). I also feel that this impacted upon the presentation of my analysis, as I was reluctant to use literature to ground the ideas (even though there was very little to use) as I wanted to remain as participant orientated as possible. As a critical relativist, I understand the importance of the power of language in constructing meaning, but I am not fully against the idea of certain aspects regarding a real world existing independently of language (Burr, 2003). Because of this viewpoint, I understand that my participant's accounts, and therefore my interpretations of them are bound in the context by which they were discussed and analysed, yet I believe that this does not detract from the value of the research.

Word count: 10,981

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