

Humanistic psychology & a real world problem

This activity will help you to...

- Use concepts from the humanistic perspective to analyse real world behaviour
- Apply research methods concepts to a real life situation
- Compare and contrast the humanistic and psychodynamic approaches to psychology

Men are shopaholics too, say psychologists

- US study finds sexes almost equally vulnerable
- Compulsive buyers often young and on low incomes

Shopaholics are almost as likely to be men as they are women, according to a study published by psychologists today. The report overturns the widespread view that binge buying is a predominantly female pursuit, and claims more than one in 20 of adults are prone to compulsive spending sprees.

Known to psychologists as compulsive buying disorder, people who binge-buy experience waves of irresistible and often senseless urges to shop. They are often left with bundles of unwanted clothes and other items and rack up sizeable debts from frequent shopping bonanzas. The consequences can be severe, leading to

bankruptcy, divorce, embezzlement and even suicide attempts.

Previous studies have suggested 90% of shopaholics are women, but in the latest study psychologists found the difference was almost negligible, with the disorder affecting 6% of women and 5.5% of men. Writing in the American Journal of Psychiatry, a team lead by Lorrin Koran, an expert in psychiatry and behaviour at Stanford University in California, claims: "The widespread opinion that most compulsive buyers are women may be wrong."

The scientists conducted a telephone survey of 2,513 adults from randomly selected households and asked about buying attitudes and behaviour. The similarity between the sexes came as a huge surprise, said Dr Koran. "The difference that we observed between the prevalence in women and men is quite small and contrasts with the marked difference reported in clinical trials, in which women constituted 80%-95% of the participants," he said. The study

revealed that compulsive buyers tended to be younger, on low incomes, and four times as likely as others to make only the minimum payment on credit card balances.

The finding adds to recent research that suggests compulsive shopping is a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder that affects men and women equally, although men are less likely to seek help for it.

"A lot of binge buying seems to be driven by feelings of unrelenting perfectionism. People feel incomplete without particular items and believe that having it will make them look nicer, smell nicer, be more appealing," said Helen Nightingale, a clinical psychologist at the Priory hospital in Manchester. The problem is exacerbated by media images of perfect, unattainable lifestyles.

Compulsive buying among women may be more conspicuous, with vast sums being spent on make-up and clothes. Among men, the disorder is more likely to lead to an amassing of gadgets, or sprees on cars and

sporting equipment, Dr Nightingale added. Although a spending spree might give very temporary relief to urges, over-spending on unnecessary items usually drives anxiety levels up, causing a vicious circle of buying and remorse.

Although common, the condition can be treated using cognitive behaviour therapy, a psychological technique that helps patients to adjust their outlook on life and lower anxiety levels. "Compulsive buying leads to serious psychological, financial and family problems, including depression, overwhelming debt and the breakup of relationships," said Dr Koran. "People don't realise the extent of damage it does to the sufferer."

Ian Sample, science correspondent

The Guardian, September 30 2006
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/sep/30/shopping.psychology>

- How would Carl Rogers explain the phenomenon of compulsive buying disorder?
- How would a humanistic psychologist research the causes of compulsive buying disorder?
- In which ways would Sigmund Freud agree with Rogers' analysis? What might he disagree with?