MEMORY-WORK: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO INVESTIGATING CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND DISSATISFACTION OF CLOTHING RETAIL ENCOUNTERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces memory-work methodology to examine consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction of women clothing retail exchanges. Unlike most other methodologies, memory work aims to capture the complexity of the consumer's experience. This paper uses one memory, "a quick exit from a clothing store", to illustrate critical concepts in the satisfaction dissatisfaction process. The analysis reveals that the consumer appraises and evaluates her exchange interactions based on her "self", social experiences and attached social meanings. Specifically, it illustrates how injustices, disconfirmation of expectations and resultant emotions constructed. It further describes and theorises how the resultant emotions drove this consumer to "flee" the store and perceive her experience as being dissatisfying. The analysis implies that by fleeing, this consumer protected her "self" by avoiding association with the perceived meanings created by the unjust experience.

INTRODUCTION

In a social interaction there are many factors which determine whether the consumer will be satisfied or dissatisfied with the resources exchanged. Whether or not an exchange (e.g., a clothing store encounter) is considered satisfactory is partially determined by a consumer's experiences in relation to her/his social world and personal identity.

For many years both researcher and retailer have endeavoured to better understand consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and service quality. Much of the research has adopted a cognitive process and a predictive objective, aggregatable model. However, due to the complexity of social exchanges, the confirmation and rejection of theories cannot be predictive, but rather must be exclusively explanatory (Bhaskar 1978). The use of statistical manipulation on a large data base to

indicate mass generalisations does not address the complex conditions of people and their conduct, either in their uniqueness or their commonality (Hollway 1989). Furthermore, the subjective phenomenon associated with satisfaction, dissatisfaction and service quality has been overlooked (Klaus 1985).

A number of researchers (e.g., Granbois 1993; Hunt 1993; Spreng, et al 1993) have called for a broader conceptualization of satisfaction and dissatisfaction as exchange outcomes are based on the consumer's construct system which is mediated by previous experiences. This should incorporate factors such as consumers' behavior, social worlds, and costs, and not just the performance of the product and/or the sellers with whom they interact.

Tse, Nicosia and Wilton (1990) have suggested the need for a comprehensive model to better understand 'satisfaction as a process' which incorporates different theories and paradigms (e.g., arousal, attribution, equity, disconfirmation of expectations) to explain the 'processes' that underlie a consumer's experiences. Such a model should consider the "set of conditions that place the system in disequilibrium and the set of activities and social psychological processes that restore its equilibrium" (Tse, et al 1990, p.179). It should not just consider the consumer as a receptor of persuasive messages and/or an evaluator of the service and product in a shopping environment.

Although a variety of research approaches and foci have been used to examine satisfaction/dissatisfaction, this study adopts an alternative methodology. Through a phenomenological perspective, a memory-work methodology is used to examine clothing retail encounters to explain:

- 1. the conceptualization and meaning of satisfaction and dis-satisfaction to women consumers,
- 2. the process of creating satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and

3. how the context in which the exchange occurs affect satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

MEMORY-WORK METHODOLOGY: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Memory-work was developed by Frigga Haug, who argued:

If we refuse to understand ourselves simply as a bundle of reactions to all-powerful structures, or to the social relations within which we have formed us, if we search instead for possible indications of how we have participated actively in the formation of our past experiences, then the usual mode of social scientific research, in which individuals figure exclusively as objects of the process has to be abandoned (Haug et al 1987, p.35).

Memory-work incorporates theories from a variety of disciplines to analyse and explain the activities, behaviors, and emotions which occur in a person's memory (Kippax et al 1988). It aims at both modifying and building theory. As Crawford and her co-researchers stated,

In doing memory-work, we are our own subjects, we use our own experiences as the raw data for our enquires. We do not seek to eliminate subjectivity (in the logical-positivist sense); rather we explicitly engage with it, and do not try to deny or overcome it (Crawford et al 1990, p.336).

In other words, memory work methodology demands that the lines of objectivity which separate researcher from participants are explicitly removed. All members of the group actively share and interpret their memories to identify themes and meanings underlying their behavior. When considering satisfaction and dissatisfaction, Tse et al (1990) suggests consumers act as investigators. Consumers are thought to evaluate interactions within the context of the exchange situation and create appropriate attributions, behaviors, emotions and decisions in response to their goals and/or motivations to achieve equilibrium.

