

“Shopping defines ONE LAST THING... who you are”

YOU MEAN BY BUYING A CERTAIN BRAND WE'RE BUYING A CERTAIN IDENTITY?

Colin Campbell: “No. I think the link between shopping and identity is much more interesting. Increasingly, people see their identities as closely linked to their tastes. If we have to describe who we are, we'll talk about gender, race and ethnicity, but when it comes to our individuality, we'll say we are someone who likes Madonna, or someone who reads books and likes red wine, but who dislikes white wine. It's in the choices we make for books, music, food, clothes, holidays—really, everything—that we define our identities. And how do you find out what you like? By shopping.”

SO COMPULSIVE SHOPPERS SHOULD KNOW THEMSELVES REALLY WELL, RIGHT?

“Not quite. Shopaholics have an ambiguous sense of themselves. They have psychological problems, which is why they have become compulsive shoppers in the first place. I believe these are people who want to get to know and define themselves, and they do so by shopping. However, this is an unsuccessful attempt, because, as with any compulsion, they discover that to them, shopping does not give a satisfying sense of identity.”

I KNOW CHEAPER WAYS OF GETTING TO KNOW MYSELF.

“Of course, but your response to an environment in which there are many products from which you can choose will say a great deal about who you are. Nowadays, going out to buy a dress or a pair of shoes is definitely one of the most important ways to discover your own individuality.”

I SHOP, THEREFORE I AM?

“Quite right.”

Colin Campbell is a professor of sociology at the University of York in England and co-editor of *The Shopping Experience* (Sage Publications, ISBN 0761950672).