The use of memories by this methodology are

a critical vehicle for the examination of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Memories, Crawford et al (1992) explained, describe contradictions, conflicts, disequilibrium and/or unfamiliarities which give an episode or event its meaning. In an attempt to understand memories, we reflect and evaluate our own and others' actions (Kippax et al 1988). At the same time, they provide a direction and evaluation standard for future actions (Crawford et al 1992; Shotter 1984).

However, when the perceived product and/or service performance is not different enough from the expected or norm (i.e., confirmation of expectations) the consumer is not aroused and does not enter into an evaluation process. This is referred to as the 'zone of indifference'. (Cadotte et al 1987; Woodruff et al 1983). When the perceived performance lies outside this 'zone of indifference'; it is unusual, attention-getting and creates positive or negative disconfirmation of expectations or, in other words, a memory. As Woodruff et al (1983) suggest, that when disconfirmation occurs:

the satisfaction process is more likely to be raised to a conscious level and ... evokes a positive or negative emotional response. ... Whereas, confirmation of expectations is much less likely to lead to anything more than a neutral, or at best weak, emotional response (pp.300-302).

Oliver (1989) and his co-researcher, Mano (1993), have further suggested that the meaning given to satisfaction and dissatisfaction will depend on the degree of arousal in the experience and the resultant emotion (e.g., contentment, pleasurable). Again, this has implications for memory-work methodology, which focuses on the meaning(s) of actions and emotions rather than on details of how a past episode has been reconstructed. Crawford et al (1990) explained memory-work is not just a technique for data collection, but rather a method which analyses and theorises through its interpretation and reinterpretation of the data. Priority is not given to either subjective experience or theory; rather it sets them in a reciprocal and mutually critical relationship (Crawford et al 1992).

Memory Work Procedure

Individuals involved in memory-work research are given a "trigger"; a word or a phrase which allows them to evoke and focus on a particular memory. They then must write down the memory in the third person providing a "thick description" of the situation. These descriptions can be as specific as sensual cues (smell, lighting, taste, noise), interpersonal and intrapersonal cues. These memories are then shared with the group as a whole and collectively interpreted, discussed and theorised upon by all of the group members. The endeavours to uncover underlying assumptions and cultural imperatives that have occurred in their memories and the process by which the meanings are constructed (Crawford et al 1990; Haug et al 1987). As the memories are discussed, the "memory-owner" simultaneously validates or invalidates the interpretation. In so doing,

memory-work transcends the oppositions between the individualistic bias psychological theory and structural theory that does not recognise agency. ... The meanings of the actions are not found in the actor's head but in the common meanings which she/he negotiates in the interaction with others. ... Memory-work makes it possible to put the agent, the actor, back into psychology - in both method and theory - without falling into psychological individualism (Crawford et al 1992, pp.53-54).

In this paper, memory-work is used to examine how the consumer actively participates and constructs the meaning and outcomes in the process of creating satisfaction and dissatisfaction in women's retail clothing exchanges.

APPLYING MEMORY-WORK METHODOLOGY

Participants

Two groups of five women from similar professional backgrounds, and all living in a small New Zealand city (approximately 120,000 people) voluntarily participated in this study. These final

groups were selected through a snowball technique. They ranged in age from 31 to 52 and were all from a middle class background. Some members in each group were interested in and frequently shopped for clothing, some were neither particularly concerned with nor shopped frequently for clothes, while others were interested in but only shopped occasionally for clothes.

None of the participants were financially compensated. Each memory group met on five occasions. The particular number of meetings had no significance other than to insure that memories encompassing both 'satisfaction' and 'dissatisfaction' were obtained. Additionally it was felt that it would take a minimum of three to five meetings for all of the participants to gain familiarity and comfort with this particular type of methodology.

The role of the researcher was initially to provide some direction and understanding of memory-work. However, even in the first session, the researcher was an equal participant within the group and treated as such. This is one of the key issues which separates Memory-work from other traditional qualitative methodologies such as focus groups. The group as a whole provided the analysis and interpretation of the memories provided by all of the participants. Each meeting lasted approximately two to four hours. All participants attended the 5 sessions.

Before giving their consent, participants were briefed on (a) the purpose of the study, (b) memory-work procedures and principles, (c) expected time involvement, and (d) ethical considerations.

Writing the Memories

Participants independently wrote a series of memories evoked from different "trigger" topics. Each trigger related to a specific clothing store episode. For example, these included "an impulse buy", "a pressured purchase" and "exhilaration". Triggers were selected in relation to the objectives of the study and concepts alluded to in the satisfaction and dissatisfaction literature.

Participants were asked to write each memory in the third person; to write in as much detail as possible including circumstantial, inconsequential and trivial detail; to write without interpretation, explanation or biography; and to write one of their most "vivid" memories regarding the trigger. The group was given the trigger topic at least two weeks prior to each session.

The Group Process

All group members received a copy of each participant's memory at the beginning of each session and in turn read and reflected on their own memory to the group. The group then examined and discussed what had been presented, relating this to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the experience. As the discussion developed, the group looked for similarities, differences and/or patterns across the memories as well as identifying and analysing cliches, contradictions, metaphors, and inconsistencies in individual memories. Autobiography and biography statements which emphasised individual aspects of an experience were avoided in the discussion.

The group discussion moved back and forth from examining individual memories to analysing the collective set of memories on that particular trigger. In doing so, the analysis of each individual memory often suggested a common pattern across the set of memories. And sometimes, the analysis indicated a need to revise a prior interpretation theorised within the session. Eventually the group discussion ended when a coherent picture emerged from the set of memories.

All sessions were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used in the group sessions and in the written transcripts. This helped ensure the group discussion occurred at the collective rather than the individual level as well as providing confidentiality.

MEMORY ANALYSIS

To illustrate how memory-work methodology enables the process and meaning of satisfaction and dissatisfaction to be reconstructed, one memory, Susie's, will be discussed, along with the reflections derived from the first group session. The trigger used for this session was "a time you could not exit a clothing store fast enough".

Susie's Memory

It was a warm sunny day - Summer was The wardrobe was looking almost here. pretty sad - time to go shopping for summery clothes. Susie was in her thirties - decided to try an ethnic type dress. The dress shop had exactly the style - longish flowing, white and just the thing for summer evenings. She went into the fitting room. There was a skylight there where the sun was streaming through. She tried the dress on. Someone else had already done so because she could smell a strong deodorant type of smell. A bit off putting to say the least. The dress was almost what she wanted, but then she noticed a split of about three inches where the stitching had come undone around part of the waistline. Susie took the dress off -changed into her own hot winter clothes and took the dress to the owner of the shop at the counter. She pointed out the problem. The look of utter disdain on the Manager's face made Susie feel as if she had in fact split the dress. Feeling hot prickles climbing up her neck it was time to leave!! Messages were being sent to the legs "lets get out of here!" - but the lead feet seemed stuck to the floor - and the mouth kept chattering on non-sensically. It was at least two more years before she went near that shop again and she made quite sure the manager was no where near at the time. She still did not buy anything!

(Notes:)

- 1) All written text in this section has been taken from the memory-work group discussion regarding Susie's memory. Passages in quotation marks are direct quotes from various group members. Indented sections are Susie's direct reflections
- 2) Bold words in this section of the written text correspond to key components in the model illustrating the analysis of Susie's quick exit in regards to her experience and the process of dissatisfaction (see Figure 1).
- 3) Words in italics in this section of the written text are important descriptions or feelings which help provide meaning to Susie's experience of a quick exit and dissatisfaction.)

Group's Reflections of Susie's Memory

In order to facilitate the understanding of Susie's memory Figure 1 provides a mapping or flow chart of her experiences and their consequences.

In the ensuing discussion of Susie's memory, the group identified that a moral injustice had occurred when Susie was falsely accused of breaking the stitches on the dress. Although she went to the manager "being helpful, being positive," she received a "look of utter disdain ... as if she had in fact split the dress". She could have "sneaked it back on the rack" but did the "womanly" thing of endeavouring to be helpful rather than complain. Susie reflected:

I thought I was being nice; taking and showing her [the manager] before the next customer got it. I thought I was being totally honest and lovely. But that backfired somewhat.

Thus, Susie received the unexpected outcome. Instead of being thanked for her deed, she was made to feel as if she had damaged the dress. Susie reflected:

I felt very guilty... Just the look she gave me, I knew she thought I was guilty. But I wasn't guilty. But she made me feel as if I were.

In addition to the **shock** between Susie's behavior and the resulting outcome, her feelings of **distress** were *intensified* by the contrast with how she had felt earlier and the **mood** created by the setting. As another group member highlighted, "The sun was coming through the skylight, the longish flowing white ethnic dress and the sun streaming in. It was a real summer image. Yes, it is that *excitement*, *carefree* feeling of summer and then to have her [the manager] react like that was *twice as bad*. It *shattered* the whole feeling of the day". Susie agreed, and added:

I [was] probably feeling disappointed that the dress wasn't up to scratch.

Since the dress was not up to scratch it did not match her quality expectations. Hence, there was

a negative disconfirmation. Although in need of summer clothes and since "the dress was almost what she wanted," Susie was disappointed it was not the quality it "should have been". This contributed to her feelings of dissatisfaction with the retail encounter.

The objectionable smell and shock of strong deodorant from a previous customer resulted in disgust which also contributed to her feelings of dissatisfaction. Susie said:

I can still to this day remember putting it [the dress] on and thinking, Oh Dear! ... (the strong smell of deodorant. A bit off putting to say the least).

Although not specifically discussed in the memory or group reflection, this emotion of disgust could have represented a break in the justice norm. In this situation an individual is entitled to, and thus expects a clean garment and a fresh retail environment. Furthermore, to satisfy the customer, it is the store's responsibility to ensure such entitlements. When Susie informed the retailer of such a problem, her behavior supported the expectation of justice since she did not want the next customer to be exposed to the same negative experiences.

As indicated by Susie's intense physical reaction of being accused of wrong-doing, it was the emotions of guilt and humiliation which dominated her negative feelings and subsequent behavior of leaving the store and not returning for two years. Susie reflected:

If you could underline feeling hot prickles (climbing up her neck). If you could underline that! ... And the message ... going to the legs ... lets get out of here! ... And the feet ... weren't going anywhere (stuck to the floor)... and the mouth kept chattering on and on non-sensically. ... I wanted to get out of a situation I was not in [being guilty].

Furthermore, because Susie attributed the cause of injustice to the manager, future interaction with the manager was avoided even when returning to the store two years later. This implied a fear that if she were to see the manager

again, there was the possibility of being humiliated as before and reliving the feeling of guilt. Through the act of avoidance, she protected herself from humiliation while maintaining her identity of being a helpful individual.

Susie reflected on how the situational factors of living and shopping in a small isolated rural town emphasised the significance of how she behaved following the incident; as well as actually leaving.

Where I came from was a small town, so I told lots of people about that. The store wasn't doing itself any good.

MEMORY RECONSTRUCTION AND MEANING ILLUSTRATING THE CONCEPTUALISATION AND PROCESS OF SATISFACTION AND DISSATISFACTION

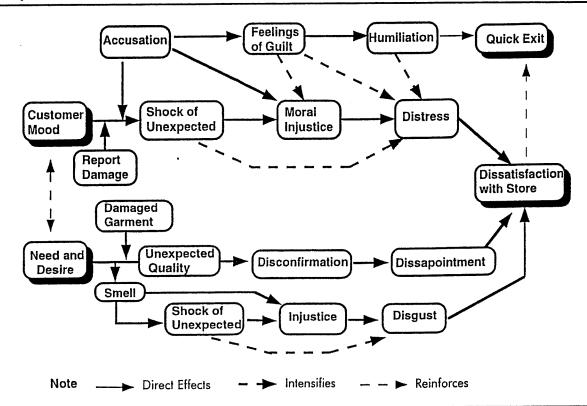
As we have illustrated, the analysis of one

woman's memory from a specific clothing retail encounter supports Mano and Oliver's (1993, p.464), claim that "satisfaction has many antecedents and is a much more complex 'emotion' than many have suggested."

Analysis of Susie's memory and subsequent group reflections reveal how injustices and disconfirmation of expectations resulted in a number of emotional responses. These were constructed through cognitive appraisal and evaluation of actions and reactions in the exchange situation. Interpretation of these interactions were based on Susie's concerns (e.g., goals, motives, values), past social experiences and attached social meanings. As suggested by Crawford et al (1992), the acquisition of, and response to, these social meanings is not a straightforward process. Thus, understanding the satisfaction and dissatisfaction process is not a simple case of the consumer and retailer taking prescribed social roles or scripts as suggested by Solomon et al (1985) and Smith and Houston (1982). Rather, social meanings are

Figure 1

Analysis of Susie's Quick Exit in Regards to Her Experience and the Process of Dissatisfaction



constructed through human consciousness in relation to socio-cultural practices. The appraisal and reappraisal of the social significance attached to the experience only becomes meaningful when there is "reflection" with one's "self". These meanings are thus defined and interrupted through lived, interactional process (Mead 1934).

Susie's memory and reflections reveal how the resultant emotions from the injustice contributed to her leaving the retail store and "dissatisfied". Not only does this reveal an unjust experience, but illustrates the complexity of examining the relationships among the emotions, behaviors and feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The analysis of Susie's experience highlights the complexity of understanding emotion in relation to satisfaction and dissatisfaction. For example, Susie internalised the manager's judgement of guilt which lead her to feelings of humiliation where she felt ashamed of her wrongdoing. Both the guilt and humiliation contributed to her distress, created from the moral injustice of being accused of what she did not do. Although Susie accepted the retailer's appraisal, she still attributed fault of the moral injustice to the retailer. It was this overall distress which dominated her experience of dissatisfaction. Her quick exit, however, is attributed to a feeling of humiliation (i.e., shame of wrong-doing). Subsequent interaction with the manager was avoided due to fear of further humiliation. By fleeing and avoiding, she protected her identity; her "self". Research by Crawford et al (1992) regarding fear in women lends support to this interpretation, as guilt and shame were two emotions involved in the construction of fear which was appraised as a threat to their identity and autonomy. Frijda and Mesquita (1994) also reports that fear signals a threat in the interactional process to one's physical integrity.

From a social constructionist approach, fleeing is part of the "intelligible" response to the appraisal of fear in the specific interactions of the episode, rather than a motivated behavior created by fear (Averill 1980; Crawford et al 1992; Harré 1986). Other researchers (e.g., Denzin 1983; Frijda and Mesquita 1994), have presented a similar view which claims that emotions are part of the social interactional process which links appraisals to responses and behaviors. In this

sense, it is the emotion which drives consumer behavior and not the summary of experienced feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction as sometimes suggested in the literature (e.g., Bearden and Teel 1983: Bolfing and Forman 1989; LaBarbera and Mazursky 1983; Oliver Westbrook 1987). This supports, but extends Halstead (1989) findings that postpurchase behavior is directly affected by consumers' initial expectations and disconfirmation Emotions, along with other consumer actions and postpurchase behavior must be included in the process to gain a complete understanding of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

The analysis of this memory also illustrates the importance of the specific context in which the appraisals took place. Susie's mood, need, desire, and reaction of shock influenced the intensity of her emotions. For example, the "unexpectedness" of the two injustices (i.e., the smell of deodorant and being blamed for something she did not do) resulted in shock. This shock intensified the emotions (i.e., disgust and distress) and her feeling of dissatisfaction. And as discussed in the analysis of Susie's memory, the contrast in her mood before and after the moral injustice (i.e., carefree and excited as compared to feeling ashamed) also intensified resultant feelings of distress and dissatisfaction.

The context in which the behavior is constructed helps to give meaning to the complexity of the emotional experience. In this situation, if Susie had no need or desire for a particular dress, her personal involvement and arousal to evaluate its quality would have been less intense, thus avoiding disappointment.

The example provided in this paper alludes to the "dynamics" of studying emotions and linking these to the construction of behaviors and experiences of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. After all, as Hunt (1993, p.40), suggests, "it is emotion, not cognition, that drives consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior." And as noted by Crawford et al (1992, p.36), there is a need to identify and use alternative methodologies such as memory-work, that will

capture much of the richness and complexity of emotional experiences ... and recognise that

emotion is constructed in interaction with others, both self-interaction and interactions with others...

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the conclusions of other researchers (e.g., Hunt 1993; Mano and Oliver 1993; Yi 1990) which support the need for a better and understanding richer of satisfaction dissatisfaction, we have adopted a memory-work methodology to examine its conceptualization and process. In doing so, this research extends current views regarding the understanding of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in three important respects. First, it provides us with a commonsense understanding of its complex conceptualization and process which is often lost in empirical studies. Secondly, it theorises and illustrates the importance of the role of "self" as an agent, a moral evaluator, in the understanding of the process. This links the social construction of self with behavior and evaluations associated with satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In doing so, it explains how the consumer's actions, goals, values, attributions, feelings, behaviors and especially emotions within the exchange contribute to the process and conceptualization of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Thirdly, it theorises and demonstrates the importance of the consumer's social realm to the interaction process.

We agree with Keith Hunt (1993) that to obtain a richer understanding of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and complaining/complimenting behavior, we need to tell stories.

We need to write the stories down. The stories become our case histories. From a multitude of stories we can draw inferences about human behavior, inferences in which we are confident because we have heard (or read) them so many times that it is accepted as valid. We can repeatedly seek the key insights to be gained from the stories. Ten or twenty years from now the stories will still be there. As we learn more we will gain additional, fresh insights from those stories (Hunt 1993, p.41).

Many memories are yet to be recollected and

analysed in helping to further understand consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

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